

Multinational crew; in words and in action

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Summary

In today's maritime world, running a vessel with only a single nationality is nearly impossible; as a master mariner who has sailed on and commanded ships with so many diverse nationalities, there are a few points which I would like to share with you. Having differences is undeniable, but we may be able to tackle the troubles associated with them if we try to identify and analyze the root causes. The human being has quite a lot of versatile aspects with respect to behavior and living patterns but one may start with scrutinizing primeval points of existence; some of which are quoted here, along with possible solutions and/ or recommendations.

Points to ponder

Eating habits

In the old textbooks of biology, which try to generalize matters, it is often mentioned, "we are what we eat". I would like to add, "we even smell what we eat!" This may seem a bit odd at first glance, but those who travel a lot would agree that when you enter a new place, there is often a particular smell, which attracts your attention; this has of course been initiated from the kitchens in the area, amongst other things. It is a fact that in a society that there is a typical type and group of food being used; the people would also give off smells through the evaporation of sweat and breathing, etc which have been originated from the food intakes.

While having a newcomer on board, the existing personnel would also realize this, which may be a ground for obnoxious attitudes from others; for the newcomer this is very much disliked because he/she does not understand or feel it, but it is a fact as many declare so. The other point is how we eat; in some societies, slurping the soup may not be as bad as the other one. The same is how one uses the utensils. The way you use the fork and knife or spoon and at occasions, if ever you use them, is a question.

The backgrounds of religion and belief would also cause differences as usual like kosher, vegetarian etc, but they are not construed here as being so obvious and known matters.

Washing and bathing habits

I do not want to call it hygiene because they are not really synonyms, but depending upon the temperature of the atmosphere, people differ by the number and frequency of washing and bathing. In some societies people may use various oils/creams, which may be not so likeable in other places of the world. Although this point is usually adjusted after a few days of living on board, it may well be continued and create a source of bitter reaction from shipmates and colleagues.

In some societies blowing one's nose may be very impolite but in others it may be a very

common thing to observe even while at the dining table or in restaurants. Having long/short hair, keeping an untrimmed beard or wearing earrings may attract attention or arouse misperceptions, which can be grounds for differences and possible dislikes.

Dressing habits

Although on ships which are operated by companies that require uniform wearing; this may not be so prominent but still the fact that people of different nations would prefer to wear folk dresses or at times move around half naked remains there. While at rest or off duty, this is quite normal thing to see. This may not be a grave matter but is a sign of appearance differentiation, and may be taken at times like trying to segregate or categorize them.

Language barriers

Having different mother tongues is surely a base for differences, but when they want to communicate in a common language, a lot of funny misinterpretations happen which may become sources of trouble. In the science of linguistics, the correct translation is an art and would vary from one individual to the other depending upon the cultural background, general knowledge, extent of ability in the mother tongue, the group of languages that they belong to and other factors which are better discussed while doing a course of linguistic philosophy and are beyond the scope of this essay.

The intonations and emphasis by which a statement is made can be taken as aggressive or impolite by one group of people while the others take it as quite natural and common. What we all agree is the fact that at times a pronunciation or incorrect statement in another language may be the base for disagreement and making fun of each other or leading to problems, due to misconceptions or misunderstandings.

Working systems

Some of the personnel have left over patterns of work and procedures from their ex-employers and ex-ships; this may on occasions become a sort of misinterpretations and lead to difficulties. At one culture doing the work may be in traditional way and as it comes with keeping relations on top, but in other the rules may override all the relations whether liked or disliked.

In a group of people they may have learnt not to do anything unless ordered/told so, but the others are somehow automated workers and do not need constant attendance or supervision. Although a lot of efforts have been made to facilitate all these by unifying procedures through IMO and related legislations as well as recommendations, this is still existent especially amongst the ratings, and would most probably remain so.

After all above-mentioned points, it is very important to state that having a gang/group within a vessel is nothing desired by the command and management. The whole crew should be trying to live and work together in a single group and any segregation will surely lead to bitterness and possibly a repugnant atmosphere on board. This surely will impede the operation and running of the vessel.

To achieve the difficult goal of making personnel live and work together in a friendly way - which is undoubtedly a prime concern of every master in command of a multi-nationally manned

ship - the following practically experienced probable solutions may be worth mentioning:

A) Try not to ever discriminate amongst the personnel on board. From a general point of view this is a part of implying proper discipline, which should be adherent with the management commitment and be physically seen. An order to one of the crew who speaks the same language as the master while somebody else is present, may be taken as a favor, or listening to him/her in that language may be construed as backbiting or spying. The senior officers should be briefed and instructed that while appointing jobs for those who are general-purpose sailors and have no specific job description; they must observe fairness, the difficult tasks should be reasonably allotted/divided, and favors like shore leave must be fairly granted.

Use of ranks/positions or names in a polite manner should always be encouraged. No one including the master should ever address others with nomenclature like Indian OS, black engineer or even things like fat/short fellow etc. It is obvious that, this may be taken as offensive and should be avoided.

Whoever has an experience of management is aware of the difficulties related to trying to have fair treatment for subordinates, but all may agree that a neutral look onto race, color, connections or non-performance related preferences can be accepted and judged by majority, and this may only be achieved by promulgating clearly that those who perform better and are honest, willing and good workers along with good conduct, will be appreciated and preferred.

The crew even while being questioned for mistakes or penalized should be treated/called upon in relation to their job or conduct in an ipso facto manner and any relevance or regard to other things like nationality should be discouraged.

Hence no other criteria apart from the workmanship standards are taken, this should be done in action, which as always speaks louder than voice.

B) Try to consider the eating patterns of the crew in menu preparation, due regard should be given to including foods that the majority of personnel like and on occasions allow some of them to cook their local food if possible for all on board. For different tastes, we may cook spice-less food and keep various spices on the table so that those who like them can add as much as they wish. If some of the crew likes less or more meat, these can be instructed to the stewards to provide the same dish in the requested way, so a reasonable balance can be made. Organize barbeques and let them fry the meat or chicken in their own way, in those occasions call everyone to participate and let them play various types of music and dance to various tunes. By this way the different nationalities learn each other's fun and pleasure aspects and try to have tolerance for.

Little by little they may also start to enjoy living along with others, as the atmosphere grows friendly.

*At one occasion I had a rating who was feeling terribly homesick and lonely, only after a few days of joining the vessel, he was nearly crying as it was his first time with another company and different nationality of crew. The same guy was physically in tears after six months on board and

was imploring me to extend his contract so he can stay longer! He even learnt a few words of the language predominant and happily attended gatherings and enjoyed the food. Work-wise he was quite a good rating too.

C) Listen to your crew and let them complain at times; this way you will identify the grounds of bitterness and at times you can intervene and stop grievances. There will be chances of only releasing the pressure by talking to someone and you may clear a lot of misunderstandings. Most of the crew only wants to have their captain *communicate with and see them* and he does not ignore his personnel because of their color, rank, nationality etc.

