Going to Sea and Being Prepared for Life

When you go to sea, you will be prepared for life! And I cannot think of any other group of professionals, including astronauts, who can match the spread and depth of preparation that seafarers get.

At sea, the seafarer is the person on the spot to ensure that all systems work. For a cargo ship, the systems include propulsion, power generation, fuel supply, air supply, hydraulic power, cooling and lubrication, steering, navigation, communications, cargo handling and fire fighting. Other than the handful of fellow seafarers on board, he does not have others on hand to turn to for help should anything fail. And should a system fail, the seafarer has to use and improvise with whatever he/she can muster to get the ship moving again and complete its journey. In such situations, what is learnt in the classroom or ashore suddenly become very much alive. What is forgotten or not learnt has to be learnt or discovered in double quick time!

As a result, most seafarers become fast learners of how things work and what's important. They acquire the skill of being able to assess any situation quickly and decide on the best course of action. And if one action fails, they will not hesitate to try another. Thus, they become decisive and practical people. The saying, "If the ship does not move, you move!" will be well driven home to the seafarer who encounters his first "problem" at sea.

Many landlubbers often forget that a community of between 20 to 35 persons, mostly men and between 20 and 70 year old man a ship. They need to eat, sleep, socialise, relax and live. The ship is a floating island and has to cater to all these needs. Most seafarers end up good cooks and entertainers! They are also experts with life-support systems – food preservation, fresh water generation, plumbing, sewage removal and air conditioning. You have to get along well with others for long periods and in close quarters. If not, survival needs will make you fast learners of how to "read" people. You will acquire high EQ - emotional intelligence unless you choose to be a loner.

Thus, over time, a seafarer becomes an all-purpose professional. The marine engineer will be good at nearly all flavours of engineering – mechanical, electrical, electronics, hydraulics, pneumatics and communications. The deck officer becomes good leaders. For all seafarers, they should be consulted on safety and would be valued for their teamwork and people skills.

Most landlubbers know that a cargo ship carries cargo from one port to another. They would take for granted that the ship will deliver the cargo over long distances to arrive at their destinations safely and on time. And they could because most ships do despite the odds against the sea and Murphy's Law. Odds that are overcome by a team of resourceful professionals!

And when the seafarer finally comes ashore, he will be sought after. The enlightened knows that the seafarer had been prepared for life – technically through his daily work, socially through having to work and live interdependently with others in tight situations and humanly after having seen the World and experienced its diverse needs, cultures and values.

It is a very smart move to go to sea!

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