



Caring for seafarers
around the world

the SEA

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Connection is important
for every seafarer



What really matters to seafarers?

Crews give their views on what's needed to improve a career at sea **By Felicity Landon**

Access to the internet, good food, comfortable accommodation, a gym, decent pay: much of the accepted wisdom is that these are the magic ingredients for keeping seafarers happy and keen to continue their on board careers. Where we can all ask a question and expect a certain answer. For those spending months at sea, the reality is more complex. The answers can be unexpected – and even tremendously sad.

Yes, seafarers want connectivity, but that doesn't just mean the internet. Yes, seafarers want to be part of a competent team at sea and (it is hoped) find their work rewarding, but what about kindness and understanding from colleagues?

A junior engineer serving on board a bulk carrier sent an email while anchored off the West African coast – “19 days in anchorage and still counting” – and

said: “I have been seafaring for five years now and with this I experience a lot of loneliness, even up to depression – but I am able to overcome it. For me, what matters the most is the character, personality and attitude of every crew member on board. That's why I would like to suggest to shipping companies, principals and even manning agencies to search not for someone who is good in his or her job but look more at the personality of the person you are hiring.

“I believe that every human is capable of doing things when it comes to any job or work but not all humans are capable of having the right kind of attitude, character and personality that is needed in this field. That's why, please look for someone who's kind enough to understand each person that he or she is dealing with on board ship.”

This seafarer said he didn't ask for

help but kept his problems to himself. “I just tried to overcome it until the time I signed off. I just make myself busy.”

Life isn't easy, he said: “But at least we should try our very best to survive as seafarers living on board.” His conclusion: despite the comms technology available, seafarers are the only ones that can help and cheer themselves up; there should be much more awareness amongst seafarers of mental health issues; and, above all, there should be more emphasis on teaching people how to be kind and look after others.

Connection in the broad sense

In answer to the question ‘What truly matters to seafarers?’, Danica Mae Madela, former deck officer and now fleet co-ordinator at Rederiet Stenersen in the Philippines, says: “One word:

connection. It is the most important thing for any seafarer. I'll even bet it is for anyone else in the world. And by this, I don't mean just the internet connection on board – connection goes beyond that. Connection to home, to their loved ones, to their work colleagues and to their jobs. A seafarer who is met where he/she is, is a fulfilled seafarer. A seafarer who is understood is a safe and peaceful seafarer. And this creates a ripple effect; a seafarer who is connected to things which are important to him will also want to share that connection with everyone else he meets. Connection makes the world go round; connection makes a seafarer – a person – go on."

Hearing the lonely seafarer's comments, Ronald Spithout, managing director of VIKAND's OneHealth, proactive healthcare solutions for the maritime industry, says: "Another 50,000 sailors could have sent the same message. It is not uncommon to see this – mental depression is a big issue."

It is vital to look at the vessel environment to develop a mentally fitter person on board, he says. "It makes every difference whether someone sees sunlight on a regular basis, breathes clean air, eats the right food, gets enough exercise, sleeps well. If not, they will develop some form of depression, anxiety or fatigue. When we provide our services, we also make recommendations to do something about all these aspects."

Spithout says some companies he

advises are working on tools that bring seafarers back together. One is bringing in low bandwidth TV channels – not for use by the seafarers on their mobile phones or other devices, but for viewing on a big screen. "The idea is that once in a while the crew will be sitting together to watch the news, sport, etc., to bring social interaction – otherwise they only have their phones and are sitting in their own cabin," he says.

'Family building' on board the vessel is very important, he adds: "Digital tools should not only take people away from each other and be used more individually, but should also bring them together. Having meals together could also be contributing to that."

Connectivity pros and cons

Internet connectivity enables seafarers to maintain their social life at home but this can also generate a lot of stress, he notes. "The older generation were right in some ways – they left home for six months and had no conception of what was happening at home, if someone got ill or the kids were not doing well at school. Now you can call home and find these things out – but not be able to do anything about them. A social life is nice if you are part of it but not so nice if you can only hear about it."

In contrast, if you are in a situation with colleagues where you don't have access to the 'outside world', he says: "You deal with what you have, like a new family life around you. You live with what you have more easily."

Of course, no one wants to go backwards in that respect but the counterbalance, he says, is that seafarers need someone to talk to outside their social environment. "They need a listening ear, a buddy – this should be a professional service offered to all seafarers. It is a big hurdle to go to your captain and talk about the problems you have. It could even cost you your job."

Shipping companies like to describe their people as their most important asset but Spithout questions this. "Imagine, nobody would take a technical asset and run it until it breaks down, then call the engineer. But that is exactly what happens to people. I speak to ship managers and ask them: would you do that to your engine? Why does your engine rarely break down? It's because you maintain it and replace its parts on time. Why wouldn't you do the same for your people? Give them a check-up regularly, call them once in a while, ask them how they are doing. We need to make sure that people don't get sick either physically or mentally. We need preventive maintenance for these most important assets."

Reflecting on her own time at sea, Madela describes her experience as 'a vague equation of woe plus bliss', a mixture of happiness and loneliness.

"The fact that you are far away from your loved ones, isolated, will really get you at times while on board. However, with the presence of your crew mates, especially with good management, life



Reducing crew numbers could lead to greater loneliness at sea

at sea can still be worthwhile,” she says. “You get to develop new friendships with your colleagues, have people you can share your life stories with and have people you can depend on and help too in work. It is a floating community with a diverse set of people – all different as they may come from different countries and with different cultures, but all the same as they come and work together as a team on board one vessel.”

