

**ATTRACTING THE BEST PROFESSIONALS – A SIDE EFFECT OF THE STCW
CONVENTION**

Paper Presented at

**THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STCW CONVENTION
BIMCO/WMU RESIDENTIAL COURSE IN COPENHAGEN
17 - 20 JUNE 1996**

by

**Bengt Schager, M Sc.
Maritime Psychologist
Marine Profile AB
Sweden**

The STCW Convention deals with two major issues. One of these is what professional seafarers should know, i.e. the basic standards of knowledge, skills and the distribution of responsibilities. This has been carefully specified in the text. But equally important, the Convention also addresses the issue of how the work shall be done. In this context "teamwork" is often mentioned, as well as words like "commitment", "working climate", "motivation" and "attitudes".

The problem is, however, that while one can demand a certain level of individual knowledge and easily check if it has been reached, there is a problem to identify and check the level of teamwork, commitment, working climate and attitudes. Such "human software" is not easily pinpointed or measured.

It should not be a major problem for a shipowner to comply with the standards of education and skills of his officers, engineers and crew. This is more a question of selection, training and experience. To comply with the demands for "human software" can, however, create problems because this is connected with traditions, culture, style and organization, not only with individuals. It can't easily be ordered and it may change without being evident to the shipowner. Building the right attitudes, motivation, commitment, a good working climate and teamwork takes time since these things are interrelated.

It may be worth mentioning that the STCW Convention is not simply there to be complied with per se. Basically it deals with professionalism and safety. Its very existence suggests that things are not quite right in the outskirts of the business. What is written in nearly 300 pages is largely a matter of common sense: people should know certain basics and be able to cooperate because it is a hazardous business.

The two major issues the STCW Convention focuses on seem, for example, to be widely known by hundreds of millions of football (i.e. soccer) fans. In the world of football it is not regarded as enough to take 11 of the best trained individual players in the world and ask them to go out and win a game. They also have to know how to play together, what strategies to use and what roles they will have in these strategies. They also must be committed, motivated, happy and proud to play with each other and feel and act as a team. Then and only then can their individual skills flourish.

Every manager, every player and every football fan knows this. Even hooligans know. They prove this knowledge over and over again because most of them, irrespective of category, blame defeats upon the coach and demand that he should be sacked. Unanimously they point to him as the person responsible for the team, the players' emotional commitment and the strategy.

Where skills and experience mean knowledge of the game you are playing, teamwork means how you play. The right attitudes, motivation, commitment and teamwork grow under the right circumstances, creating the frame in which the formal skills can appear and develop. The skills are *what* to do and the frame is *how* to do it, or to put it in more formal or scientific words, you need both the *content* and the *process*. The STCW Convention has identified and emphasises both.

To use the football metaphor once more, it is not only the individual capacities that count. Equally important are the teaming up and coaching of the players.

Let me point out a couple of tools the shipowner and the person responsible for the manning can use in order to achieve the desired standards.

Basically it boils down to the quality of personnel and the quality of management. To get both, a shipowner should direct his efforts towards the following:

- 1. *Attracting the best professionals.***
- 2. *Selecting the personnel carefully.***
- 3. *Training the personnel continuously.***
- 4. *Organizing the work.***
- 5. *Retaining the personnel.***

Let me elaborate on these headings, starting with the second and saving the first one till last.

2. Selecting the Personnel Carefully

This has to do with breaking up old habits and traditions and learning by looking at other industries. Today it is common in other industries to be very careful when hiring new personnel on the managerial as well as the subordinate level. For this they have a competent personnel staff especially trained in interview techniques. They also have the proper assessment methods and traditions. Moreover, competent applicants expect to be carefully evaluated before being hired. This gives them a sense of how serious the employer is, which is important for their own evaluation of the position.

Other industries often use special recruitment or assessment consultants or their own methods which mostly consist of careful and skilful interviews complemented with assessment methods. Why? Because they know that they can't survive in a competitive world without good quality personnel.

