



Pacific Basin

Nobody is perfect, but a Team can be

The Team - Pacific Basin Shipping Limited, Hong Kong

Teamwork or Ship - Shore Partnership

There is an old Chinese saying “*Nobody is perfect, but a Team can be*”. The essential part of a successful and safe operation is to ensure perfect synergy between shore based management and the shipboard management by making every employee ashore and afloat to take ownership of the success of the Company. Shipping is a people business and the importance of good seafarers who are recognized by the Company for its success are integral to the safe ship operation and the business results. We at Pacific Basin believe that this can be achieved in a number of ways in the context of seafarers.

Crew Empowerment

Shorebased team must provide “the best shorebased support and guidance for doing the task on board most efficiently”, rather than making daily decisions for the seafarers for daily operation of the vessel. Masters and Chief Engineers, as the Senior Managers onboard must be empowered to make decisions and manage the vessel without requiring approval from shore based team and without needing to comply with a complicated communication protocol and paperwork.

With the advent of e-mail communications, it is easy for seafarers to simply inform the Company and await advice and instructions and for the Manager to seek information on every little aspect prior action on board which distracts the decision making and management on board and counter productive to emergency preparedness, professionalism and self respect. If we trust the seafarers with a multi-million dollar investment and its cargo to make the voyage on high seas, we must trust in their competence and ability to manage it effectively from the ship. Shorebased team should take a supporting role while the shipboard team takes the lead role on board in management of the ship.

Selection, Recruitment and Retention with Career Path from Seafarer (Shipboard Manager) to Shorebased Manager

Of course, this requires very strict selection criteria when hiring senior officers, which precludes all but the best candidates. Once selected, they are to be integrated into the Company carefully with as much interaction with the shorebased team and an environment to interact freely without any power distance. Normally, the best candidates are those officers who have served in the Company as Junior Officers and are well versed with the Company policies and culture.

Therefore a good retention and a healthy progression upwards through the ranks within the Company is crucial. This is achieved by recognition of the contribution made by our seafarers, an expanding and long-term Cadetship program even in times of recession, a wage structure which rewards longevity, structured training and promotion and long service achievement awards. What else is better to promote this system and to develop a career path than to promote a Seafarer to Shorebased Manager (Bridge/Engine Room to Board Room), something to be seen as attainable by all, and something that is done regularly within Pacific Basin, where many of the key positions in Technical, Crewing and Commercial Operations are held by ex Pacific Basin seafarers.

No Blame Culture, 22 Crew are 22 Owners, Self Check by all 22 Crew to find and fix issues rather than waiting for External Check.

Of course, a ship, like every other piece of machinery, may develop defects. Wear and tear in these days of 24 hour cargo operations and rapid port rotations takes its toll. Things go wrong, near misses or accidents happen. There will always be a small percentage of seafarers who may be complacent with experience or ignorant with lack of experience, both of which are human and could result in hazardous situations and undesirable events.

In these days of imbalance between the supply and demand of seafarers, some percentage of seafarers may not also have the right attitude, willingness to change and receive feedback for continual improvement and career development. While every near miss, defects and accidents must be investigated, it has to be done without individual blame and a “*No Blame Culture*” is fundamental to successful ship operations and for encouraging near miss and defect reporting which is integral for the success of the business.

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Pacific Basin promotes the “22 Crew 22 Owners” principle onboard every ship. This takes the mandatory reporting of accidents and incidents under the ISM Code to a much higher level, and gives each seafarer the ownership and belonging to the Company and the comfort that he is part of the Company. Ultimately, the reluctance and apprehension to report and communicate issues on board to shorebased team are eliminated. We encourage Zero Defect in External Check by good Self Check on board by 22 Crew (22 Owners) to find, fix and report issues rather than waiting for External parties to point out the issues. Good external check results can be very motivating to the seafarers on board to get job satisfaction.

Look after your seafarers and they will look after your Ship

Lamentably, with the system of government controlled manning agencies supplying seafarers in some countries, the option of directly hiring seafarers as permanent employees of the Company in all the crew resource pools is not possible. However the sense of belonging to the Company can be nurtured by:

- family welfare; holding frequent shore based training seminars to which families are invited, family medical schemes and strong support for the seafarer’s family when a seafarer is away at sea.
- good food, hygiene and fair living conditions on board monitored closely by the owner, well designed living quarters and policies on fatigue management prompt payment of wages and social benefits, respect and fair treatment of seafarers,
- continuous career development & training; Company newsletter; communication facilities for phone call and email facility; regional language news bulletins by e mail; crew entertainment facilities on board and adequate funds to buy music, movies, gymnasium equipments etc.
- *Safe crew run safe ships*, another slogan used regularly in the industry. We can, and we do, train our seafarers to the highest standards, far above those required by STCW. MRM, BRM/ERM, simulator and computer based training, enhanced pre-joining briefings for all staff, Fleet Training Superintendents sailing on vessels, and more is now, we at PB would hope, an industry norm.
- Rather than burdening the busy seafarer with information overload, we compile relevant information for the ship type and trade and summarise key information for our seafarers to assist them in efficient management on board.
- But many accidents and incidents happen to the best trained crews, due to lack of foresight or pro-active planning throughout the team. It takes commitment for the Company to support the seafarers by letting the ship incur loss of earnings for 6~48 hours, for familiarisation after a crew change or letting the seafarer take rest at safe anchorage after a busy port operations or after an incident with investigations by various parties.
- Incidents, near misses or industry events must be analyzed and prompt pro-active action must be taken throughout the fleet. Pacific Basin has voluntarily implemented ISO 9001, ISO 14001, OHSAS 18001 management systems on board from 2005, rather than just complying with the mandatory ISM Code.

Management without Power Distance and Providing the best Shore Based Support to Sea Staff

The *team* must however, be seen to work both ways, and good and open communications plus strong round the clock support from shorebased team must be available without power distance. Our Senior Managers onboard, whatever their nationality, spend time in our head office in Hong Kong prior joining each ship.

They discuss the ongoing problems onboard with their counterparts ashore, see and understand the outstanding issues and the reasons behind them by attending the regular management meetings and generally get to know the faces behind the shore team supporting them. Power Distance and outdated attitudes of *them & us* between office and vessel must be a thing of the past.

Most of our shorebased team who do not have a seafaring background, take every opportunity to visit ships in port or make a short coastal trip to understand the sea life and the challenge the seafarers face, to improve the synergy between shore and ship. Communications from vessels are carried out during working hours of the officer (to facilitate sufficient rest and emergency preparedness on board) unless there is an emergency. Extensive feedback is taken prior implementing new systems and our focus is to trim and simplify the existing systems rather than making the SMS heavy with reams of paper checklists, taking out innovation and professionalism from the seafarers.

Risk Management for each and every task

Informal and easy to use risk assessment and management means for each and every task, shorebased support and specific voyage prompts and team work on board without power distance assist in managing the risks.

The shortest route between load and discharge port is not always the best one for the crew or vessel. Severe weather conditions, dense traffic, piracy are all matters for the team to evaluate before making a risk based decision to go around, or wait several days to join a naval escort convoy for example. In this respect the concern for the seafarers in the team, their safe workplace and their lives, “the Human Element”, must be considered together with operational efficiency. In

our PB team, it is, as we believe that our success as a Shipping Company comes primarily from our well run ships, by our dedicated seafarers on board.