‘Unique and cool’

Among the positives of a maritime career, she says: “You get to be unique and cool. There is pride in saying that you are a seafarer; I believe everybody can do it, it’s just that not everybody is willing to do it. It takes a lot of courage to heave up your anchor and sail away from home.”

A seafaring career can be rewarding and fulfilling, and can make you appreciate life more, adds Madela. “Practically speaking, it is one of the highest paid jobs in the world, plus – as the cliché goes – you get to ‘travel the world for free’. And once you opt to quit sailing, maritime – being a vast industry – has a lot of opportunities.”

She lists the negatives as being away from loved ones for long periods, the feeling of isolation and loneliness, the demanding work with voyage orders mostly coming unexpectedly, and a high risk of accidents and danger on board.

Madela says seafarers value an internet connection, gym, karaoke, basketball, movies and games consoles. As for improvements, she suggests: “A virtual presence of office personnel during monthly safety meetings could be a help. In that way, if there are concerns which require office/shore assistance, these can be tackled or resolved. In addition to that, the presence of office/shore personnel can indicate that they value the crew on board and creates a bridge of communication between shore and ship.”

Being away from loved ones for too long has always been a problem for seafarers, she says. “But I believe this can be solved by proper planning and rotation – shorter contracts and enough vacation on land.”

Yrhen Bernard Sabanal Balinis, seafarer and journalist, says that what matters to him as a seafarer is a clear career progression and a company that he can contact whenever he needs them. “That is why I have been advocating as well for the ship businesses, crewing

offices and their personnel so that they can better assist their seafarers. I like the term ‘crewingat’, an amalgamation of the words crewing and the Filipino word ingat – take care.”

Insurance and demands

Among other comments from seafarers contacted by The Sea was one that called for seafarers to have insurance ‘like any employee in a serious company’ and support in the event of an accident or trauma. “Seafarers need committed lawyers to defend their rights,” one respondent said.

Another noted that some say it has been harder to employ younger seafarers because of their ‘astronomical demands’, which was not the case for the ‘old salty seadogs’, i.e. they did not demand the same when they were starting out on their careers at sea. “But the thing is, this new breed has more options on what industry or profession to go to, instead of being stuck at sea,” said a seafarer.

This seafarer also noted: “The seafarers who are old in the industry are discouraging their own children and friends from embarking on a seafaring career. The other side of the coin argues that there is still hope, albeit small, if the industry can be branded as progressive and no longer archaic.”

What will the future bring? Steve Yandell, assistant co-ordinator in the ITF’s Seafarers and Inland Navigation Section, highlights the impact of crew sizes being so much smaller than a few decades ago.

“With fewer crew around and everything run so tightly in terms of the hours of work regime, with people going on watch or another group in the engine room, there are not the numbers to gather a group of people together,” he says. “They come together a bit when they have food but even then obviously not all together, because of keeping the ship running.

“I think this is a problem going

“We need to make sure that people don’t get sick either physically or mentally. We need preventive maintenance for these most important assets.”

forward, because with automation we are potentially looking at even fewer seafarers in the future. This idea of having two or three seafarers on board, as opposed to around 23, which container ships might have now, is a concern. Most people need that human contact.”

Personality and interpersonal skills are important and will be increasingly so as the industry moves forward with new technologies and the transition to alternative fuels, says Yandell. “The future will require a lot of new skills. Seafarers are going to have to think on their feet much more and work with different kinds of people. This will be a big change in the work environment, so those human skills are going to be more important.”

The ITF is pushing for a ‘just transition’ to involve seafarers in the move towards a more sustainable shipping industry. “Companies can’t just expect this to happen on its own. Some of these fuels can be extremely dangerous – for example, ammonia. What are we doing to make sure seafarers are safe? What would happen in emergency situations?”

The industry has to get better at training people, as opposed to poaching trained people from each other, he adds. Shipboard culture and facilities must be changed to accommodate more women coming into the industry. On the plus side, Yandell says the image of the industry may change as new technology emerges – and that might interest more young people. However, those young people also need to feel confident that there is a career path for them.

As to other issues for seafarers: “There are a lot of things that everyone onshore takes for granted they are able to do, that people at sea can’t. As a profession, seafaring is nowhere near as valued as it should be. Covid-19 raised the general consciousness of the importance of shipping for a time – but I think it is still not so visible.” 📍

Unpacking maritime accidents

Preparation is the key to preventing incidents on ships

By Andrew Moll

Like any good story, accidents can be sub-divided into a beginning, a middle and an end or, more precisely, events leading up to the accident, the event itself, and how it was dealt with.

Everyone remembers accidents, especially if they are accompanied by spectacular video footage. Explosions, collisions and groundings make for good TV, and even lesser accidents can become headline news when accompanied by an incredulous commentary peppered with gratuitous superlatives. However, it is an inescapable fact that by the time an accident has happened, it is too late to stop it.

The essential skill for managing an accident is that of being ready or, to slightly misquote the French microbiologist and chemist Louis Pasteur, “Fortune favours the prepared mind”. In the marine industry emergency drills are all too often viewed as a compliance activity; a necessary evil imposed by the regulator that has to be fitted in to an already busy programme. Unless the crew is blessed by having someone who has actually experienced a real fire, explosion, collision or flood, emergency drills can quickly be diluted to touch-drills, talk throughs and tabletop exercises that lack any sense of realism. Of course, realism has to be tempered, as no drill or exercise should put anyone’s health in danger. For example, wearing a blacked-out face mask to simulate escaping from a smoke-filled compartment can be realistic and safe if the trainee has a chaperone ready to intervene if injury looks imminent.

