

## 1. Good leadership



Management aboard is essential for well-being and efficiency. In this chapter, we report on various managers' experience and thoughts on leadership.

## Management must be visible

Capt. Hildur Friis spends some of his time talking to the crew and giving them feedback on what he thinks of their work. He goes to the mess and says good morning while they are having breakfast and takes the opportunity to give them new orders or report other voyage-related matters. And if he does not turn up one day, they come to him themselves and ask, which as captain he greatly values.

“ I feel that visible management and good communication are my most important areas of focus as captain. You cannot sit hiding away in the office. All in all, it is about treating other people as you would like to be treated yourself; for example, shouting at people rarely helps. ”

*Hildur Friis, Captain*

Hildur Friis regularly visits the cook to ask about the food. The cook is not used to such interest, from the skipper or anybody else. But if no one talks to the cook, then how can he know what the crew really think about the food?

“ I have in fact had many colleagues sit and complain about the food and when I ask: "So have you been out to tell him?" then it is: "How could he possibly not know" etc. But as long as no one says anything, how can he know?" ”

*Hildur Friis, Captain*

Chief Officer Nikolaj Larsen serves on a passenger vessel. Officers do not spend so much time on deck and therefore may not be so much in tune with the crew. So they need to be especially aware of being visible and communicating with the crew.



*Visible management and good communication are essential.*

“ It is easy enough to spend the whole day on administration. So you need to take special care to take the time to get out on deck during the day. ”

Nikolaj Larsen, Chief Officer

### Common management approach

Rotating management teams is a special challenge as a manager on a ship. Getting management to function as a single team means you need to spend some time in getting to know each other.

Aboard Nikolaj Larsen's ship, they try to ensure that the same officers do not always sail as management. The reason for this is to avoid having two teams fighting each other, saying that the others are stupid because they do things differently. In order to generate a little continuity, they plan on having an overlap so that the skipper and chief officer do not change at the same time but do so a week apart. This means that time and energy have to be spent on adjusting to each other in the management team.

“ If I'm used to sailing with skipper A and then get to serve under skipper B, the routines and ways of doing things are often different. It can take a couple of days to find one's feet and send some "don't tread" signals. The ordinary seamen may possibly see this as some small "upsets" and think we do not have things fully under control. But we don't have big problems. Management just need to be aware of it. ”

Nikolaj Larsen, Chief Officer

It is important for management to discuss thoroughly how to manage the vessel and role allocation in the team. If crew are uncertain about who to report to, it can give rise to conflicts in management and amongst the rest of the crew. Capt. Gert Christensen has had the same thoughts.

“ If we in senior management get on well, so will the ship. On the other hand, if we are discontented and disagree on management, then the ship in general will suffer. ”

Gert Christensen, Captain

When management agrees, it is easier to give clear messages to the rest of the crew. It is also important to have the opportunity, and the time, to hand over the vessel to the next crew. If everybody in management agrees on the core things aboard, it makes handing over much easier because we agree on what we need to tell the others.

So it is also important to have a dialogue with the company to get the opportunity to have a proper hand-over between the various management teams. And all in all, it is essential to have a dialogue with the company about the conditions and framework for influencing well-being and welfare aboard.

▶ ▶ See part 2: Toolkit section: Good Management/  
Unanimous ship management makes for a better vessel ▶ ▶

### **Create respect and co-determination.**

Engineer Francisco Caquilala Cuardo thinks that it is important for management to create a good atmosphere aboard. It means that you can go to anybody and ask anything and be taken seriously. It is also essential for the Chief Engineer to respect his area of responsibility and how it should be managed. And especially that he asks permission when he wants to use some of Francisco's men from his department.

“ It is OK if he wants to use them for a job but he must ask me, not just take them. I have also seen that people I counted on to do something in my department were suddenly working on other things without my knowledge. ”

*Francisco Caquilala Cuardo, Engineer*

Francisco Caquilala Cuardo also emphasizes the importance of the captain asking what the crew need.

