



To : Seafarers Our Ref : Mentoring Letter 13
From : Marine Mentor Date : 27 March 2020

Dear colleagues,

As I write, many countries around the world, including the homelands of all our seafarers, have closed their borders, and about 20% of the world's population is in lockdown to fight the Coronavirus named Covid-19. For our ships, this means that crew changes have become impossible in the majority of ports, leaving many crew members stranded aboard their ships, unable to get home. It is almost impossible to get supplies to our vessels despite the best efforts of our hard-working Procurement Department. Circulars are published daily, sharing information, and advising on how best to deal with a new situation which also changes almost daily. Is this something we were prepared for? Definitely not – neither were most if not all countries whose resources far exceed those of our company. So, what to do?

It's not my intention to repeat the excellent advice already given, but rather to focus on the Human Element in this Letter. Your shipmates are people, good people, people who may feel some distress at not being able to get home to their families at a time like this, or who may be afraid that Covid-19 may invade your ship. There is however nothing that anyone can do about getting home, that's something which is beyond anyone's control. Management spend many hours daily trying to prepare ships procedurally and supply-wise, so that too is under control to the best of their ability. Yes, we may have to come up with novel ideas to improvise - making our own sanitiser, or to maintaining "social distancing" from visitors to our ship - but seafarers are really, really good at that. Yes, we can and **must** follow the procedures the Company has laid out to the best of our ability, but the only other area within our control where we may find ourselves in need of improvement is in the soft skills necessary to manage the crisis, so let's explore them.

These are challenging times for the entire world. Aboard ship, it could be better, or it could be worse. You're already in a fairly confined space, and sit opposite the same people at the dining table day after day. You relieve the same bloke of his watch, and have to put up with the same sense of humour (or lack thereof!) several times a day. You have a great deal in common, after all, he's in the same boat as you. (No pun intended!) Socially, you clearly have an extremely important role to play, and it's going to be either a positive one, or a nasty one. This is about how to avoid it turning into the latter.

Facts. Appraise yourself of the FACTS. Make sure that you only get information for creditable sources. (Note that tv stations are not always creditable, and politicians are usually definitely not creditable sources.)

Fake news. This is the scourge of the modern world, and a disadvantage of social media. If anyone wants to start a rumour, Facebook and Whatsapp are the places to be. So, PLEASE, be very careful about what you read on these, and just as importantly, what you post. Verify just about everything. It's not necessarily fact just because your mom sent it to you! She probably heard it from someone else, who heard it from someone else... let that loose on a ship, and you're going to create problems. It can be as infectious as Coronavirus... and just as deadly.

Under-reaction. Yes, we've heard the same stories about how flu also kills people every year, and that people are over-reacting to Covid-19. They are NOT over-reacting, do you REALLY believe that countries will go into lockdown and place their economies under extreme pressure? I think not.

Over-reaction. This is about as bad as under-reaction. Why get stressed over something you cannot control? Rather focus on what you can control. Read the Circulars sent out almost daily by the Company – these provide you with the best advice possible. Yes, of course it's imperfect, but it is very carefully researched and considered. The Company is doing EVERYTHING possible to care for our seafarers, but we too are limited by what is possible, and what is not. Get creative, if you don't have sanitiser, learn how to make some with the ingredients you have aboard. The best is old-fashioned soap and water, but not for less than 20 seconds. Don't allow unnecessary shore visitors aboard, and keep a distance from those who have no alternative than to allow aboard. If they're coughing and sneezing, or are displaying corona-like symptoms, sympathise with them, and explain your concerns before advising the Master who will probably ask them to leave. Please don't spray a sanitiser or insecticide at them, that's only going to annoy them.

Stress. Stress can be like a cancer, and eat away at your physical self. At even the mildest level it distracts you from your responsibilities and can cause accidents. It also causes ulcers. If you've ever had one, you'll know what I'm talking about. To counter it, make sure you are nourishing your body properly with the right food, that you're getting exercise and some sun if possible, whilst bolstering your immune system. Just as importantly, watch your shipmates for stress, and engage gently with them if you notice the obvious signs – sweating, blushing, shortness of breath, withdrawal. Reach out, encourage them to talk, ask about their families. Suggest that they chat to the Captain or the CEO, and share their concerns. Whatever you do, don't feed their stress by spreading fake news, or by giving them an update of how many people died in the last 24 hours, etc. Rather speak about how many recovered, after all, that's a FAR higher number.

These ARE taxing times, but we also have an opportunity ahead of us. Yes, Covid-19 is a worry, but think also about the other problems in the world. About 22000 people have died TODAY from hunger, and counting. There are nearly ONE TRILLION under-nourished people in the world. \$95 trillion has been spent on illegal drugs this year. How much on feeding the hungry? It's a time for reflection also. Did you read what I wrote about last week, about values and how practising them can create a healthier environment for all? Well, one week later, the entire world is in even greater need of a much better set of values than we've been practising in recent years. Selfishness needs to be replaced with generosity – and I mean of self, not necessarily financial. It means making sure that you give your shipmate more time, more quality time especially. That you make a positive impact on his or her life. It means listening to your shipmate, even if they're telling the same old stories, in the same monotone voice. By listening, I mean active listening - ask questions instead of just nodding your head – you'll be surprised by what you may have to learn from him/her. Generosity means being authentic, all of the time, not just when it suits or benefits us. Generosity in this context also means keeping your shipmates safe by practising proper hygiene, washing yourself and your clothes often. Sanitising your cabin and workspace (eg bridge, galley etc,) and following the procedures as outlined in the circulars will keep both you, and your shipmates safe and healthy, so that you can all go home to your families when this is over, as it will be quite soon.

Stay safe and healthy!

Mike Melly

NEXT: TBA