Unfortunately, as an accident investigator, it is not uncommon when an emergency response has not gone well to find that the emergency equipment has not been used for months or the record of drills has been mislaid. However, we also have lots of examples of where a well-executed emergency response has saved the day. As a wise old captain once said to me: “It’s not what happens, it’s how you deal with it that matters.” If you hope for the best but train for the worst then, should the unthinkable happen, you and your team will be ready to help prevent a drama becoming a crisis.



The MAIB's Andrew Moll advises seafarers to not put off until tomorrow what could or should be done today

But suppose you could stop accidents before they happen? Wouldn't that be good? Well, the magic bit is we can, but it takes effort and focus.

The effort part comes into play in what accident investigators refer to as precautionary thought. This is the planning and preparation that should precede any activity. It starts with what we aim to achieve, how we intend to do it, what risks there are and how we mitigate them, the training and equipment we need, the briefing that ensures a common understanding of the task and each individual's role and, finally, Plan B if things start to go wrong. Unfortunately, the old saying, “Failing to plan is planning to fail” is still true today, but my favourite quote belongs to the industrialist Sir John Harvey-Jones, who said: “Planning is an unnatural process; it is much more fun to do something. And the nicest thing about not planning is that failure comes as a complete surprise rather than being preceded by a period of worry and depression.”

The solution? Get planning.

The focus part is maintaining our ‘A’ game and not letting anything slide. Simply put, it means not putting off until tomorrow what could or should be done today. This includes inspections, maintenance, defect

reporting, record-keeping, training and a myriad of other things that if left unattended can create an underlying unsafe condition that opens a pathway to an accident.

However, focus also involves avoiding the complacency, habituation or familiarity that tempts us into under-preparing because, ‘we have done it all before and everyone knows what they are doing’. That might be true, but subtle, minor changes can accumulate over time if unchecked and, before long, the situation can become quite novel without anyone realising it. Systems might be carrying unresolved defects, there might be new members in the team or, at a basic level, the weather might be different. Routine, particularly monotonous routine, can quickly dull the senses. Hopefully, good risk assessment will identify the risks posed by repetitive tasks but our individual approach to work can help ensure we do not lower our vigilance.

If the above sounds like motherhood and apple pie, it probably is. But we all have a choice: do we adopt safe behaviours all the time, or only when someone else is looking? 📍

Andrew Moll is principal inspector of marine accidents at the UK's Marine Accident Investigation Branch.

Better support following a serious incident

Crew need careful handling after a traumatic event

By Alvin Forster

The aftermath of an incident on board is when the atmosphere is most sombre, especially if it is one that involves serious or fatal injuries. At a time like this, the wellbeing of crewmembers must be prioritised.

Crewmembers' reactions vary depending on their degree of interaction with the incident; being directly connected to the events that led to the incident, witnessing the incident unfold, administering first aid, or simply being caught up in the whirlwind of mixed emotions which follow. Trauma, anger, guilt, self-blame, 'finger pointing', or a fear of future similar incidents are amongst a plethora of emotions that can affect a crewmember's mental health and performance.

Therefore, investigations must be carried out sensibly and with sensitivity, especially when there is potential of triggering emotional wounds.

Following an incident, it is not uncommon for inspectors, surveyors and lawyers representing different parties to attend on board to speak to the crew. Empathy is the ability to 'step into the shoes' of another person, to understand how they are feeling, and how things are from their perspective. Practicing empathy is useful when

conducting interviews after a traumatic event, including the following tips:

- Manage access to the crew: don't allow third party surveyors and lawyers uncontrolled access to carry out interviews – take advice from your P&I Club and appointed lawyers.
- Make sure the interviewee is at ease and comfortable.
- Explain the purpose of the interview.
- Ask open-ended questions that allows them to talk freely.
- Be aware of their welfare throughout the session and take breaks where needed.

Above all, remember this isn't an interrogation – it's a means to find out what happened.

After care

Mental health issues manifest themselves differently in each individual. Crewmembers should look out for each other, not just in the immediate days after the incident, but in the coming weeks and months, to ensure that everyone is coping well. This is imperative since there are numerous possible reasons why a seafarer may be reluctant to ask for help. For example, they might not recognise that their difficulties stem from a mental health problem; they fear what other people will think of them if

they do ask for help; they don't feel they would be supported by the company; or they worry that their future employment status or promotion prospects could be affected.

Owners and operators should consider liaising with international organisations or local charities in the next port of call that may be able to attend on board and provide emotional support, be it religious comfort or a listening ear.

NorthStandard has a slew of initiatives designed to assist members and seafarers. These include My Mind Matters, which provides information and resources for emotional wellbeing at sea, and Mind Call, a dedicated emotional support helpline available to seafarers on vessels entered with NorthStandard, operating 24 hours per day, 7 days a week throughout the year. Mind Call's staff are trained in counselling skills and offer emotional support in a completely anonymous setting, enabling the crew to talk in confidence about their feelings and worries, whatever they may be. ☎

Alvin Forster is a loss prevention executive at NorthStandard.

To find out more, go to <https://mymindmatters.club/>, <https://mindcall.org/>, and <https://www.nepia.com/articles/supporting-crew-through-the-loss-of-a-colleague/>.



Seafarers must be supported when interviewed about a safety event

Optimarin service engineers help crews to get up to speed with the BWTS during system commissioning.

Credit: Optimarin



Training critical to ballast water efficiency

Risks are reduced if seafarers are properly prepared

By Carly Fields

Only with proper training can crews operate ballast water treatment systems (BWTS) efficiently, ensuring regulatory compliance and minimising environmental impact.

Here, Øystein Myhrvold, a system engineer and former training and specialist engineer at Optimarin, a pioneer in BWTS, explains to *The Sea* the central role that crew training plays in ensuring the proper treatment of ballast water on ships, which if handled incorrectly, has the potential to cause significant environmental harm.