“ It is his attitude to many things, the fact that he asks us and involves us in some things. ”

*Francisco Caquilala Cuardo, Engineer*

One small detail that means so much for the Filipino crew is that the captain asks what film the crew would like to watch.

“ We all pay the same for films so it is extra important that there is something people would like to watch. In the old system, we just got films that we might have already seen but then the captain helped change the system. ”

*Francisco Caquilala Cuardo, Engineer*

### **Deal with conflicts**

Capt. Gert Christensen also feels that good leadership is about getting involved if there are problems or if something is brewing, like conflicts or some other dissatisfaction aboard.

“ If there is something important or there are problems, I speak to my senior officers individually. ”

*Gert Christensen, Captain*

▶ ▶ See part 2: Conflict management/ Mediation ▶ ▶

### **Generate commitment by delegation**

Chief Officer Helle Barner Jespersen trains mates aboard the Georg Stage. She has noted that many newly employed officers come back to the George Stage and are frustrated about not being able to use all their knowledge of new technology, for example, or radar and new electronic charts in practice.

“ Good leadership is about delegating according to competencies and giving the young challenges. It is part of the key to the mental working environment. Good leadership is not about a manager's own needs and profile but about making the vessel function the best possible way and as a total entity. But aboard many vessels, the chief officer stands there saying that it is him who decides because he is the most senior, even though the young people may know more than he does. Chief Officers are often busy and often make rules on things that the young know could be done better. ”

Helle Barner Jespersen, Chief Officer

Challenges for the crew provide commitment in daily routines. But pitching delegation and challenges at the right level is a major task. Too few challenges make people passive and too much of that leads to stress.

“ Aboard the George Stage the challenge they get is when I say this is your task. I am there if you are in doubt and then I am sure we will work it out. But I expect you to come and say that you cannot manage it. That is precisely the ethos we try to teach them aboard. You cannot know everything even when you have three or four rings on your sleeve. People need to be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. ”

Helle Barner Jespersen, Chief Officer



Make an effort to make new crew welcome.

### Focus on new crew and what they can do

Similarly, Capt. Lars Peter Jensen feels that things should start with the individual, even though you might like to have everybody to be experts. Newly joined cadets must feel welcome aboard and management need to pay special attention to ensuring they get the right training and experience.

“It would be a shame to frighten them away from the sector and sometimes we need to lower our expectations so that people feel they are successful.”

Lars Peter Jensen, Captain

▶▶ See part 2: Communication and information/ New crew aboard ▶▶

### **Establish ownership for solutions**

Chief Engineer John Agathon tries to work on the basis that people can solve problems by themselves.

“I never suggest quick solutions. I ask a few relevant questions to get people to suggest a solution to the problem and we can then discuss it. When they suggest solutions themselves, ownership is clear immediately and it works differently than when a solution imposed on them. That is also how I react myself.”

John Agathon, Chief Engineer

John Agathon has often seen that just a little communication or getting people involved can resolve or turn around a difficult situation. Crew often have enormous resources hidden away which are not used and that is a shame.

Capt. Lars Peter Jensen feels that it is a basic principle that as captain, you should not take a high hand.

“As captain, I can get lots of things pushed through and the law will support me but it is much better to reach another solution some other way. Obviously if we need to turn to starboard, people must obey and it is not up for discussion. But if work is involved and there is time for reflection, then I try to get them to go along with me. It makes things much easier.”

Lars Peter Jensen, Captain

### **5 tips**

- Like master, like man. Ensure that your management style gets reflected throughout the vessel.
- Be visible and spend time talking to everybody.
- Listen and let people speak. Be aware of the signals being given by crew. Dictatorial systems do not work.
- Assess the abilities of individuals and give them duties they can perform.
- You cannot decide for yourself who is aboard so make the best of those you sail with.