



To : Seafarers Our Ref : Mentoring Letter 12 – our values
From : Marine Mentor Date : 20 March 2020

Dear colleagues,

When considering the topic for this week's edition of Mentoring Letter, I asked myself the obvious question; "why should someone mentor?" The answer came immediately – "Because it's the right thing to do."

I've also been acutely aware of the stress that everyone at sea must surely feel, and especially those who are due for leave, but are unable to sign off due to the Covid-19 virus. We ashore are finding our lifestyles radically altered, but we're also deeply sensitised to your concerns for your families ashore.

We very unexpectedly have a new "norm." At times like this we need to stick together, and work together. We need to be very aware of the role we are playing – am I going to protect others from myself just in case I am carrying the virus unknowingly, or will I be selfish and place others at risk by not taking all the necessary precautions?

This is not an accusation, think on it, and let's admit it. We're all selfish, our materialistic society makes us that way. It's become the norm. But perhaps this virus is a call for us all to re-think our lives, to return to our root values, and to cease being selfish? This applies as much in the workplace as anywhere else – socially, or at home.

So what IS our norm – our deep, character-driven norm? What ARE our root values, and how do they differ from our interests? They're those principles we're prepared to die for. (Well, not quite, but you get what I mean. Please DO NOT even think about harming yourself or threatening any of your shipmates because he doesn't share the same values as you do! It's ok, we're all different!!)

One thing I remember clearly from the GWave course ("Grindrod Work Attitude Values Enhancement" for those who haven't done it) is that the majority of us on that course shared very similar values. We were not nearly as unique as we thought we were. Our values oddly enough were also very similar to the company's core values, which are:

- Respect
- Integrity
- Professionalism
- Fairness
- Accountability

Clearly, these have a great deal to do with mentoring. Of course, we need **respect** – in both directions. We need to show respect, and to earn it. Most importantly, we need to respect ourselves. If we don't, how can others respect us? We do so through our behaviour and our attitudes. We do so by presenting neatly and tidily, both in our dress, our cabins, and our attitude to our work and to others. How can we mentor someone if our dress code or behaviour is poor? Do we really think that they will respect us for our other, better attributes? Think again.

We need **integrity**, and fortunately, I think it's fair to say that I have not witnessed much lack of integrity amongst seafarers in the 44 years since I first went to sea. It seems to be an inherent value in us all. Integrity of course also allows others to trust, and open up to us. It works both ways – a Mentor who trusts a mentee, will share more with him about what he's learnt from his failures, whilst a Mentee who trusts a Mentor will ask more questions, and learn from the answers.

Professionalism is something we can certainly do with more – across the board. Merriam-Webster defines professionalism as the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterise or mark a professional person. When you think deeply, it once meant that you possessed a superior qualification which indicated a great competence which could be trusted. Later on it became more of a bourgeois concept, and an indication of status. For me, professionalism is something which comes from within – but includes competence, trust and discretion. It has nothing to do with status, and, in the workplace, everything to do with how you use your knowledge and skills to the benefit of your employer and employees.

Fairness. Of course this means to be objective, or not to discriminate in any way. It can also mean to play by the rules of the game – do we always do that? Do we abide by a strict sense of ethics or do we cheat sometimes? Ok, we're all human, but if we expect to be treated fairly, surely we also need to act fairly at all times, to play by the rules, not to discriminate but instead to embrace others regardless of language, culture, gender, etc. (eg, Are we realistic in our expectations of each other or do we become impatient? Do we stop speaking our home language when others who don't understand it, are around? Are we considerate to crew members of the opposite gender, younger people, older people.?)

Accountability is an interesting value. Essentially, it means to take responsibility for the consequences for our decisions, actions, etc. Of course in the organisation context it means that each of us needs to take responsibility for how we do things – be it reading the draft marks, recording them, writing up the log, and so on. It's correct of course, but this also implies that someone can be blamed if things go wrong. So for me it's this and more – as human beings we are accountable to each other, so it has to be a collective responsibility. This is interesting, because it's not always fair. But it is what differentiates a manager from a leader. It differentiates an officer from a "qualified person." It means that if we are to expect accountability we must be prepared to model it, teach it observe it, coach it, actively encourage it and ultimately, insist on it. We also have to acknowledge and reward it when we see it and correct and educate for it when we do not.

I suggest that if we practice these and our other values on a daily basis, they become the norm. They also become the foundation of the character of the shipboard family, and create a safe and healthy environment, in which we can again thrive.

Stay safe and healthy!

Kind regards,

Mike Melly

NEXT: (Depends on what happens next week!)