The main risk factors with ballasting operations in relation to the crew are incorrect or illegal operations, which can result in non-compliant ballast water operation, Myhrvold said. This incompliance can lead to major environmental damage, as well as financial consequences in the form of fines from port states for failing to adhere to the IMO's Ballast Water Management Convention, a regulation that operators are required to follow. Additionally, improper operation can lead to equipment damage, which, in turn, incurs substantial costs.

Training is essential to ensure that operators are aware of and adhere to the laws and regulations governing ballast water treatment, Myhrvold says. "This compliance is crucial to

avoid penalties and legal issues related to improper handling of ballast water." Crew members must be well-versed in these regulations to ensure that their operations meet the required standards.

Proper training also equips crew members with the knowledge and skills needed to respond effectively in emergency situations, such as system malfunctions or non-compliance incidents. "This can prevent environmental harm and system downtime," he said, reducing the risks associated with such incidents.

Effective troubleshooting

Crew members trained in system maintenance and troubleshooting can identify and address issues promptly, again reducing system downtime and preventing costly and unnecessary repairs. This proactive approach not only saves money but also ensures that the system continues to function optimally over the long term.

Additionally, adequate training helps crew members understand the importance of proper system operation and maintenance. This knowledge extends the lifespan of the equipment and reduces the risk of damage, making it a wise investment in the ship's long-term operational efficiency.

Myhrvold shares an example from an Optimarin test. The company compared ballast water management on two vessels with identical

equipment. They discovered that the vessel with higher maintenance expenses suffered from poor operation of the BWTS. However, by providing training for the crew, Optimarin was able to significantly reduce the consumption of spare parts and other resources, resulting in substantial cost savings. "If the operator understands the system and knows how its components work, this makes it possible to anticipate and quickly resolve issues so the BWTS can run effectively with low maintenance costs over many years," he said.

Myhrvold highlights Optimarin's commitment to providing high-quality training for BWTS operations. Optimarin has made substantial improvements in the content and accessibility of its training courses in recent years, offering training free of charge, making it accessible to all who need it. Its training platform is designed to be user-friendly, with an intuitive online portal that can be accessed through various devices, including phones, tablets, and computers. Crew members can also complete the course offline, addressing the issue of poor or no network coverage on ships. 📶

Optimarin, founded in 1994 in Stavanger, Norway, was one of the first companies in the world to develop an environmentally friendly ballast water treatment system.

Know your rights

What does the UK Seafarers' Charter mean for you?

By **Voirrey Blount**

In July 2023, the UK government launched a new Seafarers' Charter in conjunction with the French government. The aim is to protect domestic seafarers in the UK as part of the UK Government's seafarer protections nine-point plan from July 2022.

The aim is to provide seafarers with proper employment protections and a right to be paid and treated fairly, regardless of the vessel's flag. But the question for seafarers is – what does this mean for me?

The most important point to bear in mind is that this Charter is voluntary. That means it will only apply to you if the company you work for has signed up for it.

Currently, the only firms that have signed up include Condor, DFDS, Stena Line, and Brittany Ferries. If you don't work for one of these companies, the Charter does not apply to you as of November 2023.

If it does apply, then you have the right to be paid at least the UK National Minimum Wage if the ship is calling at UK ports at least 120 times a year. If you do not think you are receiving the right hourly rate, then you should talk to your union rep.

The second right you have is to receive overtime at a rate of at least 1.25 times the basic hourly rate in your seafarer employment agreement (SEA) for anything over the basic hours in your contract or anything over 48 hours if nothing is specified. Check your contract for what your basic hours are; they cannot be over 48 hours under the Charter. If they are, then raise this with HR; you should be receiving overtime for anything over that 48-hour period.

Your SEA must not be on a voyage-by-voyage basis (unless there has been some sort of exceptional circumstance). The SEA must include provisions for adequate rest, and you cannot be charged for your accommodation on the vessel. This should already be the case under the Maritime Labour Convention, but you should discuss with your union if you are continually being given voyage-by-voyage SEAs.

Training provision

You also have the right to receive adequate training and development regardless of your rank or position. This



Voirrey Blount

could take many forms and you should discuss with your head of department or HR if you want more information on the training on offer. On joining a vessel, you should be given familiarisation training. If you never received this then you should discuss this with your head of department or line manager.

You also have the right to a roster that properly takes into account fatigue, mental health, safety, welfare, operational manning and intensity of the route. It should also give you adequate rest between your shifts.

The company must submit a risk assessment with the rosters, and you can ask to see this if you have concerns that the roster has not been properly assessed.

You also have the right to shore leave between your roster patterns and when the vessel is in port if you are off duty. If you are not being allowed shore leave

you should discuss this with your head of department.

Finally, drug and alcohol testing will take place at intervals not exceeding 12 months and will be done on both a random and regular basis. This is just something to bear in mind if it is a change to your company's previous policy.

Overall, you may not see a great change to your rights under the Charter compared with your position before. It should, however, give you peace of mind that your employer takes your rights seriously and wants to encourage a good working environment. It also means you should feel confident in challenging any issues you see as a potential failure to comply with the provisions of the Charter. 📞

Voirrey Blount is admiral manager at global law firm Reed Smith.

World's first digital seafarers' centre

MtS launches Happy at Sea app to put its support services in the palm of crews' hands

By Verity Relph

Find a seafarers' centre, pre-order shopping, request a ship visit, book transport, access news and wellbeing resources – wouldn't it be great if all of this could be in one place? With the launch of its much-anticipated Happy at Sea app, The Mission to Seafarers (MtS) is providing seafarers with access to all of this and more.