D) This may seem a bit pessimistic but it is not a bad idea that at critical and volatile situations to remind the staff that they are bound to live together and tolerate each other in a way mercenaries do, in order to achieve a common goal, which is having a job and living by it. So why not make the best out of it and enjoy the small community, recalling the fact that every mariner spends more than two thirds of his working life-time at sea, then the most logic acceptance is to pass it smoothly and if possible with good memories left over from the fellow sea-mates, who are also *in the same boat!*

There is an old proverb which says “*A rolling stone gathers no moss*”; a perfect example of this is the life of seafarers who either loose their friends or make not many, because of being always away at sea, in exile or partial deprivation; telling this to seamen is sometimes waking them up to the fact that to take the benefit, while they have the chance of making good acquaintance with people of other continents by living and working peacefully with them instead of looking for differences.

Last but surely not the least, it is a prominent fact that the seafarers are really one of the most recognizable categories of people on the earth who have very high tolerance levels and adjustable/adaptable attitudes, that is due to the nature of their profession and therefore making them accept other human beings as colleagues or co-workers, and so this is not an impossible task to lift the threshold of irritations or getting provoked.

We should bear in mind that fairness and consideration for others is the essence, and if on certain occasions, abrasions occur, this may be attributable to the human nature and various characters’ conductibility.

By knowing some basic principles, if we cannot stop the differences, we can definitely have control over them.

Onboard training; essence and requirements

Summary

Training of seafarers for their position in a practical way at sea is a major concern. The international regulations known as STCW have defined the requirements in the theoretical and practical aspects of maritime training; the focus of this essay is the sea-phase training for the

cadets and the associated problems.

There are many areas, which have to be looked into when considering elements affecting training at sea, some of which are mentioned below:

Primary understanding of various aspects of sea life

The first training phase at sea if done at early stages, ie before they spend a long time at the academy - can help the cadets to have a better understanding of the future profession and life. Although if the academy had had a proper system like “open door day” and issuance of the bulletins or information sheets, a lot can be grasped prior to applying for such course, but still the best understanding can be achieved while the person is physically at sea. This is related to the type of vessel and many factors like trade areas but the most important part seems to be the officers, crew and the master who can really instigate the good or bad ideas. If the experience at the earlier stages cannot satisfy the person to continue with the job, then a lot of later troubles can be avoided by quitting/changing the career.

Time spent for primary training in the schedule

As per STCW requirements, for example for a deck cadet to be able to attend the competency examinations, a minimum of 12 months at sea from which a part is done along with a training officer is required. In some companies under certain administrations, a minimum of six months with the presence of a training officer is needed and then after the college session they are sent for another six months as senior cadet, so called.

The allocation of six months with a training officer could be enough but we should see the time being divided in a way such that nearly the first month is spent to know the way about around the vessel and getting adjusted to the living conditions such as food, noise and associated problems. It is a fact that the sea-life is a unique experience and if we take elder or less adaptable people, the adjusting period may even be longer, but for youngsters allowing about a month would not seem too much.

After this, there is four to four and half months, which will be spent for effective studies on board. The way this time is spent is very important; a sort of halving the days to mornings in the classroom and afternoons on deck/in engine room will be a good choice. The physical work is better put for the afternoons as after lunch the level of attention comes down and the cadets tend to fall sleep but this may not affect the work as much as it has influence on theoretical studies.

It may be a worthy suggestion to try to teach some work-habits and living schemes to the cadets; this may include behavior towards others, having tolerance and ability for communications with other shipmates. Although this is surely a part of the programme with respect to the discipline and practical training, I would like to suggest to include it in the daily schedule in a sort of hidden way, like when the cadets are tired with the sophisticated stuff, to give a break by telling them how to address the captain or the officers, how to move around when in some ports or how to analyze the happenings around, and so many other topics as necessary.

The last part of their junior training will be wasted by being home/love-sick and getting tired of life on board in the typical way of isolation; in other words in mental preparation to get out and

away from the ship. This is somehow so for most mariners that nearing to the end of their serving time they are a bit absent minded and want to get away from the ship. For the cadets this time cannot be effectively counted as very productive.

The senior cadet time (the secondary phase of sea-time)

In some systems where only minimum requirements are taken, this time may only be limited to six months. Now the question is that if a trainee can acquire the abilities within that period or not. The answer cannot be a word such as 'yes' or 'no' - it all depends on the individual and the circumstances, but in a general point of view this may not suffice.

According to the feedback received after those cadets are graduated and join vessels, many masters complain about the lack of abilities amongst that type of officers. This can be a base for improper upbringing of officers, it is very important to note that when an officer joins the vessel, he/she is expected to know the jobs in a overall way; there may be occasions that guidance is necessary, but the main areas of duties should have been generally understood.

While carrying out the assigned tasks; the officer should show interest for learning the next position's duties and in that line must be helped or directed, but if the primary training is so short that there had not been enough time to grasp the various aspects of let's say third officer's/junior engineer's duties, then while being assigned as one, he/she would try to fill up the gaps missed when and where it may not be the right time or place and will definitely affect the safety and workmanship on board. Unfortunately this may continue in further ranks as well and the result is obvious.

During the secondary stage of cadetship, the person may just be unlucky to serve with a group of officers and crew who if not disappointing type; they may not really bother about training or motivating/pushing him/her for learning to become an officer. As a result the time will not be as productive as required. The other point is the individual's abilities. Although some cadets may be smarter than others but limiting the time to six months, which shall be spent on one or hardly two ships and at occasions idly, may not be considered a very effective idea.

To become a merchant marine officer if one does not require very exemplary theoretical abilities, he/she surely needs a lot of patience and allowance for setting abilities in, to be capable taking charge of a watch affecting safety of the personnel and ship plus the environmental protection etc.

It is understood that any extension of the training period has financial burdens and every system likes to have earlier achievements by shortening that time and appointing the persons as serving officers as soon as possible. On the other hand nobody can deny the huge losses that may have to be incurred if an accident takes place due to a human error basically attributable to insufficient training.

What may be possible is to try to arrive at a reasonable compromise by neither shortening the time dangerously nor extending it unnecessarily.

Basically the STCW rules stipulate the minimum, but the personnel management should consider various elements while recruiting with respect to educational matters. If an officer may be required to serve on different type of ships, it might be a good idea to send him/her for certain periods of service and training on board those classes. Let's say an extra three months or at occasions six months can be added. Surely, while requiring such extensions due reference to the personal files should be appropriately taken into consideration.

We may as well state that the minimal requirements set by the regulations need to be revised. There may be many statistical data backing the idea that the training at sea has been so brief that the result has given rise to hasty training and unsafe officers at sea. While looking onto an academy and the students in there, you may find very bright boys and girls but this may not necessarily mean that they shall be good officers; one can easily find instances for that statement.

What I have tried to highlight here is the point that the practical training if not more important than the theoretical part, is as valuable at least. We must spend time, allow subsiding the quickly learnt subjects and also accept the financial burdens if we are really planning to have well trained staff for the vessels.

Only 20 years ago we were obliged to have over 24 or 30 months at sea before appearing for the examinations and now with so much of sophistication in the industry and the very important fact of having “*faster ships*”, we hardly give any time for learning. It is true that we do not see many derrick operated or steam- ships today, but the navigation and traffic has become much more difficult and the ships' engineering designs have changed a lot as well. Remembering the fact that also many international new regulations and consequential requirements have been entering into force, above all “*the reduction of manning levels*” would surely necessitate having more qualified/better trained personnel.

