
To : Seafarers Our Ref : Mentoring Letter 14
 – Goals & Objectives for mentees

From : Marine Mentor Date : 3 April 2020

Dear colleagues,

As I said in a previous letter, I’m a firm believer in setting goals and objectives. After all, as a famous Cheshire Cat once sagely advised, “it doesn’t really matter much which way you go if you don’t care much about where you are going.” I was writing more to Mentors at the time, but this applies equally, if not more, to mentees – all of us in fact.

Can you imagine how difficult it is to try to motivate somebody who has very little self-motivation? Can you imagine how difficult it is to work with someone who is content with his position, and has no ambition? That person most probably has very little self-drive, and is cruising along, waiting for the day when he will inevitably regret his past attitude. Certainly, I’d not rest easy knowing that he’s on watch!

Most often, we fall into this rut because we have not set ourselves any objectives. Maybe obtaining our last CoC was a difficult experience which we don’t want to repeat. Perhaps it’s going to take finances which we just can’t afford. Perhaps we’re simply content with our current position, and just lack any desire to go further. As many whom I have spoken to know, if you fall into one of these categories, then you’re going to get in the way of somebody else who DOES want to progress. Which is more unfair than, being urged to progress in the ranks, or blocking the way for others? Of course the latter is simply wrong. Easier said than done? Not, actually, if you have mapped out the way ahead of you. The best way of navigating your way out of complacency, and onto a progressive path, is to establish objectives for yourself, and then to monitor your progress. This is an important part of Continuous Professional Development, (CPD) of which we’ve spoken before.

Failing to Plan, is Planning to Fail. So, get a plan together, it’s simple enough, but must be one which you can measure your progress in such a way that when it’s accomplished, you are ready for the CoC exam!

If you are let’s say a 3NO, then you know how much sea-time you need before you can obtain your CNO license, and then, your Master’s license. Likewise engineers. What you should already have done is to have planned out a timeline of your contracts, vacation periods, when you will update STCW basic training, etc. Putting a timeline together is easy, but how many do it? You’ll hopefully also have factored your budget in, so that you know what is possible and what is not possible. You should then of course prepare a draft, then ask the Captain or Chief Engineer (or CNO / 2EO) what he thinks of it. Consider his advice very seriously. Are longer leave periods really necessary? Similarly, shorter breaks may be counterproductive. You need family time, and a rest. Factor them in also, so that your plan is properly balanced, and won’t fall apart the first time it hits a speed wobble.

Next, get a syllabus of your next CoC from your administration (SAMSA/MARINA/PMA.) Map out how and when you’re going to study each topic. Unless your vessel is coasting, and is in and out of port, you have plenty time so there should be enough flexibility for those things that are out of your control. Much of this can be worked into your Daily Work Plan. Type this up, print it, laminate it even, and place it somewhere where you will see it every day.

It’s always good of course to have a plan, but you have to follow it! It simply won’t work unless you are following it, and tracking your progress. Cadets do this with their Training Record Books, so it’s an idea to develop your own Logbook too. You can do this in Excel or Word – draw up columns such as Date planned, Item description, Date done, lessons learnt or whatever suits you, and keep to it. If you prepare properly, and demonstrate your commitment to your senior officers, you are almost guaranteed of their active support.

Some broad guidelines to preparing yourself to be the professional you desire to be, follows:

1. **Stay alive** – don't muck about in drills, they will save your life one day and help you to save others. That's what seafarers do! A photo session is NOT a drill, it's a fraud. Watch the safety videos too. Do Risk Assessments and prepare Permits to Work properly. Don't go through the motions only, you're doing nobody any favours, your family at home even less so.
2. **Stay healthy**- exercise, rest, be careful about your nutrition - what you eat. A healthy body is a healthy mind.
3. **Stay alert** – don't waste your rest hours, get sufficient sleep so that you're on top of your game when on watch. Get used to practicing Chronic Unease, so that your situational awareness is always on fire!
4. **Study the SMS**, it's far more than a mere procedure intended to satisfy statutory requirements. You may just be surprised to discover a wealth of knowledge that you was right in front of you without you realising it. Of course you may find errors in it, your management team welcome suggestions having their attention drawn to errors. We're all human!
5. Get your **personal study and development program** together. Adopt a methodical approach to it. Share it with your senior officers, your Master or your Chief Engineer and ask for their support. Deck officers, purchase a "Shiphandling Logbook¹" from the Nautical Institute, plan your manoeuvres, share this with the Master, ask him if you may manoeuvre the vessel when: approaching the pilot station ; embarking/disembarking the pilot ; applying rate of turn techniques ; in shallow water ; in rivers ; choice of anchorage; anchoring with one or two anchors in limited anchorages etc. There is so much to be learnt.
6. **Use CBT** – it's free! CBT and TOTS or BITS are 100% free.
7. Make sure that you enlist the assistance of the Master / CNO / CEO / 2EO, ensure that they know what you're doing, and accept their help with humility and grace. Don't be a Smartass! Learn from them, they are senior to you because they are more experienced than you are, and like most seafarers, will be very happy to assist you. It's in their blood to do so.
8. **Give back!** Be generous with your time with your own subordinates as you rise in rank. Remember that you would not be where you are today had it not been for the investment someone else made in you. Be grateful for that. The best way to thank them, is by paying it forward...

In short, the above can all be summarised in a single word – **ATTITUDE!**

Let's say that you are a 2NO, holding a CNO license, and preparing for your Master's. Or, a 3EO with a 2EO CoC, studying towards your Chief's license. These studies may be short-circuited if you are unexpectedly promoted aboard. Of course you should continue to prepare for the next license if applicable, but by now your priority must be to prepare yourself for the transition. We have seen cases of newly promoted officers struggling with certain tasks despite being qualified for that position. It's a serious problem, the more senior you are. What will you do if you are promoted to CNO, and the Master suddenly becomes indisposed? Will you be ready to step into his shoes and take Command? This of course applies to a 2EO also, who should be ready at all times to deal with the paperwork as well as engine management. So, from the day you sign on, start understudying your immediate superior officer in case you are called on to relieve him at short notice. Ask him to show you the way around the paperwork, as well as the more practical matters such as shiphandling. Every officer should be ready at all times to step up into the next rank at short notice. You can't do this alone, you need a Mentor to assist you, so ensure that you do everything within your power to make that task as pleasant and rewarding for him or her, as possible.

Kind regards,

Mike Melly