"This is the world's first digital seafarers' centre and it's exclusive to MtS, the world's largest provider of seafarers' centres," explains Ben Bailey, director of programme for MtS.

Free to download, the new app offers seafarers centralised access to the MtS services, which are available day and night, 365 days of the year.

What sets it apart is that it is the first app completely dedicated to helping seafarers access port welfare services. It is essentially a one stop shop where seafarers can find information about facilities available in port, put in requests for help, and access resources to support their mental health and wellbeing. "It puts seafarers in charge of their welfare and will allow them to pre-order their needs," says Ben.

Why now? For more than 150 years, MtS has been providing essential emotional, spiritual and practical support to men and women working at sea. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the charity relied on technology to reach seafarers. Its network of centres found innovative ways to connect with crews, providing pastoral support and taking shopping orders when crew had no way of getting ashore.

As Ben explains: "The idea for the app came about because of the pandemic. During that time, we were receiving an increasing number of requests via social media, email, SMS, etc. and while local teams have the capacity to deal with these, we felt the moment was right to develop an app which would provide seafarers with a 'one stop shop' for accessing all MtS locations across the network."

Need for access

Lockdowns may have ended, but as recent feedback from the Seafarers Happiness Index has shown, problems with shore leave continue and many crews have little or no opportunity to get time away from ship. Ever-increasing turnaround times, heavy workloads and limited communication facilities are further barriers to accessing welfare support. Seafarers

including loneliness, mental health issues, and connectivity.

The app also benefits welfare workers struggling to find ways to connect with seafarers. As well as allowing easier contact with crews arriving in port, the app offers port teams the ability to prioritise ships that have requested visits, and to provide the broadest range of services.

Seafarers can register for an account



Free to download, the new app offers seafarers centralised access to the MtS services

need to access information and support quickly, without having to worry about using up all of their precious data.

Thanks to funding from DNV, Cargill, and The Seafarers' Charity, MtS was able to develop an app which directly addresses the increasing digital needs of seafarers. Its aim is to provide them with easier access to welfare services and to tackle some of the present-day challenges of working at sea,

using Facebook, Apple, Google or an email address. When setting up a profile, there is the option to enter more personal information to allow the app to serve more tailor-made content if desired.

One of the principal features of the app is the ability to search the Mission's directory of over 200 ports worldwide. Seafarers can find information about the welfare services available in port ahead of time and check in to their local Flying Angel seafarers' centre. The app also gives them the ability to save a port as a favourite, making for easier check-in and contact next time they are there.

Another key function is requests. Shopping formed a major part of MtS' work during the pandemic and

"Seafarers can now request shopping to be delivered ahead of arrival in port"

calls for help with purchasing items ashore continues. Seafarers can now request shopping to be delivered ahead of arrival in port. They can also request Wi-Fi and SIM cards so they can make contact with loved ones, and even arrange transport into the local shopping mall or town.

Global network

Central to MtS' work is its global network of chaplains, who are there to talk through problems and provide practical support where it is needed. Crew now have the ability to request and arrange a visit from a chaplain before their arrival in port.

Seafarers can also take part in the Seafarers Happiness Index survey. In just a few taps, using the chatbot-style interface, they can answer questions and give feedback on their recent experiences at sea. Once they have completed the survey, they then have access to a range of advice and resources, as well as the ability to track their own happiness. The app is also where seafarers can now access *The Sea*, keep up to date with news and access MtS' extensive range of wellbeing resources.

Importantly, these resources are all available offline, meaning that even those with limited internet access can benefit. The app's small size also means resources can be downloaded easily, which is so important when seafarers need data to contact family back home.

The new app is essentially about empowering seafarers to take control



Free port welfare and wellbeing services from The Mission to Seafarers straight to your phone

Introducing **Happy at Sea** – the world's first digital seafarers' centre created by The Mission to Seafarers! By using our new app, you will be able to check in to our network of seafarers' centres and pre order items from the ports, including a ship visit, transportation or items of shopping*.



Scan the QR Code and be among the first to download the app!

Supported by




*Some services will not be available in all locations. 'Happy at Sea' is a project by The Mission to Seafarers. Registered charity no: 1123613

of their port welfare needs, ensuring that they get the help they need when they need it most.

In New Zealand, where the app was initially rolled out, port teams are already seeing the impact. "We have had wonderful feedback regarding the access to the resources," comments The Revd Lance Lukin, regional director for Oceania & Pacific region. "These have been well received and seafarers are looking for more offerings in the devotional and spiritual care space."

MtS has always striven to evolve

its support and services in line with seafarers' needs. The charity is already thinking about how the technology could be developed further, for instance how it could be utilised by partner organisations. "Initially, the app is available to MtS," says Ben, "but in time we hope to offer this to other seafarers' welfare organisations so that it makes life at sea easier for crews."  To access the app, download it from the Apple App Store or the Google Play Store for Android. For further information, visit <https://app.missiontoseafarers.org/>.



“Learning data has proven invaluable for OTG’s team, helping them observe trends and identify areas for improvement”

Keeping seafarers at heart

OTG’s Raal Harris shares insights into the role of technology in supporting seafarers **By Carly Fields**

Seamarers are “absolutely critical” to the mission of Ocean Technology Group, a maritime software company committed to empowering seafarers, advancing industry standards, and embracing cutting-edge technology.

Speaking with *The Sea*, Raal Harris, chief creative officer at OTG, explains that the company’s focus is on doing everything it can to support seafarers to be able to work safely and to perform. “That is how we deliver value to our customers, the majority of whom are ship owners and managers,” he says. “They increasingly understand that their people are their greatest asset and key to their commercial success, and that’s why they invest in solutions such as ours that help to recruit, retain, and develop their workforce.”