Physical health problems at sea

Summary

There are a number of diseases and physical health problems, which are frequent and more observable at sea. The purpose of this essay is not considering them from a General Practitioner's or doctor's view, but only to try to have a general glance at, identify, somehow categorize and give a few guidelines to confront and if possible to tackle them as the master of a ship.

In order to be able to identify the probable physical problems, one must try to categorize their attributable causes; the following items are considered as the predominant areas:

Accidents

When there is a personal accident consequential physical problems may exist. Depending upon the various circumstances, the associated remedy would differ; these usually are part of the first aid and must have been explained during the courses, therefore not included in here. One point may be the fact that the seafarers tend to give strangely unsolicited and non-scientific advice,

which should seldom be allowed. This is of course the case with every illness on board and especially grave with multi-nationally manned vessels where the variety of local ideas is really numerous. It is important not to permit application of any local/herbal or whatever else medicine or remedy without consultation with a doctor through CIRM or any other proper source/authority.

Food related sicknesses

Constipation: This is very frequently observed on board, it may be due to having little physical movements which can be because of type of work like radio operators or even the galley crew as the nature of their work does not constitute a lot of movement. It can be because of eating less vegetables/fruits or consuming mostly frozen foodstuff as ingredients for preparation of the meals. Some of the personnel may get constipated due to over-eating or eating at improper intervals. The officers or ratings, who keep watches, usually tend to eat irregularly and with lesser appetite. When one has just got up from sleep, having a fatty or deep fried meal will surely lead to less bowel movement.

There are instances that smoking too much or alcohol/drug abuse, above all nervous tension and depression can give rise to constipation too. In order to overcome this, we may apply some simple solutions such as:

- Encourage personnel to drink a lot of liquids, especially water.
- Avoid deep fried and oily food. A generous amount of fiber rich provisions is a good line to follow.
- Doing some exercise even in the form of pacing up and down can be quite helpful.
- Fresh vegetables and fruit must be a permanent part of meals. Although this cannot always be accomplished, having them as much as possible in any form can be very good. I always ordered a lot of various vegetables while passing the Suez Canal and at any other ports where they were very versatile and also good for quality/prices. On board a ship you may get crew members who do not like eating some type of vegetables due to habits, nationalities etc. Then the vegetables can be served in different forms, such as in soups, boiled or even fried (still better than not eating them!). At times I ordered the cook to add vegetables in some dishes not so common and give a short lecture that how good this can be for health or your sexual potency! This way they ate all with eager pleasure.
- Advise watch keepers to get up about half to one hour before mealtime, to move about a little and start eating with liquids and not heavy dishes.
- Discourage over-eating by providing some snacks in the saloons/fridges, so that the personnel would not be tempted to eat extra to keep themselves until the next meal, and then they can have a grab at snacks if they felt hungry. This way frequent eating but with little amount can be made routine.
- Avoid smoking /alcohol as far as it can be.
- To avoid nervous pressure and depression is not a simple task and may have to be talked about in a separate essay.
- Medications for constipations are preferably to be avoided as far as possible but if the problem is for a long time, some herbal medicines (pharmaceutical - not local or hand made!) can be given. A few drops of olive/vegetable oil in a glass of lukewarm water if

not miraculous, cannot be dangerous either.

Diarrhea: This is not so frequent to happen, but if seen, should be dealt with carefully. It can rarely be due to some food, which then will not be very persistent, but if diarrhea continues, it can be a sign of food poisoning or some type of infectious/viral disease. On these occasions, a doctor should be consulted and appropriate/professional advice is required.

Ulcers and Gastritis: Those who have a history of ulcers are not really fit for sea life. But still you can see a lot of them on board especially those with peptic ulcer. They should bring their medicines along and also follow a special diet. The advice for them along with those who suffer from gastritis or diseases of colon (also very common on board) is a general guide as above to avoid greasy/fried food, alcohol, smoking etc.

The healthy food guides are the same as ashore with the difference that at sea it is not always easy to find what you like, then a compromise should be made and while having choices to get different provisions, a more health-conscious aspect should be taken into consideration. To convince all appetites is nearly impossible but the red lines should be drawn by health and hygiene criteria.

Physical health problems attributable to climate/weather

Sea life is a type of living, which makes one undergo a lot of weather and climate changes within a short period of time. For people living ashore a change in weather or seasons cannot be so disturbing as it happens slowly and allows time to adapt/adjust to the changes. For seafarers passing an area of high into low pressure as it happens under certain speed and quite quickly can at times be disturbing.

Let us consider passing through a frontal system or a cyclonic depression; it is amazing to note that during a few hours, the pressure will change by 20 millibars or a vessel will experience dry, wet, warm and cold atmosphere which will definitely affect the personnel. We can see typical headaches, nausea, dizziness, earache, sleeping disorders and, in women, menstruation irregularities.

The extent of these troubles will vary from person to person but is surely related to sea-experience and of course dependent upon individuals' tolerance levels and physical conditions. In general we may say that everyone gets a bit of the said matters due to weather and climate.

The above-mentioned problems will usually subside after some time passed as the body will adapt itself slowly. In order to help the staff, we may allow longer rest periods and provide more likeable food. It can be a good practice to warn those who for instance suffer from hypertension or the ladies on board to be prepared for and more cautious if at all helpful, otherwise not much can be done for the abrupt changes of pressure etc.

The other category of the climate related diseases can be mentioned as hot and cold weather problems. Working in very hot or cold weather can be very disturbing. This is also varied from one nationality/individual to another on board. The weather considered pleasant by people from tropical areas may be very hot for those originally from mountainous regions. So is for relatively

cold weather. As a general rule the ambient temperature should be kept at a standard level that nearly all consider okay. Hence having a good air conditioning system on board is vital.

Here again the food plays an important role. In cold weather a menu with so many carbohydrates and fibers can help a lot. So does many different soups served that are full of vegetables. This can help to avoid catching cold and influenza and a lot of consequent troubles. Using appropriate clothing at all times is necessary, along with the code of safe working practices and safety ware, proper dressing as per weather prevailing can be as important.

For hot weather areas, there can be a lot of skin diseases, ear infections, stomach upsets and fatigue or sleeplessness expected. A general hygiene can be the most important. Serve cold drinks and encourage personnel to drink a lot and take salt tablets.

Some people get even nervous while sweating; this can be a hazard. Those who sweat a lot also get external ear infections very often. We must allow more rest if possible and advise use of headbands for restriction of sweat getting into eyes/ears. For an engineer who works in hot air with ear muffs, nothing can be more easing to frequently call the engine control room and breathe cool air; this may also deter Otitis in various forms as well.

At certain times we may even consider shifting the work-hours and periods to lesser disturbing hours of the day. This way the work efficiency can also be maintained.

