

Maritime careers – Getting on board

Encouraging young people on board and beyond

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Even as the world changes around us, the maritime sector remains essential – yet as a career option, it is one that is overlooked by younger generations. The sea, once considered a symbol of adventure and prosperity, now carries a reputation for long separations, emotional stress, and unclear career progression. While some of these concerns are valid, they don't reflect the full picture. Modern shipping is technologically advanced, globally connected, and offers exciting opportunities for professional development, as my own career shows.

If the maritime industry is to continue to thrive, we need to create an understanding of the many opportunities that are available both at sea and for those who later wish to transfer to a shore career – and an enthusiasm for those opportunities.

From deck to office: A personal transition

I began my own maritime journey as a deck cadet in 2013 with Stolt Tankers BV, joining their cadetship program while studying in maritime academy. In 2016 I became a third officer, following in my father's footsteps. He was a captain on board a refrigeration vessel, and from childhood I was steeped in the maritime atmosphere, hearing a lot of sea stories. Yet, after gaining experience, I start thinking about possibilities to transfer into shore-based position.

In 2022 I received an offer from the crewing agency and training centre where I started my maritime career, and decided to move into a shore-based role in maritime recruitment – a move that allowed me to engage with aspiring seafarers and continue my career in the maritime sector. Along the way, I studied for my MBA, which helped me to understand some aspects of business and how large organisations work. Nowadays we have a lot of opportunities to get additional education, even while working at sea. It is all about motivation and self-development.

Why did I decide to remain within the maritime industry? Having had an education in the maritime sector; I had a very useful experience as an OOW on board modern oil/chemical tankers and I really enjoyed working there. In order not to lose my experience I decided not to completely change industry away from one where I had already developed knowledge and expertise. This dual perspective – sea and shore – has helped me understand both the challenges and the untapped opportunities in maritime careers. We need to make sure that young people at sea understand the value of that experience, both now and in the future.

Facing the mental challenge

One of the most effective tools for encouraging young people to join the maritime field is cadetship. The maritime industry needs educated, smart, and motivated people. These programmes bridge the gap between

education and real-world practice.

As someone who now works closely with cadets during recruitment, I see the transformative power of cadetship programmes. They provide:

- Structured and clear prospects for future jobs;
- Mentorship from professionals;
- Confidence in career planning.

More than just training, cadetship programmes offer reassurance. They show young people that they won't be thrown into unfamiliar waters alone – that support and guidance are part of the journey.

One critical issue that cannot be ignored is the mental health aspect of life at sea. Long contracts, cultural isolation, and homesickness are very real challenges, especially for newcomers. During my time on board, I saw cadets with high motivation to grow up and continue their maritime career on board the vessel. As a recruiter, however, I was faced with situations where some cadets lost their motivation and desire to continue sailing already after their first voyage. Why is this happening? There are several aspects that may have influenced their decision to quit sailing:

- Separation from family and friends – young people are not ready to feel comfortable away from their close friends and families, especially in our globalised society
- Mental health challenges – life at sea is not the same as working from the office.
- Lack of social life – usually there

is a lack of social life and activities on board. Looking at your friends' Instagram stories, sometimes it is hard to understand that your next party will take place only in a couple of months. There may even be no internet on board at all.

- Unpredictable contracts – it is becoming increasingly common to have very short contracts, possibly as few as 2-3 months. Normally cadets have a six-month contract, and realise that they will have to look for short contracts in the future. The tension of continually working contracts of 4-6 months or fewer pushes cadets to think about shore-based jobs.
- Better shore-based opportunities, roles in crewing, fleet management, training, and consultancy offer comparable salaries with more stability.

Improving retention

What can the shipping industry do in order to keep cadets to continue working at sea beyond that first contract – and to keep them within the maritime industry when they do come ashore, rather than losing those skills altogether? To address this, we must create an environment where mental wellness is part of the professional culture on board. That includes:

- Integrating psychological resilience training into maritime education;
- Providing onboard mentorship with a structured programme;
- Ensuring at-sea access to communication, recreation, and community;
- Offering clear pathways to transition ashore if desired.