At the heart of OTG’s mission lies the recognition of the intrinsic value of seafarers to the maritime industry. In a world where ships crisscross the globe, their safety and expertise are paramount. OTG aims to provide the tools and support needed for seafarers

to excel in their roles, ensuring that every voyage is a successful one.

Walking the talk, OTG is a signatory to the Neptune Declaration on Seafarer Wellbeing, described as a rallying cry for the maritime industry. It aims to achieve a comprehensive set of goals, including raising awareness, advocating for change, promoting collaboration, and improving the wellbeing of seafarers. Signatories commit to prioritising seafarer wellbeing and taking concrete actions to address the challenges faced by seafarers. The collective hope is that this declaration enhances corporate responsibility and accountability within the maritime industry, fostering a more responsible and seafarer-centric approach. It represents a significant step toward a brighter future for those who keep global trade afloat.

ESG aspirations

With environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors taking centre stage today, Raal acknowledges

that ESG is becoming an increasing part of the conversation with OTG’s customers, with a particular focus on the social element. “Key to that is building the right workplace culture, and so investing in non-technical skills like leadership, communication skills, bullying and harassment, and diversity are becoming just as important as the traditional technical skills.”

He sees the maritime industry as undergoing a transformation, recognising the need to create an environment where seafarers feel supported and can openly discuss complex concepts and personal experiences. This shift necessitates a wide vocabulary, a high level of conversational English, listening skills, emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness.

Therefore, Raal highlights the importance of awareness, understanding, and practice in improving communication skills. “That, a seafarer can’t do on their own; it has to be part of the workplace



Seafarers benefit personally from effective training. Credit: OTG

culture,” he says. A supportive culture empowers seafarers to become more effective communicators and fosters a positive on board environment.

Turning to operations, Raal acknowledges that the maritime industry is currently facing one of its most significant challenges: the shift to new, cleaner fuels. “The transition to new fuels is one of the biggest challenges our industry has ever faced, and it simply can’t happen without empowering our seafarers,” he notes. OTG’s approach here is two-fold: effective training materials tailored to specific training needs and active participation in industry working groups to devise common standards.

Participating in initiatives such as the Just Transition Taskforce and Green Curriculum with the Nautical Institute, OTG aims to ensure that seafarers have access to quality training that equips them to work safely in this evolving landscape. The commitment to cleaner fuels is not just about environmental responsibility; it’s also about ensuring seafarers have the knowledge and skills to adapt to a rapidly changing industry.

Pushing digital boundaries

Digital learning is another game-changer in the maritime industry. Raal says that while digital learning is nothing new to OTG or its customers – who have long recognised its benefits – the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote learning, with many customers now favouring it over physical attendance courses. Regulators have also become more open-minded toward digital learning, making it easier to gain approvals for digital remote courses.

According to Raal, the key criterion should be learning outcomes: “If the learning outcomes can be achieved successfully through digital means, then why shouldn’t digital learning be accepted?” The future of maritime education lies in leveraging digital tools to provide seafarers with flexible and effective learning opportunities.

Learning data has proven invaluable for OTG’s team, helping them observe trends and identify areas for improvement. When combined with complementary data like Port State Control (PSC) inspection results, patterns emerge that shed light on how training relates to vessel performance and areas where companies can focus to prevent negative results.

Raal sees the potential for AI to transform digital learning further. “AI is poised to revolutionise digital learning by offering more personalised education based on the learner’s individual needs, automating administrative tasks, creating content, and opening up possibilities for intelligent AI tutoring.”

“The transition to new fuels is one of the biggest challenges our industry has ever faced, and it simply can’t happen without empowering our seafarers”

– Raal Harris

But while AI holds great promise, Raal also emphasises the need for caution, considering potential privacy issues and algorithmic biases. Ethical and practical implications must be carefully considered to ensure that AI benefits both educators and learners.

Future focus

Raal summarises OTG’s vision for the future in two main areas. The first is improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning OTG provides to seafarers. “There is more and more for seafarers to learn, and they have very little time available in which to do their training,” Raal says. This demands a design that maximises the benefits of learning within a limited time investment. Utilising mobile learning apps and online accessibility, OTG ensures that seafarers can access training materials wherever they are, online or offline.

The second area of focus is on the employee experience. OTG seeks ways to enhance recruitment, onboarding, and access to information, and streamline workflows through intelligent automation and data integration. Technology, Raal says, affords the possibility to simplify labour-intensive tasks, reduce the room for error, and improve collaboration between ship and shore teams.

As the industry continues to evolve, OTG is employing technology to support its commitment to seafarers’ wellbeing in a new era of maritime. 🌐



The case for cadet ships

How can the industry solve the sea-time conundrum?

It is hard enough to find young people willing to take up a sea career, when there are so many other choices. But we don't exactly make it easier for them, when there are too few ships available for training purposes and any number of excuses made to avoid taking a couple of cadets on board in order to gain essential sea-time.

And if you have set your heart on a sea career, you probably do not want to have to spend years at a college ashore before you even get near a ship. You probably want to get afloat fast, not just watching ships through the classroom window.

Ideally, newcomers, perhaps after a short safety course, would get a taste of seafaring just as soon as they could be taken aboard. It would probably reduce wastage and generate real enthusiasm. But the reality remains that there is a real shortage of ship operators willing to invest in a new generation and too many around that will merely 'poach' people who have been trained by others. It was some years ago that the Indian delegation at IMO, concerned about the shortage of training places afloat, suggested that it should be made mandatory for all ships to have accommodation for perhaps two trainees aboard ship. It was a great idea, as it was practical, seemed reasonable and did address the problem

of shortages that everyone saw on the horizon. Sadly, it failed to find any support and was lost forever.