Diseases caused by type of work

In every profession there will be certain types of diseases that occur more often. For seafarers the following can be called upon amongst other problems, which may have been missed:

- Body/waist pain - headaches, hernia: this happens in most seafarers. During rough seas, it is very difficult to sleep, which will surely lead to different types of pain. These types of problems can also be due to heavy workload and moving objects around with improper lifting methods. The engineers are very much prone to this type of ailments. Reiteration and strict observation to follow safe working practices is the way to lessen the occurrence of this category.
- Heart and coronary problems: these are also not very difficult to find. The jobs on board who undergo high stresses and have too many responsibilities are the possible persons with the heart problems. The master is mainly the carrier of most responsibilities, and then you can imagine how prone this position is. Smoking/alcohol and wrong eating habits are also major reasons but the nervous condition can be a dominating factor. Having varicose veins in the officers who stand up very long hours like deck officers are a common problem amongst them. It is very difficult to attempt to give guidelines to avoid such problems, as some may be the inherent nature of the work.

We may only advise on healthy eating habits, lessening tension on board - this should be told to the shore managers and operators mainly as they are the creators of most of the tensions! Then we can teach the officers how to reduce the pressure of ankle and feet veins by changing positions or having one foot higher than the other one, or supplying soft matting for the bridge and using proper shoes are possible solutions for reduction of

occurrence.

Continuous advice on drug/alcohol abuse should be a part of management on board but how effective is the question; this surely has many loopholes.

If troubles with heart exist for any of the staff on a ship, it is obvious that only a professional help can do any good and apart from some primary first aid, not much can be done on board.

- Hair-loss: this seems not a major health concern but is a fact existent and many suffer from it. The type of water used for cleaning can vary a lot; the distilled water from the ship's fresh water generator can be one of the worst types for causing the hair-loss. Those staff like engineers who work with various oils/chemicals are very much prone to this problem. You can often hear some of the crew complaining that wearing helmets during long hours and especially during high temperatures can lead to hair loss; this can be a deterring reason for following safety measures.

Apart from abiding by the hygiene standards, we must be careful about water supply and use the approved additives in to the water made by the fresh water generators; also get proper type of safety helmets with ventilation holes and non-irritating materials. By these, we may be able to help to reduce this problem.

After all said in above paragraphs, we may be able to deduce that the illnesses on board a ship are limited to a few mainly and if one knows their causes plus probable treatments, it can be possible to help most and avoid drastic situations.

N.B. The diseases as categorized under STDs and kidney problems have been appropriately addressed in the ship's captain medical guide, therefore not talked about in this essay.

Finally, some general remarks/guidelines can be given about the medicine administration to conclude this essay as following:

- Try to avoid giving medicines too often; this will stop the act becoming a habit.
- Some crew like to ask medicines frequently and at times even naming them; following the procedures laid down by WHO may help in these cases and if necessary, we can give them some harmless medicines such as vitamins just to satisfy their persisting request.
- Most of the personnel would be satisfied by seeing your attention attracted, this will help them morally a lot; some may like to get a bag of medications to know that you care. To supply these, we must be very careful and voluminous prescriptions may only be accomplished after consultation with a doctor if at all admissible.
- Start administering medicine with small doses and mild types then if necessary stronger ones can be given. For instance for a headache, if the person has no problem with stomach, give him/her only Aspirin, then if not okay after some time, stronger analgesic can be administered. It is a bad practice to start with heavier doses like Paracetamol-codeine or Ibuprofen. Most ailments if dealt at early stages, can be easily treated. Jumping to strong medications that may give disastrous results should be avoided.
- Always read the attached instructions before giving them – but not in front of the patient

as this may give distrusting effects! Ask the patient's medical history and if some trouble may arise as per the instructions contained along with the medicine, be careful to administer and consult professional help.

- For women and children (spouses on board) be more cautious. They can be advised to go to a doctor prior to joining and get the medications for general/probable troubles.
- At times people may only want some thing to be given to them and are mainly having problems in mind. They complain from baseless diseases and pains in a lot of places and moving here and there, eg: sleeplessness and general fatigue etc. For those, a harmless vitamin or the same type of medicine can be given with a strict instruction like you should take it with a glass of water or not to sleep after the pill for two hours etc. This can give very good results and patient calming down later. You may get him/her to sleep and relaxing without giving any tranquilizer or sedative of any sort, which is what the person was actually after.
- As the last remark, if in doubt, seek professional help and do not act as doctor as you are not one, the attitude of crossing the limits can be detrimentally catastrophic and is definitely against the principles of responsible management.

Seafarers' mental conditions

Summary

The knowledge about the mental problems of seafarers is very important both for mariners and senior staff as well as the logistics and management companies. An overall look towards this aspect of human mind and derived behavior along with associated problems can help to run a vessel in a better/safer way thus resulting to higher efficiency in respected areas. Although many of us have encountered and dealt with most of the following discussed matters, a fresh and realistic way of analyzing them may be useful.

There are various stages, at which we can consider the mental conditions of seafarers; the forthcoming points can be a typical approach. In the following essay there may be a tendency felt to attribute the troubles to male seafarers, this may be true at many occasions due to the fact that majority of the sea-going people have or rather had been men. But the writer does not really intend to exclude female mariners and a lot of the talked topics are human element related matters and can be seen in both sexes.

Prior to joining a ship

Before a seafarer joins on board, he/she may have quite different and various conditions. As it can be very difficult to consider so many possibilities, we shall try to adhere to a few which may be taken as dominant types. If it is the first time that a person joins a ship, the mental condition is totally different and is surely mixed with a lot of hazy/untrue or wrong assumptions; so, the purpose of this essay is mainly to consider the sea staff who join and work on board vessels on a regular basis.

The leave collected after a certain amount of sea-time is spent in parts; like taking rest, doing the left-over jobs due to home being unattended for certain period of time, possible medical treatments and, of course, getting prepared for the next ship. There is always a bitter feeling like

incubus hovering on the mind of a seafarer. That is the time lapse and getting nearer to the time of joining a ship. The feeling can be compared to that of school children during the holidays, although the school cannot be as bad as a ship but still time ticking is not so desired. This is nearly the same for all mariners but for those having some trouble at home which requires their physical attendance is more painfully felt, how they can abandon these, whom they can trust upon and a lot of other things stinging the mind.

Getting prepared to hear bad news is an extremely difficult task and many who are really expecting such news will pass part of their time at home being reminded automatically of such bitterness that when they are away at sea, the not-to-be mentioned incident is going to happen. There is surely some time lost and unwanted effects caused during worrying for the matters necessitating the preparation of home and family for a relatively long time of un-attendance, which would somehow worsen the state of mind.

The amount of paperwork and bureaucratic elements are also important at this stage. In some situations to get a new passport or the necessary documents to board a ship can be very tiring and consequently cause adverse effect on the minds of seafarers. It is essential to make the process as easy as possible so that with reference to above; a person having so many potential burdens on mind, not to add any more and at least not to aggravate the pressures.

The time at sea

This has to be subdivided into the following:

1) The time, rather period of time after joining and before leaving a ship.

By most seafarers these periods are probably the worst while regarding the pressures on the mind. When you join a ship newly, first of all as a human being you have feelings of being estranged, you cannot sleep properly for the first few days, the food or water does not suit you, the extra noise, which was not there at home, is very much noticeable.

