The key to a problem is not the KEY

What I am about to relate has not much to do with Engineering. It is more of a way to handle a real situation. For those non religious, they can take it as instinct, sixth sense or common sense.

It was sometime in 1974 on Neptune Topaz. While at sea we needed to run 2 out of 3 M.A.N generators. We could do a complete overhaul of Number 3 Generator as it was due. We started stripping down the set in the morning with a greaser and a fireman during my 0800-1200 hrs watch. We continued after lunch and completed dismantling around 1700 hrs. I went for my dinner and came down at 1730 hrs to relieve the 4 to 8, 4th Engineer, for his dinner. Everything seemed normal. However, sometime during the middle of my night watch around 2100 to 2200hrs, Number 2 Generator tripped, causing the lost of air conditioning in the accommodation. The engine room blowers were down and we were on emergency lighting. The reefer cargo of a full load of raw shark fin had to be kept at minus 18 deg C. Thus we were in a dire situation.

We started to trace the cause for the trip. For some reason the Chief Engineer suspected the fuel injector and in the process of removing the injectors we found one of the unit had its spray nipple sheared off. This allowed the injector cooling water to flow into the piston/liner thus causing the engine failure. The broken nipple was eventually found lodged at the turbo charger nozzle ring and fortunately did not damage the turbine. Next what was we thought would be the easiest part for restoring power but turned out to be hell for some people. The Chief Engineer asked the 2nd Engineer to retrieve the spare injector from the spares cupboard. The 2nd Engineer after checking his overall pocket decided to run to his cabin. After disappearing for more than half an hour, came down and said he could not find the bunch of keys. The Chief told him to go and search again. He did but again returned without the key. By this time, the Chief Engineer was shouting louder than the main engine, calling the second engineer (an Indian from India) all sorts of names both in English and Polish!

Now come the best part. This 2nd Engineer who had a combined Steam and Motor COC, and who could remember where in John Lamb and Milton's text book whatever topic you named, now could not remember where he left the store key. Now come the funny part. He was so frustrated for not finding the key and getting all the shouting from the Chief that he took a 2-pound hammer from among the tools that were lying around, and he started banging at the floor plate. I was squatting next to him and as I could not take the additional noise, snatched the hammer from him, walked up to store cupboard smashed the lock which was slightly bigger than the chicken testicle.

So as my subject title suggests, the KEY is not the solution to the problem, it is the lock opener. We had grinders, hacksaws and all sort of tools. We even had oxy-acetylene. Yet we suffered at least 2 hours, in the heat, darkness and noise, looking for the small key! I left it to the 3rd Engineer to take over my watch, and those who had rested more than me to finish up the job for I had contributed more than my share in saving that load of shark fins from becoming garbage.

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