Since then, the prospect of shortages has become ever more critical. The industry lost a lot of good seafarers during the pandemic, who decided, largely because of the way that their lives became so miserable, that a shore side career was to be preferred. But the dilemma of sea-time has never gone away. One of the biggest ship managers in the world let it be known that if an owner would build a ship capable of carrying a decent number of cadets, they would manage it and the cadet's training for no cost to the owner. That too, seemed a great initiative, but alas, there were no takers.

Cost argument

It is said to be the cost of training, particularly of officers, that discourages any meaningful improvements in this area, with many operators suggesting that these should be paid for by governments and not the ultimate employers. It is also often suggested that the cost of college training has become too expensive, as the syllabus has expanded and the sophistication of shore-based equipment is ever more costly. And simultaneously, there are complaints that the young officers who emerge from the training systems, with

their first deck and engine certificates, lack the experience to take a full part in the working of the ship. It is a circular argument, as they lack the experience, because they have been unable to gain this during ever-shorter sea-time spells.

Could cadet ships, which were once used by so many successful companies to train their officers, ever make a comeback, and address these problems? As always, it is the cost of these ships which invariably is cited against such a strategy. Training ships had one major advantage in that they made very sure that their cadets left them with a full grounding in the 'company' way of doing things, so that, when qualified and returned to the fleet, they were immediately useful. And there are a few companies which manage to justify them today, feeding properly trained people into their fleets.

In the United States, the main sea training colleges have always managed to operate their own training ships and significantly, four large replacement vessels for this purpose, with Federal funding, are now entering service. Fully equipped for training large numbers of cadets, they will have an important secondary role in emergency and disaster relief, thus justifying their costs. That may be one solution. ☺





By Natasha Barley

A lifeline for seafarers' children

Lending support to families challenged by a career at sea

Sailors' Children's Society has been supporting the children of seafarers in the UK for over 200 years. We have seen great progress in the safety and welfare of seafarers and their families in that time but there are still many challenges that face children whose parents choose to earn a living at sea.

Family breakdown is far more prevalent in seafaring families because of the lengthy times apart making it challenging to maintain family bonds. Post traumatic stress disorder is more common and very sadly suicide rates are very high as well. Physical ailments and illnesses of parents because of the physical nature of the work also manifest. Children don't choose what career their parents have but they are sadly impacted by their parents' choice.

Sailors' Children's Society is there for the children of seafarers when the worst does happen. Loss of a family member, diagnosis of a life limiting or terminal illness or family breakdown. All the families we support are also in financial difficulty. We provide the families with financial, practical, and emotional support.

Every family has access to a family support officer who provides advice and guidance and emotional support to help the family heal. We also signpost families to other charities that can provide specialist support. All our families can go on a respite break to one of our nine caravans in the UK which gives them a chance to spend some special time together away from their daily stresses and helps them to create happy memories together.


Festive help

Christmas is a particularly difficult time of year for our families. We help by providing hampers in December so they can enjoy a Christmas dinner. One of the mothers we support said, "we received our Christmas hamper yesterday and it is a lifesaver. We didn't have a turkey until our hamper arrived and we would have gone without. And we got a ham as well! We wish you all a very merry Christmas, thank you so much for making ours special."

We also provide a little extra support to our families in December so they can purchase a gift for their children. It

helps the families so much to have some much-needed cheer on Christmas day.

The cost-of-living crisis is having a serious impact on our families' ability to afford even the basics, so we provide monthly support grants that help cover the cost of food and heating. We provide school uniforms and warm winter clothing to all the children and we cover the cost of school trips and extracurricular activities, so the children don't miss out. We also help to provide beds and furniture for children when needed. Barnardo's charity reports that 440,000 children in the UK do not have a bed and according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation one million children in the UK experienced destitution in the last year. Destitution is when people cannot afford to meet their most basic physical needs to stay warm, dry, clean and fed.

Children don't choose the circumstances they find themselves in. We can do better, and we have to do better for the children. 

Natasha Barley is CEO of the Sailors' Children's Society. For more information go to www.sailorschildren.org.uk.

theSea Leisure Page

There are many health benefits to spending down-time solving puzzles. Lower stress levels, better memory, uplifted mood, improved problem-solving abilities, and better work performance are just some of them.

Sudoku

The aim of Sudoku is to fill in the empty cells so that each column, row and 3x3 region contain the numbers 1 to 9 exactly once. Find the answers to both puzzles in the next issue.

EASY LEVEL

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 9 | 5 | 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | 4 | | | 8 | 1 | | |
| 7 | | | | 3 | 1 | | 8 | 2 |
| 2 | 5 | | | 7 | | 8 | | |
| | | 7 | | | | 6 | | |
| | 8 | | 4 | | | | 7 | 3 |
| 1 | 8 | | 2 | 6 | | | | 5 |
| | | 6 | 3 | | | 2 | | 4 |
| | | | | 1 | 7 | 3 | 6 | |

TRICKY LEVEL

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 9 | 6 | | 5 | | | | |
| 4 | | | 7 | | | | | |
| | 8 | 7 | 1 | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | 5 | | | 6 | 1 |
| | | | 3 | 7 | | | | |
| 8 | 4 | | | 6 | | | | 5 |
| | | | | | 4 | 3 | 2 | |
| | | | | 2 | | | | 8 |
| | | | 8 | 3 | | | 4 | |

Credit: www.sudokuoftheday.com

EASY LEVEL

solution (Issue 3 2023)

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 5 | 1 |
| 5 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 8 |
| 1 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 2 |
| 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 7 | 9 |
| 6 | 3 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 5 |
| 8 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 3 |
| 4 | 1 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 6 |
| 7 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 9 | 4 |
| 9 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 7 |

MEDIUM LEVEL

solution (Issue 3 2023)

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | 4 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 3 |
| 3 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 1 |
| 5 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 8 | 2 | 4 |
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 9 |
| 8 | 3 | 9 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| 2 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 8 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 7 |
| 1 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| 6 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| 4 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 8 |

Jumble

Can you correctly unscramble these anagrams to form four words? If so, send your answers by email to thesea@missiontoseafarers.org by December 28, 2023. All correct answers will be entered into a draw for a chance to win a Mission to Seafarers' Goodie Bag, containing a mug and handmade woolly hat. Please include your answers, name, the vessel you are working on, your nationality and finish this sentence:

"I like The Mission to Seafarers because..."

