

MARITIME EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE HEARING 10/17/2007

How do we get people to want to work in the maritime field?

I am a second generation Mariner and have been in the Maritime Industry all my life. I currently hold the 11th issue of a 5-year renewable Master of Towing Vessel license. A Mariner would say, "I have been there and done that". "That" includes successfully navigating, as Captain, over 10,000 miles of the Mississippi river system, and the Intracoastal Waterway plus attending dozens of Coast Guard and Industry meetings in 14 states and Wash D.C. To be perfectly honest to this committee, I can't come up with even one convincing reason to join this Industry, unless there are major changes in regulations, attitudes, and practice. Mariners are "at will" employees who depend entirely on the "good will" of management to provide them a good, safe, work environment. Providing a "good, safe, work environment" costs money and that affects profit. Under normal conditions in the transportation industry a regulatory body protects the employees from unscrupulous employers, FAA pilots, DOT truckers, the FRA Railroad engineers. The Coast Guard does not effectively provide this protection. Mariner protection shares the same status as an unwanted stepchild in the Coast Guard. They wanted it initially, but currently they don't have the time or resources. They also have a "conflict of interest" namely the revolving door leading to employment with Maritime companies. Example: The concept that an "at will" employee must notify the Coast Guard of infractions by his employer, in many situations, before they will enforce existing regulations is ludicrous. This puts all Mariners in a box without protection if they have an unscrupulous employer. Since as an individual I resent being put into any box, I can also say there are good companies out there. Remember a "good, safe, work environment" costs money and that affects profit. Good employers can compete. There are others who would like to provide a safe work environment, but can't make a profit if they do. They just "go along to get along".

Mariners, once they become aware of this, will find employment in another industry.

All you need to know about fatigue is there is only one cure for it - sleep. The current two-watch system means that a licensed Pilot, because of increased demands on his time, finds it impossible even to follow existing law. A pilot who stands a 6 on and 6 off navigation watch is not in compliance with the 12-hour Rule, 46U.S. Code 8104h, if he has any other duties. However, he is often assigned as the Vessel Safety Officer, and also must see that everyone on the vessel complies with the company's safety management system. In addition he must also manage the crew endurance management system, and attend to other clerical and crew related duties. Safety management rules, where they exist, require unlicensed personnel to work up to 15 hours in any 24-hour period. When at a TSAC meeting in St. Louis, Mo, I suggested an addition to this rule requiring unlicensed personnel be allowed at least 6 hours of uninterrupted sleep in that same 24-hour period. I was refused. This mindset quickly becomes apparent to new recruits.

Another ignored part of the problem, Mariners in the past have always enthusiastically recruited for this industry. Fathers recruited their sons, sons recruited cousins, and others recruited their friends. This industry has been a trade industry. Like all trade industries families and social ties were very important. Fathers, both pilots and engineers, passed their skills to their sons or to friends. Boats became places where extended social units formed, with the support provided by such

units. Many boats drew their entire crews from the same location. This was instrumental to the past success of this industry. People who rode boats and then moved into management recognized this and did not interfere. Then, all of a sudden large corporations bought out small companies; many brought their own management. They lost the continuity gained over the years. New managers treated this industry, not as a trade industry, but as a floating factory. They destroyed all of the social units not only by splitting friends and family, but also by assigning many of them to a different boat every trip. This made it impossible for new social units to form. This one step tore the very soul out of this Industry. Social units can only form among people with similar backgrounds and interests. The definition in the Maritime Industry for "similar backgrounds" is becoming not where you grew up, but where you did hard time.

The factory management's reaction is first they downsize the crews by up to forty percent adding that responsibility to the remaining crew. Then because accidents increase, they come up with a paperwork cure, completely ignoring the fact they caused the problem by downsizing. They make the crew responsible for administering all the paperwork further increasing their load. They are at a loss to understand why people quit because they don't get enough sleep. The result is they have fewer crew with less experience because of recruiting problems and huge turnovers. The second reaction is to recruit parolees, persons on probation, and in drug rehab. This has exacerbated the problem. What sane person would want to live in a work environment where most of the people have already been convicted of acting outside the law? There are people on boats, in positions of authority, who now carry handguns. Other mariners lock themselves in their rooms when they go off watch, and carry all their valuables on their person. This is not exactly an environment a father would encourage his son to join. The final reaction, they add a new office position to identify a problem that is self-evident to all Mariners. The new person knows management won't accept any blame so any cure will just include more paperwork, and the problem grows. The cycle continues, and management still can't understand why nobody will work as a Mariner. This industry is now a true "Humpty Dumpty"; I am not convinced anyone can put it together again.

My proposed solution is a dialogue with Mariners whose advice will not be compromised because they fear retaliation from their employers. Management controls all Coast Guard advisory committees closing off all advice from people who live with the problems daily. It is up to Congress to level the playing field. Regulations forcing the entire Industry to provide adequate manning, ensure the Mariner has a safe work environment, and requires that all Mariners have the opportunity for 7 to 8 hours of uninterrupted rest as prescribed by the new Coast Guard Crew Endurance Manual and recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board more than eight years ago, are long overdue.

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