



To : Seafarers Our Ref : Mentoring Letter 8 – Barriers to mentoring
From : Marine Mentor Date : 21 February 2020

The word “mentoring” can so easily become an ideal, rather than the value it should be. There are many reasons including:

Ethnic: (Language, Culture, Power differential)

This company prides itself on employing a multinational crew, comprising South Africans, Filipinos, Poles, Ukrainians, Russians as well as couple of other nationalities. To overcome language barriers which can create many problems, the Company has established English as the working language on board. (Personnel Manual, 12.1.) All bridge team members in particular for example, must have an adequate knowledge of spoken English, which counters this barrier.

Of course we must accept the cultural differences between those of different nationalities, (and sometimes even of our own nationality) but once again, GWave and Cultural Awareness programs help us manage these. Those who have attended will know the importance of respecting other nationalities to the point of speaking English only, when there are others around who do not speak your language. The use of English for operational use is of course mandatory, but this should apply during social hours also. However, other than language, it seems that most barriers are either failures of one of the parties, or simply, excuses.

Other examples of barriers are :

Emotional

- Fear
- Embarrassment
- Immaturity – the failure of the Mentee to be FAT – Faithful, Available, Teachable.
- Inability to meet deadlines
- Attitudes and old, bad habits
- Traditions

Situational

- Competing and conflicting roles
- Irregular scheduling of contracts and leave duration
- Movement of officers between vessels

Leadership failures

- Failure to give credit
- Failure to treat mentees fairly
- Failure to ensure the mentee is making progress in a timely fashion
- Failure to recognize problems
- Failure to ensure a supportive environment
- Failure to monitor mentee conduct
- Failure to provide sound advice

Management

- Lack of support
- restrictive SMS
- toxic management
- Blame culture

You'll notice that in some of the above cases, the acceptance or encouragement of these barriers, amounts to discrimination or even abuse. We don't tolerate these, and neither should any employee. If mentoring is a *VALUE* then surely it must follow that dismantling any barriers, should also be a value, instead of a mere ideal.

The Company has accepted the responsibility to identify whether any of these issues exist, and if so, to correct them. This program has been initiated by the Company, and it thus goes without saying that it has the full support of the Company, and that if any of the above or other issues have been identified, they have or will be addressed. The Company has also endeavoured to provide whatever training is deemed necessary, ranging from GWave, Cultural Awareness, to CAP, and Seagull soft skill courses. In addition, Survey Monkey is used increasingly and effectively to connect to and engage with our seafarers in order to establish from them what their needs are. The introduction of internet and WiFi are examples of how the Company has listened to them, and has realised how important these are from a social perspective. Interviews with junior officers aboard vessels as well as in the office before they fly out to join their ship are focussed on motivating them to learn, and to ask questions. It must be clear to all by now that the Company cares, and has seen fit to create a climate in which not only professional competence but also our seafarers' social well-being and level of motivation has been addressed.

It is part of the Mentor's responsibilities to identify which other barriers exist aboard, and then to dismantle them one at a time. Come to think of it, a good leader would do this naturally anyway. A good place to start would be to follow the example set by the company, and to have a good robust discussion aboard, about which barriers are perceived to exist, and how they can be broken down. This may sound daunting, but would also draw attention to any concerns and barriers which may not be listed, or which you may not have thought of. Even if they have, an honest and open discussion about how best to dismantle them would reap rewards.

Barriers may also be erected by those who need mentoring – it is inevitable that some junior officers may not want to be mentored. Don't let this discourage you, but if you have the time, engage with them nonetheless to learn why this is the case. If the officer in question is capable and can do his or her job safely, then so be it. If not, well then this will be identified in the next appraisal.

Of course, the "Power Barrier" possibly stands between you and them. This is nothing new, but today's younger seafarers are a different generation which sees things differently. They are not only open to discussions on the subject, but welcome them. You would not only earn respect but also more enthusiasm from them by engaging with them, as we have clearly seen at some Crew Conferences.

Have a great weekend!

Kind regards,

Mike Melby

NEXT: GOALS & OBJECTIVES FOR MENTORS