Preparing cadets for their first contact should be done in a supportive, convenient and professional manner. The very first contract will affect how a young seafarer views the industry – and shape their future career. A mentally strong workforce is a safer, more motivated workforce. And for young people, knowing that their well-being matters makes the career far more appealing.

Beyond the sea

A maritime career isn't just about sailing – it's about opening doors. From my own transition from deck officer to shore-based professional, I've seen how sea experience can evolve into leadership roles in crewing, operations, training, safety, or logistics.

Shipping companies and the maritime professionals and experts they employ should promote the shore based maritime careers they offer. Cadets and junior officers will see that there are clear and transparent opportunities to work within the maritime sector. Rather than losing the benefit of their hard-won experience developed over years on board, they can keep it and be proud of it. It's this flexibility that we must highlight when speaking to young people today.

For me, the decision to stay within the shipping industry changed my life. The time I spent on board has helped me develop an invaluable understanding of ship operations and life at sea; experience which you cannot get anywhere else. That experience helps me communicate more effectively with both seafarers and clients – a key reason to actively hire ex-seafarers for shore-based operations.

Of course it is not easy. Life at sea is completely different and you have to adjust yourself mentally to come

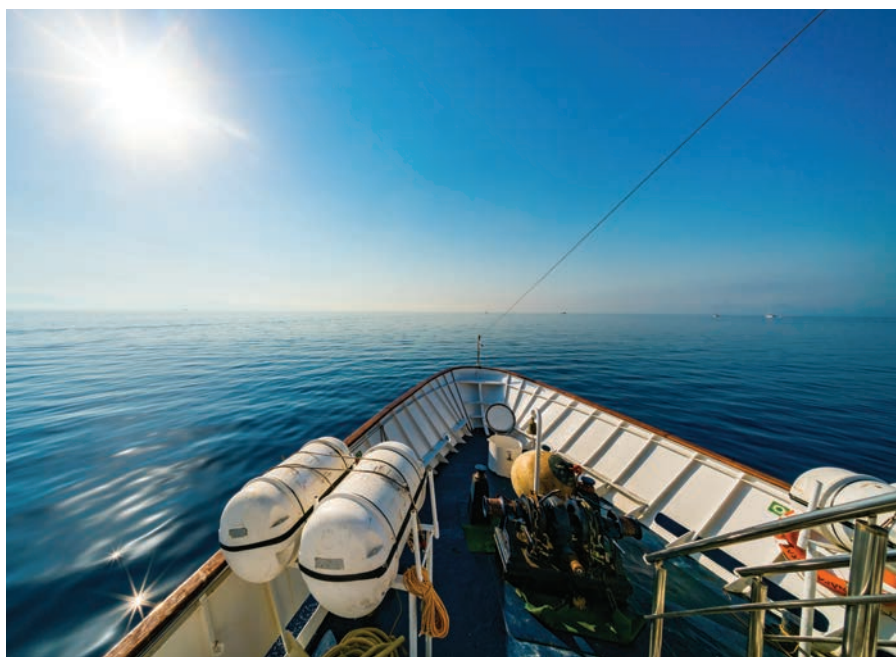
ashore, just as you do to go to sea in the first place. It would be good practice to provide short term assignments in the office for seafarers looking to try their hand at shore-based roles. Seafarers should be flexible in their career especially today, when we have so many possibilities to work on board different types of vessels and in shore-based positions, and companies should enable that flexibility.

A career built on purpose

Shipping is more than just moving cargo across the seas. It's about learning to make the right decisions under pressure, taking responsibility, building resilience, and being part of crew as a team player. The same aspects are valuable being a manager ashore.

To inspire and retain the next generation of maritime professionals, we must share real stories, support their mental resilience, offer structured career opportunities, and highlight both sea and shore-based career options.

The sea still offers great opportunities. It offers a career built on responsibility, global connection, and purpose. But it's the responsibility of those of us already in the industry to make that vision clear, supportive, and attainable for those who will one day take the helm both at sea and ashore.



We need to show cadets shipping offers a bright future ahead