Depending on the position on board and the experience at sea, the levels of tolerance are different. One of the most disturbing matters is the attack of information on senior officers especially the master. From many sides you will be bulleted by various true and untrue data. It is very difficult to array all these in the brain; you may have the experience of ignoring some of them but still when there seems to be important things relayed, the filtering is surely a headache maker.

There will be chances of backbiting too; depending upon the crew collection on board. If from places that this is a habit, you will receive various allegations and claims, and or partially to make a better situation/ground for the future.

Having joined a vessel with tight commercial schedule, all the take over may be a few hours then immediately you should proceed to sea. Trying to run a vessel on which you have only been for few hours is a really difficult task.

There are fears experienced during the few days of joining too. Various as many they can be,

such as fear of not knowing something, making mistakes while manoeuvring and a lot of other things. Along with all above there is the bitter/sad feeling of having left home recently, the sight of children with wet eyes, wife with unfathomable look, the thought of unfinished tasks, the unpaid bills, the leaking garage ceiling, the elderly relative with a mortal trend and many other things which continuously poke you.

To pass the first few days of joining in a safe and sound way is like passing the dungeon of basilisk , thereafter you can continue in a routine till the service time is over.

To be able to help a person for passing that period, some suggestions can be given, most of which might be automatically done but it may be good to point them out:

- Try to categorize the information in a form of hand over report or written short notes so that the joining person will not be so bewildered or confused, there can be an access to the quickly said things later on when there is enough time.
- The preparation of a clean and suitable cabin for the joiner is very important.
- Contacting the family during the first hours of arrival via phone and hearing the loved ones, can soothe the missing hearts at both ends.
- Try to receive the person nicely, especially if of a nationality already feeling alienated, you can help him a lot if he feels welcome on board.
- If possible give him some rest at the beginning, the noise from airplane and the dust of traveling can make human being burdened and specifically tired.
- The time before signing off from the ship is also a stressful time. The preparation for signing off, although quite pleasant, has its own pressures. The time not passing as it should, the news of the joiner is not coming, the troubles awaiting to be attended at home and the physical tiredness all add to the stresses. The mariners usually pass through this stage with little difficulty as the imaginations of getting back home to the loved ones will surely ease the things off. At certain occasions that the person has been mentally worn out, some help should be given to coax him/her to be able to continue up to the time that the reliever arrives.
- The seafarer's safe working practices should also be observed if signs of absent-mindedness are noticed.

2) The main period of sea-time

This is the area of major concern while considering the stresses associated with the seafarers.

Some of the topics are discussed here:

Loneliness

The fact is that all mariners are living in exile. They are not only away from home and family but also far from any civilization or human contact. On ships with slow speed, crossing an ocean may take many days during which the only people a seafarer has contact with are the shipmates. It is a difficult task to have only a few people to talk to or see. Even those who are not very sociable persons would suffer from. When a person is living ashore there may not be so many people he/she meets or has contact with but only walking in a shopping mall or street will give the feeling of being alive in a society. Such things are not existent on board.

To communicate, one should use a language as primary means and also have some common area

to talk about. The different nationalities may not understand each other's language and may not as well be good at a common language. It is not necessary to know English very well for doing the job, a few hundred words plus a series of standard phrases can be enough to do the job of a rating or even some officers on board, but those are not probably enough to communicate in a let's say intimate way.

That can lead to feeling lonely. The staff may talk to each other but still they can feel lonely. There are certain areas usually that mariners would talk about with fellow mates. These are quite limited areas and easily end up. When the ship is on a rather long sea passage, the stories end and the common topics finish. The unwanted thoughts start when the crew seek seclusion in their cabins as there is no reason to stay in the saloon. Playing movies or organizing games can help to delay this attitude but it is bound to happen and the various personalities can show different aspects.

The attack of old/discarded/abandoned and left over troubles usually come at that time. Some of the talks in the saloons may give rise to disturbing dreams and thoughts. The mariners, like most other professions alike are prone to be called story-tellers, at times imaginary untrue stories. This is due to the way of life and the fact that the others find their life interesting. But when the real stories end, one would start by telling other people's stories and consequently ending up to imaginations and fascinating or heroic tales.

Ashore this is partly fun and depending on the individual's character various and versatile. At sea when the family stories about the sudden deaths or affairs in absence or the sort come up, this can lead a vulnerably lonely and suspicious person to a lot of unwanted and obnoxious thoughts. We may say that this does not happen to me or consider ourselves stronger than that, but it is a fact that the grotesque dreams and thoughts can happen to nearly everyone.

The human mind has quite strange and unpredictable functions. For people in exile, the mind plays various tricks and you can see a perfectly sane person acting totally unbelievable and insane. There is a proverb in the east that says: "To know someone you should travel with him". That may be because the traveling in old times was so tiring and long that during a voyage you could see the person's different faces at different occasions and it was impossible to hide the gray or black side of the character. For seafarers this is very much true. At sea not only the good sides but also the dark sides are possible to see and at many occasions you may see the crazy parts of the character too!

Those acting strangely will not believe themselves when the crisis is over and the time or situation at which they behaved so, is passed.

There may be things possible to be done like trying to keep the staff in company of each other; do not let personnel to make fun of others or attack a weaker or different member. Organizing barbeques and eating festivities can help greatly. Listen to the crew, let them complain, at times they may tell you a lot of private stories. Try not to comment upon and avoid publicizing the matter. The case can create anger once the sort of trance in which the privacy is disclosed, is over.

Physical problems

Rough seas can give sleeplessness and fatigue, consequently this will make the personnel easily irritable and touchy. You can see fights coming up and ship having a heavy atmosphere. The amount of workload is also a factor. Although at times it helps for keeping people busy. But too much of it, especially under stressful conditions, can aggravate the mental condition. The physical/health status can play a role too. When someone is sick or has any type of illness, this can also give rise to unwanted mental burden. The sick crew should be attended with care and caution so that they will be given moral support as well; seemingly the stresses on the mind are the root cause and origin of many problems and if taken care of, can even eliminate the physical symptoms. The food intake, type, amount, spices used, frequency and categories can be a factor to cause the physical problems and subsequently effects on minds of seafarers.

Water memory: there is a strong belief amongst Homeotherapists that water has a memory which will be acquired through dilution and undergoing the numerous changes. If we consider the ship's potable water tanks and imagine the possibility that during the ship's lifetime, the chemical additions may have been present inside, despite many cleanings and even strict abiding by the health and hygiene regulations, the water might have got a barely noticeable toxic or rather chemical memory. This, of course, can be the case anywhere but it can be accountable as water can specifically attain this and is a vital consumable. The effects of the so called memory if at all existent are not really possible to detect but can be quoted as one of the factors (even minor and detailed) affecting the seafarers' physical and eventually mental condition.

Those who smoke or drink a lot are liable to depression and the series of mental troubles talked about in aforementioned paragraphs can be worsened by effects of excessive smoking, drinking and possible drug abuse.

Hence, having an appropriate food programme on board and healthy habits, abiding as much as possible with the hygiene standards may give the required vitamins thus helping to have the physical and chemical balance in the body, and reducing the influences caused on mental condition due to these sources.