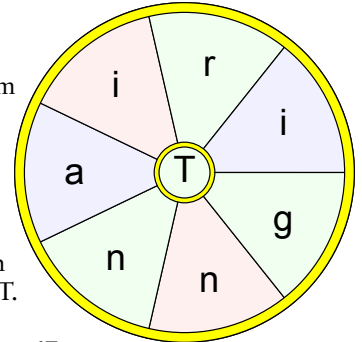
- 1) Handedkc 2) Layquite 3) Gratin 4) Eelva

Issue 3, 2023 solutions:

- 1) Handling 2) Lashing 3) Stowing 4) Carriage

Word wheel

This word wheel is made from an eight-letter word. Try and find that word, then make as many words of three letters or more as you can from these letters. You can only use each letter once, and each word must include the letter T.



Answer for Issue 3, 2023 issue: 67 possible words, nine-letter word was Schooner

Flag code

Can you tell us what words these flags are communicating? Answer in the next issue.

Answer for Issue 3, 2023: Stanchion



See Michael Grey's feature on page 12



He says at least it is giving him some valuable sea time!

Help for seafarers around the world

Are you one of the 1.89 million people around the world working at sea, or a loved one of someone who is?

The Mission to Seafarers is a great source of support for anyone working in the industry, and we've been helping people like you since the 19th century.

We work in over 200 ports in 50 countries and are available 365 days a year. We can provide help and support, no matter your nationality, gender or faith. Our network of chaplains, staff and volunteers can help with any problem – whether it's emotional, practical or spiritual help that you need.

Our services include:

- **Ship visits** – we carry out approximately 35,000 ship visits a year, welcoming crews to ports, providing access to communication facilities and offering assistance and advice on mental health and wellbeing.
- **Transport** – Our teams can arrange free transportation to the local town, shopping mall, doctor, dentist or a place of worship.
- **Seafarers' Centres** – We operate over 120 Flying Angel centres around the world, offering visiting seafarers a safe space to relax between voyages, purchase supplies, seek support for any problems they might have and stay in touch with their families.
- **Emergency support** – Our teams are trained in pastoral support, mental health first aid and critical incident stress counselling. We can also provide advocacy support.
- **Family networks** – We operate these networks in the Philippines and India where seafarers' families can meet, share information and access support.

Our mission is to care for the shipping industry's most important asset: its people.

To find out where we work, visit www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports. Here you can find information about all our centres, including contact details, facilities and opening times.



CREW HELP CONTACTS

SeafarerHelp

Free, confidential, multilingual helpline for seafarers and their families available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, provided by ISWAN.

Direct dial: +44 20 7323 2737

Email: help@seafarerhelp.org

WeCare

Our WeCare e-learning programme gives seafarers access to mental health advice and wellbeing resources on board and on shore.

For more information contact your local Seafarer Centre, www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports.

CrewHelp

The Mission to Seafarers can provide help and support if you have a welfare or justice issue.

Please get in touch with us at crewhelp@mtsmail.org

Get in touch!

Have you got news or views that you'd like to share with *The Sea*? Please get in touch with the Editor,

Carly Fields at

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WeCare, now available online through our e-learning programme.

To find out more about our Social Wellbeing and Financial Wellbeing courses, please visit www.mtswe care.org **Because together, WeCare.**



WeCare

Wellbeing programmes from
The Mission to Seafarers

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Credit: Image by Jaime Orejuela from Pixabay

Hope for peace

Keep faith in our hearts for forgiveness

By The Revd Canon Andrew Wright

In one of the Bible’s most moving passages, Jesus approaches Jerusalem. “And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying “would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace.” There has always been war and violence between and within nations.

However, these last 50 years seemed to offer some hope of stability and mutual understanding. Sadly, recent times have once again seen a growth in conflict, some of which seemed unthinkable, most recently in Israel and Gaza.

The level of horror and savagery which human beings seem capable of inflicting on one another, even on children, is terrible indeed. And such savagery breeds further hate, ensuring the cycle of bitterness remains unbroken. Where, we might well ask, is God in all this?

There are never easy answers. With Jesus we weep over what we see. That same Jesus himself suffered the most dreadful cruelties. He knew there were no easy answers. We hear his cry, “My God my God why have you forsaken me”. And yet he held his course,

knowing that in amongst the pain and the suffering his loving Father somehow remained present.

And that loving Father shows us, in Jesus, the things that make for peace – to love, even our enemies, to be able to forgive just as we need to be forgiven, to do all we can to build God’s kingdom of peace and justice for which we all long.

That kingdom is in the hands of all of us, wherever we are and however powerless we may feel. ☺

The Revd Canon Andrew Wright is secretary general of The Mission to Seafarers.

A prayer for seafarers

*Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth;
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust;
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace,
Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.*

Amen

Please donate to
The Mission to Seafarers

Please visit missiontoseafarers.org/donate or scan the QR code opposite.