SEAHEALTH

THE 8 SAFETY LINKS

– tools to boost the company's safety culture

SAFETY CULTURE - WHY?

There are many good reasons for shipowners to focus on the safety culture. Apart from groundings and shipwrecks, there is probably nothing that upsets operations more than industrial accidents. There are many after-effects. An accident may have immense consequences for the person concerned but quite apart from purely personal loss, there are also losses for the company. Such as the loss of absence or good seamen, the costs of recruitment and training, having less experienced crew for a while, delays to the voyage schedule and subsequent repairs. And it can affect the company's reputation for reliability.

Customers are increasingly assessing companies on the basis of their safety. Safety has become a parameter on an equal footing with finance and has become a way on which businesses are operated. If safety is not in order, it can affect competitiveness. This is why there is increasing focus on the safety culture and the safety of seamen in the sector.

Building up or improving the safety culture always means shared responsibilities. Right from the company down to the individual seaman. Everyone in the company needs to be convinced that the entire organisation puts safety first. It all ceases to have any meaning if compromises are made to safety in busy periods or if safety gets too expensive or inconvenient. In creating the framework and opportunities for a safe working environment, the company plays a core role in implementing initiatives to ensure that its systems support the desired approach.

This pamphlet presents the model "The 8 Safety Links". This is Seahealth's offering of a whole range of tools for developing and strengthening shipowners' safety culture so that in time, safety is appreciated and practiced by everyone.

IT IS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

Safety culture is about people. How do the crew behave and what behaviour does the company expect and reward? For example, is it normal to do something about the risks associated with a job and to take the time to take risks into account? Do people intervene if they see someone else doing something risky?

In companies with a high safety culture, safety has become integral to the way people think and work. Individuals see themselves, their workmates and the company as part of an organisation in which safety forms an integral part of the way the ship is operated. Everyone feels responsible for safety and endeavours to put it first in their day-to-day routines.

Seamen on a vessel with a good safety culture do more than they are required to do. They identify unsafe situations and conduct and they intervene to rectify unsafe situations. Workmates look after each other and make each other aware of unsafe conduct.

Research shows that developing a strong safety culture has the greatest impact on cutting the number of accidents.

What is a safety culture?
When talking about safety and work, there are many different standards, assumptions, values, attitudes, myths and stories that affect the way daily work is actually done. This applies to the company and crew, managers and employees.

Nowadays, most companies have technical solutions and systems in place. They have drawn up policies and procedures to raise the level of safety aboard. Even so, some companies have unfortunately found out that it is not easy to get employees to act as safely as the company would wish. None of us wants to be injured so why don't we do what we have been told? In reality, the answer is perfectly simple: "Because we are humans ….."

What may seem perfectly sensible in systems and rules may perhaps mean less to the people who have to comply with them in practice. There may be various other things that appear more pressing than safety. What is it in a specific situation that individuals feel is important? That is what controls the way we act, think and our attitudes.

When a seaman goes up the gangway to join a ship, he becomes part of its safety culture. In the majority of cases, he can see and sense immediately whether safety is taken seriously or not. The way people talk about safety tells him how he needs to act and work. If there are clear rules about safety and it is possible and 'right' in the shipboard culture to comply with them, there is a greater probability that new crew will do so also.

As humans, we adapt to social systems and relationships and this affects the way we act. If we wish to affect how the crew behave, we need to take a holistic approach to the crew's situation and provide support and backup all the way round.

How can the safety culture be strengthened?
Making a stronger safety culture requires action to be taken in many areas. The 8 Safety Links (page 6-7) reflect the most important links in establishing a good safety culture. The point is that we need to work with all the links to ensure that the project is successful and that the chain does not 'jump off'.

Even though Safety Management System and risk assessment documents have been drawn up and are in order, safety awareness and hence the way individuals act may not be present and if an accident does unfortunately happen, it will reflect how strong the safety culture is.

What is interesting is why things that are written down have not been observed or complied with. The reasons may be a lack of employee acceptance and involvement, the fact that what has been written down does not actually fit with the way the job is done, that the manager was not a good role model or a lack of consistency in dealing with non-compliance with safety procedures.

The old saying is that no chain is stronger than its weakest link. The 8 Safety Links symbolise that the safety culture is no stronger than the weakest link. Each of the 8 Safety Links is associated with tools. The tools support and build up good safety behaviour. The more safety links the company maintains, the stronger the whole chain. The fewer safety links the company has in place, the weaker the chain.

There is a brief review on the following pages of The 8 Safety Links. There are specific tools for each link to show how you can get going.

We hope you find it interesting and enjoyable.