Sexual problems

It is a fact that sex-life is an important factor affecting the mental condition of a person. If we go further in details, some psychologists consider wide range of effects and take it in a rather basic way as fundamental matter for many things. But if one takes it very justly as nearly all would agree, the mariners are surely sufferers of sex deprivation and consequently under a lot of stresses. If some spouses of officers are carried on board, it may ease the matter for them but for the rest it is very difficult to comment.

Human being naturally likes the contact with the opposite sex. This can be in many forms, depending on the cultural background, nationality etc. In some societies with lots of taboos, any contact may be construed as sexual but in others the attributions may vary drastically. For some people even a simple casual life where there are the opposite sexes present, is considered normal and within the tolerable limits. On board a ship, on majority of the situations the staff will be under tension due to this deprivation, although it may not be stated so clearly due to cultural barriers or things of like.

It is a fact that one would be very much relaxed and relieved of the tension after the desirable

contact with the opposite sex. But for mariners, this may not be possible due to nature of the profession and being most of life-time away from family or any ordinary society.

There is hardly any solution for this, some of the officers bringing family along may be helped so, but it can also create an atmosphere of discrimination and jealousy among other shipmates. Perhaps by shortening the service times or allowing more frequent short leaves of absence, the mentioned trouble can be lessened.

Working in shifts and sleeplessness

Watch-keepers on board are always susceptible to sleep disorders, which will be a contributing factor for mental pressure. Insomnia is one of the causes to awake the bugging memories and drive a person with some probable shadows in the past into unwanted dreams and series of distractions. That will further aggravate the sleeplessness and so forth leading to restlessness, lack of concentration, numerous errors at work and probable mental detriments.

The inability to properly eat and get the required nutrition in the watch-keepers due to the nature of their work, may also be mentioned as a source of general fatigue and effects as already mentioned.

The time in ports

With today's very fast port operations, there is really very little time in the ports. Some of the stresses and mental problems, which have been accumulated at sea, need some time of relaxation if at all possible for release. It is astonishing to see that how much of a difference it can make for a person who has spent weeks at sea, to step ashore and have few hours on stable non-rolling ground. This can first be attributed to the fact that human being is originally not a marine creature and has difficulties living at sea even on dry whereabouts. When the eyes see nothing but sea all around, this may seem relaxing at the first glance but will not look so if it is continued for a long time. The need of releasing the stresses and pressures in any possible way ashore is a vital requirement.

Although for some one going to sex market, this attitude is considered obscene and not morally approved of. But we should be more realistic and practical by understanding that not every human being has the same level of necessities and for many people, amongst them the seafarers, this need can be very important.

The purpose of this paper is not to justify some attitudes, but only to consider the facts existent. A person who has lived in some sort of captivity, needs to go into the society and walk amongst people, eat with them or maybe do nothing but just be there. During old times it used to be a practice to encourage shipmates for spending some time ashore as this was considered a vital part of maintaining the mental stamina. As an experiment it can be observed that those who go out very seldom are liable to earlier fatigue and very much prone to have mental and stressful disorders.

Having started to contact the port and its habitants with a potential of lacking human relations and needing adjacency or affection from other people, will make the mariners particularly vulnerable to excessive and unreasonable commotions. This can later be a ground for bothering

emotions. It may seem funny but falling abruptly in love can happen, spending a lot of money on cheap quality things can be another problem. Most mariners would get some type of these things. If you have some crew members with sentimental feelings or backgrounds of more frequent déjà vu experiences, they will feel more lost when departing from a port. This would happen if the stay is long but nearly everyone gets that sour feeling of goodbye, partly because of knowing that the period of being away from the civilization is about to begin again. The mariners are a category of people easily cheated; this happens often to them, so is the chance of bitter feelings associated with port stay. The seaman clubs may be able to help easing off the movement in the ports or dealing with the primeval needs and goods of the mariners but they may not be so effective at times. Nobody can deny the great help and role of the seaman clubs but at many occasions, the patronizing behaviour which is most probably not exerted intentionally might be felt due to the nature of their work, thus causing an irksome feeling. Many of the seaman may be very important persons at home with a lot of respectability but now being cared for in a way that the poor, the homeless and the orphans are. This surely is not so good. If you go deeper, you will feel even more deterring facts like they treat you the same as the mental cases with too much of fictitious likeability and forced smiles, which in no way can be taken seriously and is mainly part of their assigned duty! Anyway all seafarers approve of the seaman clubs run by the non-governmental organizations as merits in the industry and great help in the way of sea-life.

There is also an undeniable fact that at many ports the mariners would not be liked much. This may be because of some backgrounds of belief and culture, which have been made through centuries of contact with the seafarers and having had some bad experiences. As the mariners are the rolling stones and their stay is very short, making many friends may be difficult, then due to the deprivation of many rights or simple requirements, they are seemingly in urgent need of many things and cannot waste much of a time.

In a normal relationship, which has taken the appropriate time to build up, certain requests from an acquaintance are acceptable and easily welcome. But for a mariner when the time is so short, there should either be no relationship made or the pace has to be very fast. This behaviour will be taken wrongly and usually called an opportunist's way. No-one expects this to be accepted or admitted, then the whole thing will be construed as impolite and totally dislikeable.

You can imagine that when one sees that people are driven off as soon as they know you are a mariner, how annoying and awful this can be. Although some of the incidents may have true origins and causes, this difficult process is rarely understood or differentiated, therefore impossible to expect the shore people to perceive it.

In addition to all above, the recent requirements imposed by the security code (ISPS) have greatly impaired the movement of mariners in and out of ships, this has surely had detrimental impact on the seafarers' mental conditions but we can hardly do anything about it but complain!

There are the following major topics, which may be worth mentioning here:

Expendability

This may seem a bit pessimistic but it is a fact that every human being sooner or later will feel

being expendable. That is to grasp that he/she is no longer required. Every person has a status to fit in life. It may be amazing that how a person would act when in different situations or rather statuses. We can give an example: take a lady within the reasonable social limits. She can be a sweet friend, a nice wife, a careless mother, a shabby housekeeper, a neutral sister-in-law or even a bothering mother-in-law, all at the same time. There can be a thousand combinations with various values with regard to this, but what is very important is that, first of all a person should have a status and secondly the status should be likeable and wished for. For seafarers, after so many years at sea, the family or the remainders would somehow forget feeling his/her absence and learn to cope without. This at first may be desirable as they can survive without your existence, but later on when you are not counted and all the plans are drawn up without you, is a terrible feeling. The people living ashore also get this problem, as mentioned earlier, the position or bitterly said; the usage of a person may very often expire and perhaps one of the contributing factors in human troubles can be this. That may be why every one tries to change the status or somehow up-grade or at least make some move, partly in order to avoid the expiry.

For mariners this happens earlier and nearly always. After a few years, you change into a money making machine who, at times is there, who does his duty physically, but most of the time the pay-cheques do the job. This can cause burdens on the mind.

There is a saying, which nicely puts “absence makes the heart grow fonder”. It is there for some people but mostly “out of sight, is out of mind”.

A friend who is not there at parties, death memorials, marriages or most of other gatherings, will be forgotten and not called upon even when he/she is rarely present. This happens to mariners even in family on a different scale. The seafarers do remember the quest of the relatives that when they shall return to sea? This may not have a negative back-thought and may only be a simple question or in the fairer way to know how much more they can see you, but in result it surely has a bad effect on morals and a lot of disliking and ill feelings may hatch.