In the maritime business we should be equally careful when hiring or promoting personnel. This is not always the case and the training and competence of personnel officers varies. Today we have especially designed assessment methods for the maritime industry, and interviewing techniques which can be taught and learned. With the proper methodology, combined with skills in assessment, there will be fewer mistakes and, as in other industries, a shipowner can also search for and hire personnel with a potential beyond the position in question, i.e. people who it might be profitable to invest in.

At Marine Profile we have developed Masterline Marine, an assessment method which can be learned and utilized by the shipowner's or manning company's own personnel officers. In connection with the training in Masterline Marine, they also receive training in interview techniques. The instructor is a professional management consultant and psychologist.

It is worth mentioning that the three major high speed ferry operators in Sweden, Stena, TT-line and SweFerry all use extensive interviews and psychological testing before allowing anyone to work onboard their new ferries. All officers, engineers and pursers are carefully assessed by us as regards their personal characteristics and attitudes and all crew members, catering personnel included, are assessed by the shipowners' own personnel officers using Masterline Marine.

Besides the question of safety consciousness and stress tolerance, the above mentioned shipowners also place emphasis on suitable personal character traits. In addition to safety, they want their personnel to cooperate in a new and modern way and to form teams. This is not only considered a matter of high safety standards and bridge management, it also marks the launching of a new business concept where the personnel and their attitudes and motivation are central, adding to respective company's competitive strength.

3. Training the Personnel Continuously

Besides the formal courses, simulator training and software training programs which already are commonly used, the shipowner may profit from more practical and team-oriented training as well. One such program is the BRM Course, another is to train the entire bridge team in their own working environment. One advantage of the latter is that you are able to train whole bridge teams, thus not only individual team member skills, but also teamwork and how to safely organize the work.

The teambuilding and organization of the work is far more important than most people think it is, not only for the working climate, cooperation and modern thinking. To work in teams and to organize the bridge team properly is one of our major tools to counteract the impact of human error.

We are born error-prone, some more than others, which our advanced assessment methods unveil. The potential for mistakes, faulty perception, misunderstandings and the like is inherited. But today, when advanced technical development puts stronger forces than ever in our hands, this potential is much more harmful to ourselves and to the environment.

Besides careful assessment of personnel, we can organize our work in such a way that individual errors will be detected. With a good working climate and a team-oriented approach to the task, we get a natural supervision of each other and a professional, straightforward communication where authoritarian boundaries are no longer allowed to create obstacles for information and participation.

This is already known and utilized in other hazardous industries where the use of checklists, well established routines, clear and professional communication and a team-oriented approach have a longer tradition.

At Marine Profile we approach this heading in two different ways. One is our Onboard Assessment and Interactive Bridge Team Training, the other is the implementation of Mentor Masters.

Onboard Assessment and Bridge Team Training

In this training, a Marine Profile consultant, who is an experienced Master with extensive management training, spends lots of time on the bridge together with the bridge team. The consultant works actively with every team member individually as well as with the whole team. He also assesses both the team and its individual members as regards professional skills and, by the use of Masterline Marine, their personal suitability and attitudes. The consultant trains the Master in bridge management, assesses and trains individual professional skills, bridge and safety routines, handling skills of equipment, shiphandling,

navigation, safety management, crew management, teamwork etc. He also assesses and trains the team in Pilot Management and implements effective Passage Plans.

Mentor Masters

A Mentor Master is an especially selected, highly experienced and especially trained Master who takes on the full responsibilities of a Master onboard a ship. Besides the normal duties as a Master, he also undertakes the task to constantly train the officers in the same way as the above mentioned consultant. The Mentor Master's task is to train the officers so that they can be promoted and also so that the chief officer can eventually replace him.

The Mentor Master thus performs a double task. First, he undertakes full responsibility as the master of the ship and second, he educates and trains the officers professionally in teamwork and cooperation –the what and the how. Each officer has been carefully assessed as regards his potential and motivation for further growth, the Mentor Master's task is to reach a specified objective for each and everyone within a given time frame.