THE 8 SAFETY LINKS

Necessary and meaningful
Explain why the company is making an effort and explain targets and visions.

Spreading the word
Ensure that your safety activities always have a high profile and always draw attention to good results.

Resources and competencies
Make the resources required for activities available.

Key personnel
Select and support enthusiasts and opinion formers aboard.

Culture - providing support
Boost the shipboard culture for example by way of team building courses and introduction programmes.

Involvement and ownership
Involve those concerned.

Feedback and assessment
Provide regular feedback and attention by way of assessments and audits. It shows that the company is serious about safety.

Manager as a role model
Train management and other role models properly and make them aware of the major part they play for the corporate safety culture.

Draw up a strategy
Accident statistics
Inform about objectives and wishes

NECESSARY AND MEANINGFUL

For us humans to be motivated to change our behaviour, we need to understand the necessity for the change required. When things do not make sense, they are seldom or only reluctantly attended to.

- Draw up a corporate strategy with vision, justification and objectives.
- Draw up reports on accidents and descriptions of the human and financial consequences as part of the explanation of why it is necessary to do things differently.
- Consider and tell employees about the company's objectives and wishes – and about why it is important for the crew to take safety seriously.

"We routinely look at the accident statistics and calculations showing the human consequences – it seriously boosts motivation."

Learning
Training
Exchanging experiences
Knowledge sharing

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES

If we are to change our behaviour, we must have the preconditions for doing so, such as sufficient knowledge, time and skills.

- Train managers so they are able to handle safety management and general management duties.
- Train employees in safety in general – including the correct use of equipment. Training can be done aboard, on courses, etc.
- Organise work and deadlines to make sure that work is done in line with standard safety procedures.
- Involve users in drawing up safety actions and procedures to ensure that the resources required are available and that they fit in with the practicalities of day-to-day routines.

"We help draw up safety actions and procedures. This ensures that the practicalities are in line with what the written word says."

“Team-building”
Employee appraisals
Permanent work teams
Stress management

CULTURE - PROVIDING SUPPORT

If we show consideration for each other, we are much more likely to ensure that everyone in the team acts appropriately. And acts so as to ensure that nothing happens to themselves or equipment. Creating the best pre-conditions for support and back-up means that well-being must be in order.

- Run Team-building courses for work groups and crews. This boosts consideration so that people support and back each other up in acting safely.
- Run Stress Management courses for management and work groups.
- Offer courses in holding employee appraisals. This can also help increase the level of consideration employees show for each other.
- Consider establishing permanent work teams as part of an organisational solution to support building up a good corporate safety culture.
- Establish introduction and mentoring programmes.

”We are considerate and watch out for each other. We are all aware of getting the best out of a tour. We are all sailing the same way.”

Assessing managers and employees
Statistics
Learning of nearmiss
Praise and criticism

FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT

Human conduct is very much affected by the way we are assessed and the feedback we receive.

- Consider safety when assessing managers and employees.
- Use safety as a parameter for promotion.
- Analyse accident statistics and the safety culture to identify any positive or negative trends in safety activities.
- Analyse and learn from near-misses.
- Always give praise - and criticism - to support safe operations.