The mere non-existence at required times has an undeniably detrimental effect on mariners and if the person is a bit more unfortunate by being nagged at or forgotten, this can be really terrible and bothering. The fact of not being updated about the news and incidents, especially when a seafarer signs off a ship, makes the person particularly apt for seeking seclusion and not expressing ideas. Consequently the expendability will take over. This trouble may be helped by the family and friends to put the person in picture of recent events and count him/her too.

Adapting and associated side effects

The mariners due to the nature of their profession have to be adapting themselves to the prevailing circumstances. Although this may be an asset for them, it has long term side effects as well. The amount of energy required to adapt oneself to various atmospheric or work conditions will be so much that after years in service, the person’s tolerance levels come down and the procedure with which the adaptation would be taking place may be ineffective and more frequently forgotten.

You can see this by a simple comparison that those working on fixed jobs, very rarely change the place or the atmosphere of work. Inherently everyone rejects changes at the beginning but for

seafarers this happens once or twice a year. They have to try to find ways for coping with various equipment, personnel and a lot of other things while changing ships.

The making of a relationship with other people is not an easy task; we all make better friends when in childhood. Once a person knows the obligation of working with a group of say strangers, he/she should start to find common grounds for relations; this is a mind tiring matter and as done oftentimes, will have its problems. In cases that a real common ground is not found, the seafarer should somehow be satisfied with what is available and this happens in many occasions. For others not at sea, this is hardly noticed. Part of these may be helped by sending the staff on nearly the same type/route of ships or the same group of crew, but still the adaptability and energy wearing is there and will have to be burdened.

The stoppage at ranks can also be a reason for some people to feel less useful and after a few years, there will be some signs seen like laziness, lack of attention and taking the job easier. The root cause of many can be this stoppage as there is no change of status and the boring feeling will take over. There is not much that can be done here; moral support and creating new goals or attributing other activities on board, may be of some help.

Having mentioned some of the factors and areas of concern in way of analyzing the subject, it may now be the time to try to see how the seafarers' mind can become problematic, thus try to finalize the essay.

After a mariner joins a ship, he/she will under go a lot of stresses by new things encountered, the adapting obligation, the carried over troubles from home, the bombardment of information, and if the position is in management ranks, the expectations derived from. Then the sea-time (actually considered the smoothest period by most seafarers!) and feeling lonely, deprived, overworked, under-paid and forgotten. Amazingly the mind works in strange ways; a perfectly sensible person starts having woeful dreams; the fears of helplessness and even the darkness are experienced very often at sea; the long buried grievances come back; the food becomes miserable and the talks with shipmates finish up with the jokes and stories looking absurd. The memories of naggings by relatives and the missing of children poke onto nerves. The sea plays the rough ride. The managers give foolish instructions; the ship's atmosphere gets heavy.

Then you arrive to port, the pilot telling you how he misses the sea but he is happy as sleeping at home, the sturdy immigration officers, the stevedores trying to terminate the job in the peak of an abyssal dark night. An evening outside, a bag of edibles and snacks, an undisturbed call to the loved ones at home, a sigh in the candle-fume-smelling seaman's club. Back to ship, the night sailing, the new instructions, the narrow canal and the sea. Sailing to the next port and the loop again.

The nightmares, deprivations and attacks of rejected thoughts plus the normal prevailing circumstances as the nature of work contains. Not to forget, this may have happened to you many times before, so the mind forefaces the nostalgia, the bitter feelings and the irksome thoughts. The human mind and functions can at times be compared to equipment and the instability in inevitable mishaps.

It is said that in a married life, some of the abrasions cannot be avoided as if they are some way/somehow bound to happen. This can be attributed to unpredictability in human behaviour patterns; that at times to try to rectify a misunderstanding, may worsen the situation and further trial will deepen the valley into such an extent that a break and collapse is unavoidable.

The seafarer's mind due to all said a priori can be driven into such corners, or least be affected partly by the consequences.

Apart from the few remedies mentioned in parts of this essay, the following points can also be amongst those reiterated:

- Try to have shorter sea-periods as the time passes and you become an all time seafarer.
- The treatment on board should be based on discipline, courtesy and fairness.
- The personnel should be kept in each other's company, only eating in saloons; crawling to the cabins must be discouraged.
- Use of good television antenna and news reception facilities will help the staff to come out of solitude and feel alive being in the picture and the trend of recent happenings.
- Encourage contact with family and loved ones; hearing their voice works miraculously.
- During rough sea periods, overworked days and for those successively on watchkeeping patterns, ease off a bit at times so the tension slackens off.
- As a senior officer, especially master, let the crew talk to you; it may not be so nice to know other peoples' secrets but it helps the human being to confide in others.
- Although you as master are also human and all above can and surely will affect you too, the staff should not see you feared or loose-hearted as it damages their moral as well. This is more true in rough times.
- The background of the seafarers may be a vital part, but as the operator of ships you have not much of a choice in their selection and only can remind the managers about the fact.
- Observe your staff as much as possible, the signs of mental troubles are not always easy to detect but when in doubt, a further care and perhaps professional help may be required to avoid catastrophic results.

Whatever you do, some of the mental burden will be there. By having even a limited understanding of their causes, you may be able to run the ship and work on board in a smoother way. Perhaps by taking into consideration some of the above remarks, to uplift the levels and thresholds of sentimentality and vulnerability of the mariners working within the metallic entrapment, called "ship". One may not forget that the sea-carrier is one of the few types of living in which you welcome passage of time and will be happy that days are crossed and your lifetime being spent.

Also the seafarers are thirsty for kindness so administering some, can be fantastically helpful.

Receiving People on Board

Summary

There are various people who come on board a ship for many reasons. In order to be able to

deal with them in an appropriate and smooth manner, we may use a few guidelines. The following essay tries to categorize the visitors and give simple patterns to receive and treat them on board a ship.

There are mainly two categories of people who come on board in a port:

A). Those with no or little knowledge about a ship and they may only be mere visitors out of curiosity.

When there are some people who want to come on board to see the ship or use the whereabouts like an expedition, the most important point to consider, is their safety, especially if they are school children or some elderly who may have difficulty for accessing the vessel. The general pattern can be a courteous and welcoming reception, probably sending one of the officers to accompany and show them around. They should not be allowed to enter the restricted areas or touch the equipment. If they are too many, grouping them is a safe and helpful way. The mariners, due to their life in absence of a family or society, usually welcome the guests especially the children, seemingly to try seeing their own in the images and somehow soothe their missing hearts. The same may be applicable for other ordinary visitors if all the port regulations, security etc allow it. Existence of ISPS code and its implications have greatly restricted this type of movement but they may still exist and precautionary measures with respect to the security of the vessel should also be observed.

The visiting can at times be a little irritating with some shore guys, worst of all, when some managerial ranks who would use the ship as a show case and the seafarers will be treated like species floating in a tour de aquaria, but not much can be done about it. It may be a good remark to state that the ship is the working and living place of the seafarers, so the least disturbance should be imposed on them. It is unfortunate to see that the visitors usually forget about this simple fact. The said trouble is mostly felt with the officials who board the ship specifically from the company. They intentionally forget that you also need privacy and there are limits of entering each and every place.

