

## In Fulfilling the need for Future Mariners

# *Apprenticeships are the Solution*

### **Marine Manning: A Vocational Approach Through Marine Apprentices**

**By Gregg Trunnell**

Just the other day, an executive at a well-regarded and firmly established tugboat company in the Pacific Northwest remarked to me that the biggest challenge facing their ongoing efforts to grow and prosper was the critical shortage of competent, well-trained officers. Predictably, and in this ongoing climate of good times in the marine industry in general, their solution to this issue was to recruit from and depend on the professional training given by their competitors. This is a sad and more importantly, an alarming metric that rings true for the vast majority of offshore, brownwater and tug and barge operators in the domestic, American marine trades.

Absent a substantial internal budget that will provide the ability to grow a professional and structured program to recruit, train, and advance—and just as importantly, retain—mariners into the wheelhouse, there are only limited options available to most small to mid-size operators. These options include:

- Borrowing from your competitors;
- Hire a recent graduate from a traditional Maritime Academy; or
- Promote through the traditional Hawsepiper.

Each has inherent drawbacks and merits. Typically, the management style and background of the operator's executive team will dictate how and why recruiting is done in a particular fashion. And while there is little to be gained by dismissing any or all of these choices out-of-hand, it is also worth mentioning that this segment of the maritime industry is rapidly evolving, and because of this, new ideas for the Maritime Industry in the area of Recruitment, Placement, Advancement and Retention of mariners are showing significant promise.

It is important to first examine the trends that are already impacting the ability of marine operators in every sector of the maritime industry to hire, promote and

retain commercial mariners—especially officers. An aging workforce and the exploding global demand for mariners have now combined to create the perfect storm which, unchecked, will soon rob industry of its core of officers. Along with this will come the wholesale loss of talent and experience as desperate boat owners fill the gap with less-than-qualified and inexperienced help. Indeed, according to a study conducted on the U.S. West Coast by the Pacific Coast Maritime Consortium, the average age of U.S. licensed merchant mariners is now 43 years and that statistic is only expected to worsen as this decade moves quickly to a close.

According to the Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO), the maritime industry will experience a worldwide shortage of 27,000 ships' officers by the year 2015. The sobering statistic has been exacerbated by the impending retirement of millions of baby boomers and the reality that fewer young people are choosing to enter the industry. Beyond this, the U.S. maritime industry is expected to be especially hard hit. It is more than ironic that the American mariner, long thought to be overpaid and too expensive for flag of convenience operators, is now being actively sought for a wide range of marine platforms. A markedly weaker U.S. dollar has opened the door for a myriad of foreign tonnage operators, all of whom are struggling with same problems facing the Jones Act trades, to hire suddenly affordable - and yes - top-notch talent.

Notwithstanding, the more than competitive wages being offered by flag of convenience operators, there are also significant tax advantages for mariners spending most of their time outside the United States. The recent effort by the U.S. Maritime Administration to induce such venerable operators as SeaRiver, APL and Maritrans to provide berths for American maritime academy cadets is telling. These developments come in the immediate wake



**2006 - 2008 Workboat Academy Students.**

of the MarAd arm-twisting of hopeful LNG terminal operators to give similar consideration in exchange for an accelerated application process. Eventually, cadets become licensed officers and motivated operators of any flag will hire the talent that they know and the brand loyalty learned by cadets during their formative training should not be discounted.

It is more than clear that U.S. mariners in significant numbers will soon be populating a fair percentage of the world's deepsea fleets. Indeed, the largest of our maritime unions are already lobbying hard to get their members employed on foreign flag vessels. As the U.S. Jones Act fleet continues to retract and the global demand for qualified LNG officers expands, the labor side of the equation continues to be a robust "sellers" market. This reality in turn extends into every sector of the domestic marine markets, including but not limited to the so-called brown-water, tug & barge, offshore supply and other inland categories.

