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To : Seafarers                      Our Ref : Mentoring Letter 11 – Guidance for Mentees  
From : Marine Mentor              Date : 15 March 2020

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Dear Colleagues,

It's all well and good to ask senior officers to mentor, but even their best efforts will meet with frustration if those they are willing to share their experiential knowledge with are not open to receiving that valuable gift.

I must admit that I have met very, very few candidates for mentoring who fall into this category. By far, most have been like sponges, soaking up the knowledge, getting to know and respect their senior officers. In turn, I have noted how Captains especially have become more content and relaxed with their officers. Perhaps they have gained a great deal more confidence as they have seen how willing their mentees have been to learn and to apply their new knowledge. In turn, it is a pleasure for us in shore management to visit ships, take note of how happy they seem to be, and of course, to observe great improvements in attitudes, and professional standards. Much of this must be credited to Mentees, as much as to Mentors. It's clear then that there is as much to being a Mentee as there is to being a Mentor. So let's explore that.

Surely, nobody will want to waste time on someone who seems to think he knows it all, and doesn't need to be mentored. Why would someone be like that though? Perhaps it's embarrassment, maybe pride. Maybe we just open our mouths without thinking and try to convey the impression that we're competent. Each of these is a factor of a macho ego, and stands in the way of our learning. Knowledge gets us a great deal further than mere ego. Certainly practice a measure of closed-loop communications to show they you're listening and that you understand, but don't try to impress someone who is more qualified and experienced than you are. Imagine finding yourself in a situation in a few years' time where all eyes are on you when you're trying to look calm in a stressful situation, and are instead wishing you'd paid attention to what your Chief Engineer or Captain once tried to share with you about being in a similar situation. Don't be a "Know-all." It's ok to learn!

Then, there is the shy person who is really interested, but too shy to ask. Almost every Captain and Chief Engineer I have spoken to has made it very clear – "my door is open, all you have to do is knock." Just a few days ago, a Chief Engineer told his juniors in my presence, "I'm an open book." The same happened at the 2018 Crew Conference in Manila, when our Marine Manager and I held a parallel session with senior and junior officers. It was clear to all that much of the so-called "Power Barrier," is a perception only. Don't let it, real or imagined, take hold. A Senior Officer who relies on that is really only an insecure person, who him or herself needs you to rise above it, and to reverse-mentor him. Respect your seniors, of course, but don't fear them. They were also junior officers once, and have walked the same path as you.

"I'm too busy for this." Well, it's great that you're busy, but how is your time-management? We need to practice this daily. I know that it's sometimes challenging - I personally have yet to perfect it, but I'm working on it. There IS time for everything, we just need to make that time. It's obviously good to focus on the job during work hours, but we also need to make ourselves available to others through socialising – what do we do at tea-time, lunch-time, after watch? Do we sneak off into our cabins and hide away, or do we join the other members of our team (and other teams) in the common areas for a beer or softie? Maybe

you think you're a loner, prefer your own company. Maybe you're just introverted. Seafarers' Wellness has been in the spotlight for a while now, and every one of us has a responsibility to our shipmates to be available to them. This simply means being prepared to hold conversations, regardless of what they're about. Who knows what your apparently "shy" (or even "bolshy") shipmate is hiding, perhaps he or she has serious issues which they are battling with, and your being "available" may just give them the trust and confidence to share that with you, and in so doing, lessen the burden. Of course, by being available socially, you are also making yourself available for mentoring – which is something we all need.

ASK for advice, or for example, ask the Captain to be allow you to anchor the vessel under his guidance – or similar in the ER department. If the Captain agrees, don't start off by trying to impress. The chances are good that this will lead only to embarrassment. You're doing this to learn, not to show off. Start off by approaching the task methodically, well in advance of the allotted time. It goes without saying that the approach to an anchorage is the wrong time to ask. Study the SMS, and get your hands onto whatever material is available, and study that too. Plan what you're going to do, and then go tell the Captain what you've done, and ask the day or a couple of days before if he'll let you handle the approach to the anchorage, and to select where to anchor, as well as to drop anchor. Remember that he is in command of the vessel because he is competent to do so, so ASK him to share how he handles it and run through what you intend to do, with him. Listen to his advice. Ask how he felt the first time he did it, it will certainly help you, and it will also open him up to sharing not only his knowledge but also his failures. If he does, respect him for having had the trust and confidence in you, and the courage for sharing it.

Finally, - and this is by no means a comprehensive and exclusive list – practice what you have learnt. When we review assessments, we seldom look only at the most recent one, we call up three or four, and put them side to side in an effort to get to know the person, so that we can help them to address their shortcomings. Every now and then, I'm sorry to say, the same issues keep revealing themselves. That person is seemingly not hearing what they are being told. Why not? It's an opportunity for improvement! It's only human nature to be more willing to help those who are prepared to help themselves, than those who are showing no interest, and we're human also. So, whether it's by studying the SMS, or by paying more attention to your work areas of responsibility, or by adopting a more constructive attitude towards Seagull CBT, or simply by an improved attitude, SHOW positively that you have a desire to grow, and are willing to do whatever it takes to climb the ladder of success, and you'll be pleasantly surprised how the attitudes of your seniors change. You'll also achieve promotion a lot faster, once you have the requisite qualification and experience.

It's fair to say that life is not about living from day to day, but about living according to our values. The rewards will follow...

Kind regards,

*Mike Melly*

NEXT: (Topic under review in light of recent suggestions!)