These programs have been developed together with Expedo Ship Management who runs both programs on their VLCCs. The Onboard Assessment and Bridge Team Training program have been running for a couple of years and the Mentor Master program is under implementation.

Similar programs are currently under development for the engine department.

4. Organizing the Work

While the above-mentioned programs, besides training and assessment, also deal with the onboard organization, the land organization and the interface between land and shipboard organizations are equally important. Here the task should be to implement and maintain a good company culture and good cooperation between the land and shipboard organizations. In fact, they should be looked upon as a single entity.

In order to create one entity of such a geographically spread organization, the shipowner must start with a business concept or a vision, i.e. he should realistically express what kind of player he wants to be and how he wants to play. This should not be expressed in economical or general terms but in such a way that everyone, irrespective of position, can identify with the common objective and feel motivated and proud to be involved.

Once the vision is formulated, the shipowner needs a strategy to reach the desired goal. He also has to formulate this and assure himself of everyone's commitment and participation by constant two-way communication. By doing this, he is setting the standards for the

company and the standards for everyone involved. With a well formulated vision, the shipowner gives himself the tools to evaluate the performance, to assess and to react when necessary. Without a proper vision there is a risk that the company will drift because circumstances may be in charge and not the management.

We have been working as consultants along these lines with other industries since the beginning of the 80s and have started such a development process with a couple of shipowners, among them Expedo.

As an aid in these tasks, we utilize our method MasterMap, a method developed from Masterline Marine but which shed light upon organizations instead of the individual. By using MasterMap we are able to measure and illustrate the potential of an entire organization and how this potential is utilized.

5. Retaining the Personnel

Courses, training programs, careful selection and work with the organization are all wasted if the personnel do not feel loyal to the company and stay. A shipowner should make sure that investments in personnel pay off and that the company is capable of retaining good professionals. Teams and organizations suffer when good individuals decide to take opportunities elsewhere. Once they are trained, they also become attractive to others.

To assure oneself of the personnel's loyalty, a shipowner can use various programs and benefits, but it is a fact that most people wish to stay within a company that respects them, trains them, gives them opportunities, provides for their professional development, and so forth.

Most people like to be a part of something bigger than themselves and most people like to be able to feel proud of what they achieve. The careful selection procedure gives them reason to understand that they are just not anyone. They are hand-picked. They also know that their colleagues and others are selected in the same manner and possess the "right stuff".

Moreover, teamwork, motivation, mutual commitment, working climate and good attitudes are worth much for most of us. It has to do with quality of life. Just think of how you yourself look upon your own working life. There is no reason to believe that others are different.

I have purposely saved the first heading till last.

1. Attracting the Best Professionals

Any shipping company that acquires a reputation for being something special will be attractive to applicants. Any applicant who has the possibility to choose a company will do so, and shipping companies will compete with each other to hire the best. When salaries and benefits are equal, the best professionals will apply for positions in a company they can be proud of and which gives them opportunities.

It is a common misunderstanding that by being careful in recruitment and selection there is a risk of not getting any applicants at all. Reality shows that it is the other way around. Every high-profile shipping company gets spontaneous applications and receives more and better quality response from advertisements than others. A company or a line of education to which admission is difficult gets the most applications. A university that is prestigious and known for quality and difficult admission has never been without students.

People tend to go for the difficult and try to get admission to schools, companies and institutions where they can feel hand-picked and feel pride. These are organizations who they know would not pick just anyone and which therefore give them some extra prestige.

The reason why I took the first heading last is that all the other headings build up for the first. Once a shipping or manning company is known for high standards and gets a reputation for taking care of their personnel, that they don't accept just anyone and where the working climate is good, the best professionals who can chose, begin to look for that company.

Finally there is clearly one more thing a shipowner can do after having implemented programs and routines like those mentioned above. Let it be widely known!

Compliance with the basic ideas of the STCW Convention might thus help a shipping company to establish a favourable process, as follows:

→ **be attractive to good professionals** → **carefully select personnel** → **constantly train the personnel** → **organize the work** → **retain the personnel**
be attractive to good professionals → **and so forth ...**