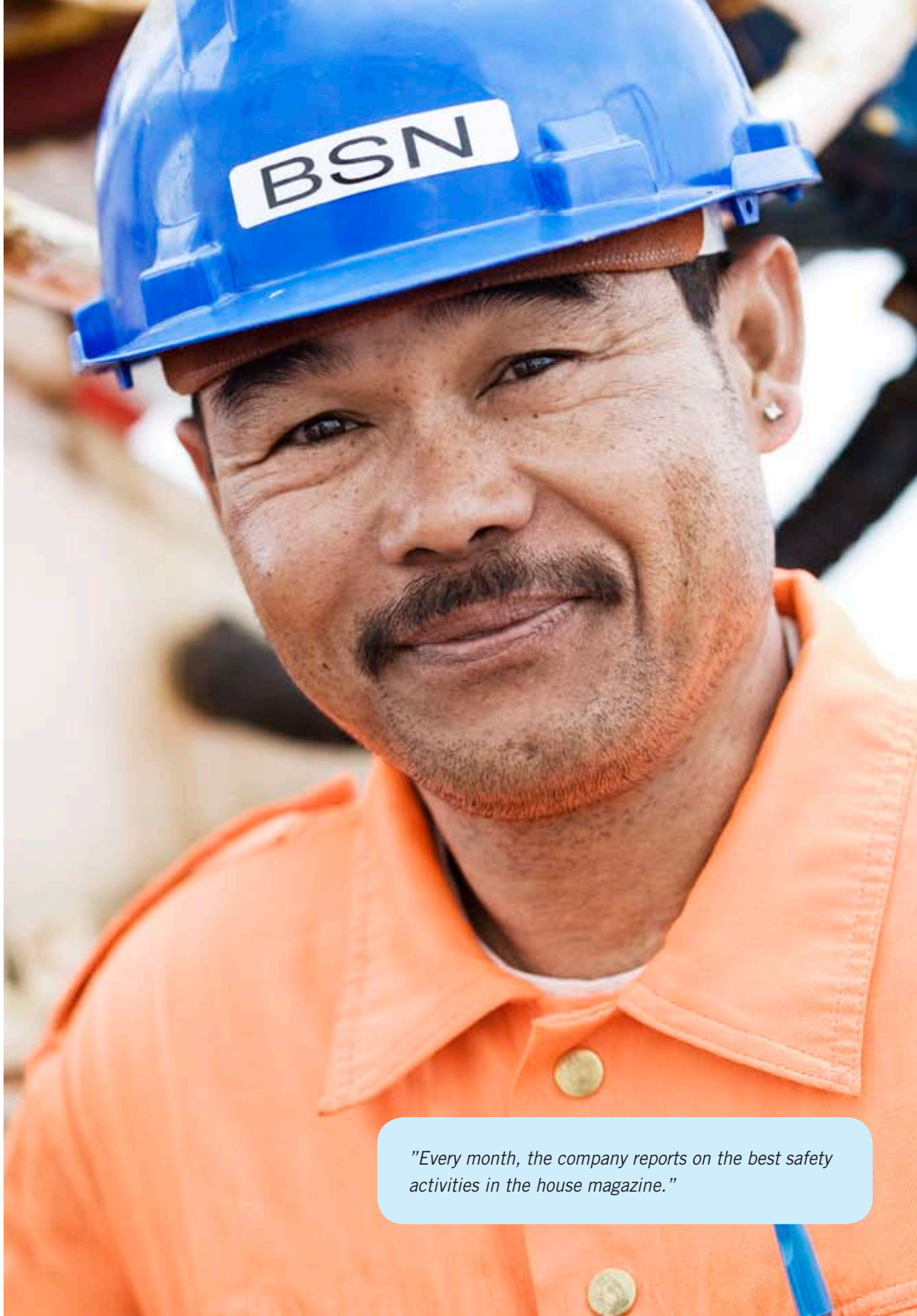
"We always keep each other updated on the near-misses we see and experience. Otherwise something will go wrong one day."

Celebrating successes
Social events and happenings
Newsletters

SPREADING THE WORD

External awareness and recognition help maintain people's focus on the conduct required, and in this way can help promote it.

- Acknowledge good safety conduct by raising its visibility and celebrating successes.
- Award gifts and organise social events.
- Make campaigns, notice boards, happenings.
- Make use of magazines, newsletters and company forums.



"Every month, the company reports on the best safety activities in the house magazine."

