



To : Seafarers Our Ref : Mentoring Letter 2 - The Call of the Sea
From : Marine Mentor Date : 10th January 2020

Dear Colleague,

Reflecting back a few years, I first obtained my Master Mariner's CoC in 1987, and revalidated it in 2016, after spending many years ashore, most of which was officially regarded by SAMSA as "equivalent service." I had always valued my ticket, not only for the deep sense of accomplishment that it came with, but also for the sound platform it set up for me, as I pursued a career ashore. Like others I'm sure, I have always felt a sense of pride at often being shown even a modicum of respect when being introduced as a Master Mariner. So naturally, I was unprepared for the deflation on the day the Senior Examiner at SAMSA's office asked to see my original ticket, and said "Holy &##*, that's 100 years old." Damn him! That served only to strengthen my resolve to revalidate it. A few months later, I finally received my new shiny, little blue book. Despite the fact that it's number now had four digits, instead of the two low-digit one I had before, I felt even more ecstatic than the day I earned my original master's ticket with its two digits, this time knowing and respecting what lay behind it that much more.

The moral of the story? The job may have changed significantly over the years, and whilst the modern Master may be forgiven for thinking he's a very highly paid admin clerk sometimes, your ticket, and status as a Master Mariner remains what you had always hoped it would be. So, go ahead, be proud of what you have achieved. Many of our shoreside friends would give their arms and legs to be Master Mariners or Marine Engineers. Of course this goes almost equally for junior officers – what reaction do YOU get when you tell people what you do? It's respect...

As you and I both know, your ticket also comes with tremendous responsibility. Few of us went to sea and started studying towards our Master's (or Chief's CoC) because it seemed like an easy job to do, or in the absence of any other bright ideas. Why on earth would we have taken the risks we did? Why did we subject ourselves to living at sea (without wifi!) for months on end, when our friends ashore were going to concerts, socialising, changing girlfriends – I guess that "boyfriends" applies now also - a lot more frequently than we changed ships? Think back to how you got to where you are. Inevitably, there is a figure in the shadows who influenced you in some way, just as Capt. CAE (Jimmy) Deacon (former senior pilot and Port Captain of Durban) once influenced me. Jimmy crossed over the side many years ago, but I regularly give thanks for his encouragement and mentorship to a (sometimes very) green and clumsy but enthusiastic volunteer crew member aboard that small steel NSRI craft, John Roberts, where I earned my sea-legs, nearly half a century ago.

Take a minute to think of how you got to where you are today, is there a character who stands out to you, as Jimmy does to me? I'm prepared to take a bet that a few fond memories just came flooding back to you...

Think also of the many mistakes you must have made in your life. God knows that I have made

way too many, but then I also know that if it were not for these, I'd be that much poorer in knowledge and experience. Of course the memories of some of these are downright embarrassing, but they are also a rich resource of experiential knowledge, whether job, or life-related. At the time, the experience may have been an uncomfortable one which we sometimes hope others have forgotten, but the knowledge is always of tremendous value not only to us, but also to others. The saying "The man who never made a mistake, never made anything else either," is so true. Today, I put my past mistakes down to "school fees" and am comfortable to share them with others if I believe that it will help them in any way.

After having spent much of my working life trying to make my fortune, I finally came to realise that money isn't everything, and that I can't take it over the side with me. I started to concern myself less with ME, and more with those around me, finally understanding that how I fit into the lives of others is way more important than material success. I will not be remembered for wealth or status, but for the legacy I leave behind for others to follow. Albert Einstein once said "Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value." Another said "*Live the way you want to be remembered.*" So true. Jimmy left me with a deep love for the sea, and a dedication for my profession. His own son also took his cue from his dad and also became a Master Mariner, remembered in turn for helping establish the NSRI (National Sea Rescue Institute.) Now THAT is some legacy. How many lives have been saved thanks to a father who passed on not only a love for the sea, but also a strong willingness and desire to be at the service of his fellowman? What positive impact have I in turn made on the lives of my wife, my sons and daughter, grandkids, my employees, juniors, colleagues. Have I passed on any values, skills and knowledge to them, to help them better negotiate the obstacles of life? Have I impacted positively on the lives of others? Will there be any Master Mariners out there one day who will remember any skills or will practice the values I passed on to them, that they have also been able to pass on to others? I hope so, and I'm sure that you do too.

This is only the second in this series of letters, but I do ask that you give a little time to reflecting on what I've shared with you. If you're wondering why I've shared this, then rest assured, the intention is not to bore you with my life memoirs, but to start an honest conversation which I hope will impact not only on your, but also the careers of the officers who will follow you one day. Please be aware that I speak from my own perspective, apply the filters according to your own level of qualification and experience, so that this becomes personal for you also.

Kind regards,

Mike Melly

Marine Mentor

Next week: Letter 3 – MODERN MASTERS