

Mentoring at Sea The 10 Minute Challenge

Introducing The Nautical Institute's most recent publication, André explains why mentoring is so vital - and why it is a role that everyone should be ready to take on



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I have, for a number of years, been concerned that experiential knowledge (knowledge gained from experience and reflected upon) is not being transferred between seafarers onboard today's modern merchant ships as it used to be, by mentoring.

In 2006 I began to research this in partnership with The Nautical Institute and Middlesex University in London for a Master of Arts degree, which I gained in 2009. The purpose of my research was to show that if experiential knowledge was not transferred from senior to junior officers on board modern merchant navy vessels by mentoring, this could be a contributory factor in marine accidents. I also wanted to identify the barriers that were preventing this transfer of knowledge and to provide practical suggestions to help re-establish the flow of knowledge. My book on mentoring began life based on the findings of that research.

In addition, it was (and still is) my aim to engage the maritime community in conversations about mentoring and the transfer of experiential knowledge. For, although you may not agree with what I say, the very act of disagreeing is engaging and helps to raise the profile of the mentoring debate.

Through this research I was able to more clearly:

- Understand where the gaps in knowledge at sea are;
- Identify the causes of these knowledge gaps;
- Develop some practical measures to help re-establish the knowledge flow.

Since finishing my degree in 2009, I have developed this research and have investigated the many ways that companies, institutions and individuals transfer their experience to others. I am now in a position to pass my findings on.

Onboard mentoring

I am not a professional writer and this, most definitely, is not a text book. I am an ordinary mariner who is very concerned about mentoring and who would like to have a conversation with you about it. As you read this book, I would like you to imagine that I have come on board your ship or to your place of work. I am with you on the bridge, in the machinery control room or in your office, having a discussion on how, between us, we can improve life at sea for today's



seafarers, by sharing experiential knowledge for the benefit of ourselves and those who will come after us.

We have started chatting about mentoring, as often happens to me. You will have your views and I have mine – I respect that. In this book you will find as many questions as there are answers, but that is no different from any conversation that takes place. All I hope is that you will read my book and, although you will probably not agree with all of its contents, you will find some of it thought-provoking and be challenged to pass on some of the knowledge you have gained to someone else. For that is what it is all about. If that happens, then I will have achieved my objective.

Why do we need to do this? In the 1980s, when I was sailing deep sea, knowledge transfer between ranks took place as a matter of routine. Most officers were happy to train their potential successors and conversely, most officers understudied their immediate superior in preparation for moving up through the ranks. Much has changed

within our merchant fleets since those days and, I believe many of those changes are presenting barriers which are preventing this traditional flow of experiential knowledge. In the book I look closely at what I consider to be the main barriers and then offer you some solutions on how to overcome them in today's modern Merchant Navy.

The time issue

I can imagine many of you are now wondering where the time is going to come from to undertake this knowledge transfer. Perhaps you are thinking you are so busy you just don't have time to teach others what you believe they should already know. I am not suggesting you take the place of a college lecturer, remember that it is experiential knowledge I am asking you to share. The title of my book, is in two parts, Mentoring at Sea - The Ten Minute Challenge. That is all it takes - just 10 minutes of your time, the time it takes to drink a cup of coffee or smoke a cigarette. I do not accept that you cannot give up that amount of time each day.

Consider for a moment the operation of a vessel as a whole and how much we have to learn to become successful operators of that vessel. The normal programme for cadets around the world these days comprises 3 or 4 years at university, followed by 12 months sea time. Can we learn enough in a classroom? I don't think so, even with the highly sophisticated simulators available in today's educational establishments. Much has still to be taught (or experienced) on board to supplement the foundation of knowledge obtained ashore. And it is not just cadets I am concerned about, it is every seafarer moving between the ranks right up to Master or Chief Engineer. Indeed, it may actually be the Master or Chief Engineer that is in need of the experiential knowledge.

Who should be teaching?

But who is going to do this teaching, how and when? This is where we need onboard mentors operating in an informal system of experiential knowledge transfer, to allow candidates to experience operating a vessel under the close supervision of an experienced person. This is where I am asking for your help, just 10 minutes at a time.

Imagine the difference it would make if every seafarer took just 10 minutes out of their busy schedule each day to pass on a piece of their knowledge to another seafarer. The volume of knowledge transferred would be huge and, in my opinion, would make an immediate and significant difference within our maritime community.

For me, learning is a lifelong occupation and, as masters of our trade, I believe we have a duty to pass this learning on. I also believe that the young seafarers following on after us have a right to our knowledge. There is a limit to what can be taught at any maritime establishment and it is we who must fill in the gaps for them.

Perhaps you are working ashore and reading this? I am conscious that you may want to make a difference and help with mentoring onboard. This book is not just for those at sea, it is for every member of the maritime community. I believe we can all make a difference, no matter what your position within the community.

I hope that you enjoy the book, are challenged by it and that you will engage in the conversation on mentoring. More, I hope that you will just take 10 minutes out of your busy schedules to pass a piece of your knowledge on. By doing so, you will be continuing a process that is as old as seafaring itself. 🌐

Marine Engineering Consultant Required

We require an experienced Marine Engineer to join our team of marine / drilling experts. Knowledge of, and experience in, the marine aspects of the offshore drilling industry is essential, and the successful applicant is likely to have spent a minimum of five years in conducting marine surveys in this environment.

Familiarity with FMEA documentation, dynamic positioning systems, risk/safety assessments, current regulatory marine legislation, compliance, standards and systems is required. Applicants must have the ability to lead where necessary, have excellent communication skills and to be able to document, administer and produce accurate reports for presentation to clients. Experience in the commissioning of MODU's would be an advantage.

Applicants will be required to undertake a wide range of marine assessments and documentation processes and must have either a sound technical knowledge or ability for system investigation and drafting of system descriptions.

The successful candidate will be willing to travel extensively to attend our global client base, and to be able to work independently from home when required.

A generous financial package will be provided, commensurate with the skills and experience being offered by the applicant. For more details of this position, please contact will.ruffman@bladeoffshore.com



Fully Accredited OVID Inspector Required

We require a fully qualified, currently accredited OVID Inspector to lead and oversee a small inspection team, tasked with conducting a substantial number of MODU inspections throughout 2013 and 2014. In accordance with OCIMF's inspection protocol, the applicant will have conducted the required number of Inspections within the last twelve months to maintain his/her accreditation.

The successful candidate must be willing to travel extensively, to attend the vessels requiring inspection.

A generous financial package will be provided, commensurate with the skills and experience being offered by the applicant. For more details of this position, please contact will.ruffman@bladeoffshore.com

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