Imagine if the seafarers go to the offices or work places of these visitors; do they take you to their home or even such thing, would at all seem possibly thinkable? The answer is definitely not. So we may tolerate some landlubbers for a few hours even crossing the limits, but we also reasonably expect the visiting people to understand that we *work and live* on board. And any possible means should be used to express this and somehow to make considerations for.

B). The majority of the visiting people are those who have an official business to conduct. This category can be subdivided and discussed in the following way:

The pilots:

As these people with a few exceptions, are ex-mariners, they already very well know the system on board and their primary aim is to help conning the vessel in and out of ports. The reception of pilots in the way as required internationally is an obligation and if we try more intimate ways, the results will surely be more favourable.

Although in some ports and with a few nationalities there are bitter presumptions felt as being

exercised by pilots and some of the information may be used against the vessel, but a very humane reception plus supplying the data needed by the pilot should always be the procedure followed. The ship-handling as involving the safety of the personnel and the ship, is a very important operation and while doing it in the restricted waters where a pilot is involved, will be more difficult and has to be dealt with a lot of caution. A good information exchange and reception in hospitable manner should hence be accomplished. Allocation of a clean and comfortable cabin plus preparation of an appropriate food, if the ship's menu might not be liked by the pilot, are quite important points.

There are efforts by some of the maritime nations as it may even be already existent in other places of the world to include compulsory reports by the pilots. If such things are mandatory in the ports with strangely behaved pilots, the consequences of possible baseless reports should be thought of while dealing with the pilots and extreme care and caution will have to be observed. It is needless to describe the troubles which might have to be encountered in an effort to prove a matter already falsely stated or instigated by a member of the port to the same port authority! Some of which might have only been originated or magnified due to inadequate or less desirable reception by the ship staff.

Owner's protecting agents:

First of all we should know that what is implied by their name is not always so, considering the area that the port is situated in and the prevailing culture, nationality etc. There are certain defined duties for those and depending upon the company's contractual dealings, the reactions and construing can vary drastically. What can be taken as a general guideline is that only the necessary information should be transferred with a usual cordiality. At the occasions that some local workshops or repairs and deficiencies are involved, the disseminated information can leak to a lot of unwanted areas. A good approach would be acquired by knowing at least the major parts of their duty and the assigned responsibilities. At times that a joint agency is appointed by more than one party, the situation of the vessel with respect to the lines and limits of beneficiary parties will actually decide the trend.

•What has to be said here is the fact that with most of the people who come on board for a business purpose, they should be kept within their limits and any leniency in the areas they like to have freedom, may lead to commercial damages.

One should always remember that those who deal with a lot of different ships and various nationalities have already acquired some ability in treatment and mentality analysis that at times can be used to make a sort of acquaintance with the ship staff. This is not always really bad, but usually it is not intended to help a seafarer and only to get a good result from the ship and then promulgate the same under the good name of the representatives!

Although the mariners have a good experience of dealing with people especially as a master, the chances of being misused/exploited are also very high.

The best advice may be not to get sentimental and deal with these types of officials in a robotic, straightforward and only business way, then you will not be hurt when you see your kindness is being wasted into impenetrable grounds.

Surveyors, auditors and inspectors

As a primeval element of human relations, courtesy plays an important role. Everyone coming on board should receive due courtesy which can be made as a base to pass the process smoothly. It is often said that “Honesty is the best policy”. This at times may give rise to problems but it is advisable not to ever try deceiving the surveyors, auditors and inspectors. They are mostly expert people and the damages which may have to be encountered are grave if the facts are revealed. On the other hand if the necessary queries are responded with the sufficient and reasonable replies, a favourable result can usually be achieved. Most of this category of people are ex-mariners and very well understand the limitations on board; they also have a certain amount of leniency towards those who know the problems, admit faults and also try to do something about.

These types of visitors on board should be accompanied by responsible staff, with sufficient knowledge about the area concerned, with all keys to accesses at disposal and if needed some help along in order to do things that might require extra hand. If possible offering them some sort of refreshment or even food can help the things go easier. Most people like to try new types of food or beverage and this enhances the human relations a great deal.

If we try to consider the surveyors and likewise as professional help and reminders of many things which may have skipped our minds, then receiving them will also be at a likeable level as originally felt supportive and somehow on our side.

The harbor officials, customs and immigration

These may be one of the most sensitive categories of people coming on board. Amongst other factors, the port area and the country in which the port is situated are quite decisive. Nearly all port officials deal with the vessels in an authoritative manner and by the fact that they do have the power, their requirements should be satisfied as far as possible. Hence in this line, a reasonable amount of hospitality and good reception should be exercised. It has been observed that if these people are well treated, a lot of operations will take effect quickly and favorably, so is the opposite way.

The influencing factors like the implementation of the ISPS code and the general atmosphere predominant amongst the officials which can be under a lot of outside impressions and implications, can change the whole thing. In line of trying to make a positive relationship, one must not forget the right to ask for some references to regulations or interpretations. If for instance an unfair imposition is being put on the vessel, it can be queried that under what circumstances or grounds, that is being done. What is important is that, to enquire with politeness and in words that no offence shall be taken. The language barriers and misunderstandings have to be cautiously borne in mind.

As a general point, it may be worth to ponder that human relations is a vital element in running a system so be it for a ship. If at times we put ourselves in other people’s shoes, we may have a different understanding and construing of the matter. Imagine a person who steps up on board, the steep gangway, the strange or at times rusty look of the vessel, the peculiar odor of the ambient air, the vaporized oil and associated cooking smells, then so many stairs up to the masters office with blushed face and short heavy breaths. This as whole may make a person so

irritated.

If he or she is unfamiliar with the ship or mariners' lifestyle, the situation is more difficult; there may be a lot of pre-conceptions and imaginations already floating in his or her mind. For women it is even worse; some may consider the ship as an amalgamation of sex-maniacs, especially if from the less-liked parts of the world. They would take any kindness as suggestive and consequently provoked.

For the people who are the regular visitors of the ships, some of the above points may still exist but at a lesser degree.

The first thing to accomplish is to try to somehow soften that primary rigidity and to let the visitor come out of bewilderment or at least not to aggravate it. Then try to tolerate the order-like, bitter and discriminative manners as much as possible. It is very important that the visitors either do not know or do not care about your problems, how much of sleep you have had during the last few days, if it is the eating time or not and many other things which are on your mind. So do not expect a consideration because most probably you will be disappointed. Once the primary moments of alien morals are over, the things will hopefully get smoother. Most officials think that their business is the only important one and strangely enough they do believe so in each other's presence, hence insist on doing it first! This at times becomes so annoying but as you cannot do much about and any objection or explanation will make things even worse, it is better to only tolerate the situation again.

We should also bear in mind that in the business of maritime world, like many other areas, the human element and restrictions as well as fair treatment although very much talked about, but hardly are considered, so the general trend is to do the job and run away from the scene as soon as possible having gained what the aim was for.

This is surely the case with most visitors on board.