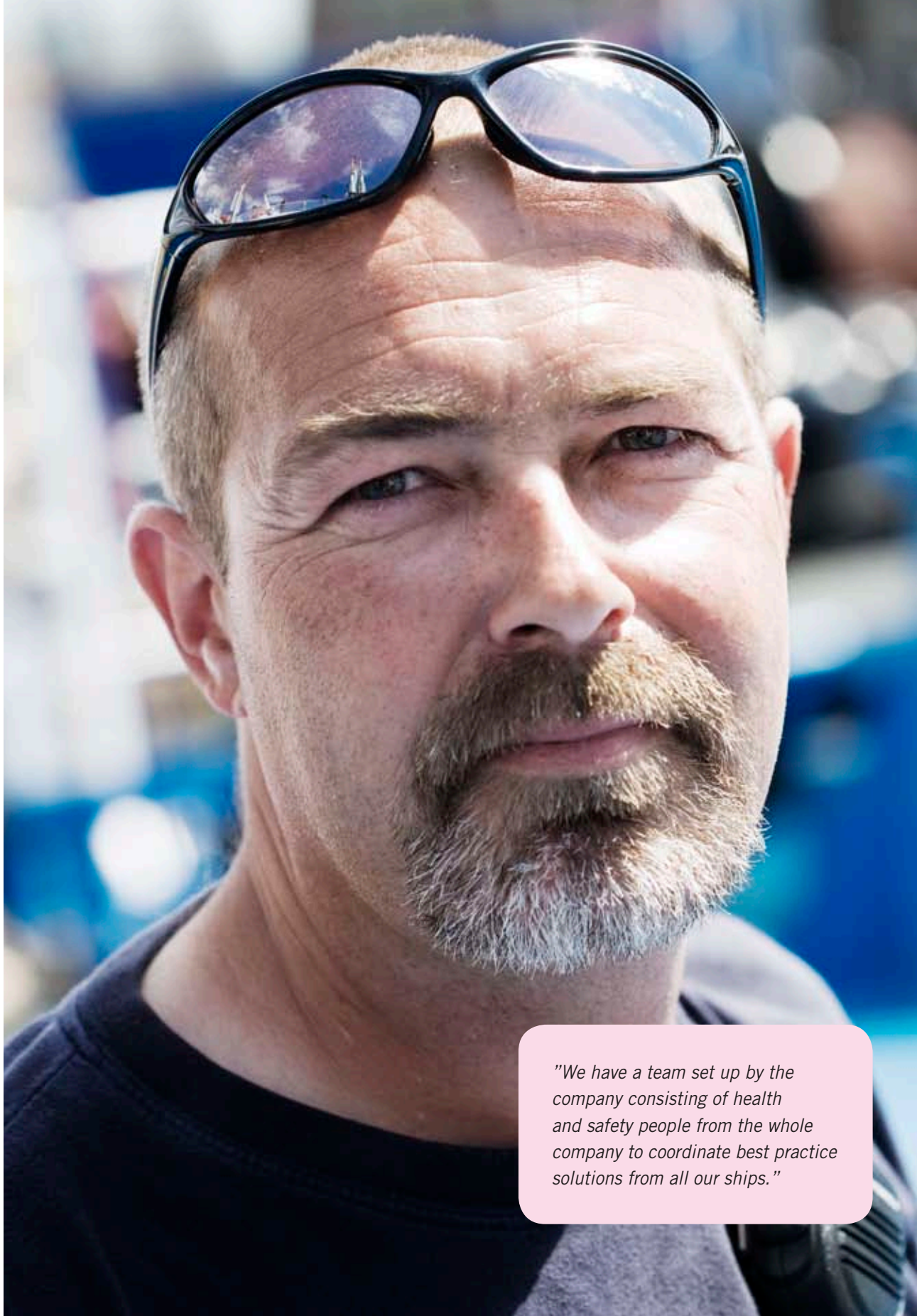
Ambassador teams
Status for safety teams
Set up steering groups

KEY PERSONNEL

In a shipping company and on board, there are always various key personnel who are well known and who set the scene. They can be people who will have a "little more to say" in the workplace. Personality, experience, reputation and power structure all play their part.

It is important for these people to support the safety culture in what they say and do. So they need to be involved and to play a part in the safety contribution.

- Set up a safety ambassador group with people who have the status, the right values and approach. They help keep the process going.
- Give safety groups the status to make them function and enjoy the necessary respect both upwards and downwards in the organization.
- Set up a steering group with management and union representatives, safety representatives and employees.



"We have a team set up by the company consisting of health and safety people from the whole company to coordinate best practice solutions from all our ships."

INVOLVEMENT AND OWNERSHIP

As humans, we are much more motivated to implement decisions in which we have had some input. There is also more certainty of decisions being implemented in practice if the people who actually have to do so have been involved in the decision-making process.

- Involve those who are affected when policies, procedures and instructions are to be drawn up.
- Involve employees in reviewing safety and inspections and risk assessments.

"We are all responsible for safety inspections and risk assessments and they are our own tool for preventing accidents. We have all been involved right from the start and we have ownership of the process."

Courses and coaching
Managers focused on occupational health and safety
"Walk-the-talk"

MANAGER AS A ROLE MODEL

We learn by observing and copying the conduct of other important people. Managers are and will always be some of the most important people in the workplace and so it is essential for them to know about their job, position and their value as role models for safety. If a manager does not take the working environment seriously, he or she sends out signals to the rest of the crew that occupational health and safety is not that important regardless of whatever the policies, guidelines, systems, etc., may say. Actions speak much louder than words on paper.

- Use courses, officer meetings or coaching to help put the focus on the manager's role and responsibilities in a safety culture.
- Recruit managers who are very aware of the importance of health and safety.
- The company and ship's management need to show in the way they act and communicate that occupational health and safety is taken seriously.

"As officers, we are all highly conscious about demonstrating the safest way to act when moving around the ship."

Our thanks go to the crews of HH Ferries and M/T Great Swan, Uni-Tankers for appearing in the photos, all of which were taken at work. The quotes in the picture captions are not from the seamen shown and so do not necessarily reflect their own views. The quotes are intended to illustrate that the process is all about people and what is required for them to change their attitudes.

If you would like to know more about The 8 Safety Links and how your company could strengthen its safety culture, please feel free to contact Seahealth for a meeting. Or if you visit our website at www.seahealth.dk you can read more.

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