#### **Defining the Challenge**

The focused objective of any marine operator should be to employ a maritime officer that possesses both a strong work ethic and an aptitude for leadership, the proper respect for safety above all things and one that has the

necessary qualifications for the job description. But none of that will mean very much unless there is a strong commitment to the long term retention of that mariner, as fostered by the employer.

This objective, believe it or not, can be achieved. At the Pacific Maritime Institute (PMI) in Seattle, WA, the challenge is already being met through a unique Apprenticeship program. And, the PMI Workboat Academy is the place to start.

#### **A Proven Apprenticeship Model**

The U.S. Department of Labor defines an Apprenticeship as a program "that is sponsored by employers and others who can actually hire and train individuals in the workplace, and it combines hands-on training on the job with related theoretical instruction." When maritime employers in Seattle came together to discuss the issue of recruitment and retention and collectively decided to support an Apprenticeship Model through the Workboat Academy ([www.workboatacademy.com](http://www.workboatacademy.com)), the most significant change to how mariners are educated in this country in more than a century was born. This program combines 25 weeks of classroom, lab and simulation instruction with one year of structured on-board training, utilizing a training record book.

### **Candidate Selection: Identification & Selection in Cooperation**

A Program Advisory Committee (PAC), comprised of participating companies and the PMI Workboat Academy itself, identifies target candidates. Often, these include displaced workers, second career and retired military. The program also works hard to simply identify those who are looking for an entry point into the maritime industry. PMI identified the Internet as the ideal conduit for this recruiting effort, utilizing specific keywords to attract individuals interested in becoming an officer. Through the Workboat Academy Web site and discussions with a program advisor, the candidate is then educated about the industry and the specific companies that are engaging apprentices.

The program advisor looks closely at specific, relevant experience in each candidate. This can include sailing, fishing, transportation and/or management experience. Once the Program Advisor is convinced that the candidate is making an educated decision about the industry and the company(s) they are interested in, an appointment with the prospective mariner employer is arranged and the candidate participates in a formal interview process. An important aspect of this process is that the final selection is made by the company and not the Academy.

### **Academic Training: Foundations for a Safe Introduction to a Life at Sea**

Once the candidate is selected by the company, the apprentice pays the tuition to the Workboat Academy and training commences. The first academic phase consists of two weeks of training encompassing survival skills, personal and social responsibility, first aid, safety, firefighting, leadership, rules of the road, line-handling and related simulation.

### **Sea-Phase I: Probation & Evaluation**

Following completion of the initial academic orientation, the apprentice then starts the first Sea-Phase, where they are given 12 weeks to receive 8 weeks of actual sea time. This first sea-phase period is probationary and the majority of apprentices are paid a flat compensation of \$845 during this time.

After two months, the apprentice is evaluated by the vessels officers, a Port Captain and the Workboat Academy. If the company is comfortable with the apprentice's per-

formance and he/she has completed their on board training, the Apprentice then elevated to full time status as either a deckhand or deckhand/cook and is accordingly paid the going day rate for all further sea-time as an Apprentice.

### **Producing a Qualified and Loyal Officer**

The balance of the Workboat Academy training includes another 20 weeks of classroom and laboratory training, as well as three weeks of Simulation training that is coordinated with ten additional months of actual sea time. Graduates of the current program receive—after sitting for the appropriate U.S. Coast guard examination—a license as a Mate 1600 GRT Near Coastal or a Mate 500 Oceans license with a Mate of Towing endorsement if the corresponding sea time was accomplished on tugboats. For those individuals that work on vessels of more than 500 GRT, a Mate 1600 GRT Oceans license is earned upon graduation from the program.

### **Building on the Workboat Academy Model**

PMI and the Workboat Academy are currently developing an Apprenticeship to the level of Able Seaman Limited. This program will combine twelve weeks of classroom, laboratory and simulation training interspersed with six months of structured on-board training, working in the capacity of deckhand. Graduates will receive an Able Seaman Limited ticket, with full STCW endorsements.

### **Apprentices are the Solution**

Apprentice training is more than a concept; it is a proven solution to the challenge of finding and retaining qualified employees. Recent case studies by numerous government organizations discuss compelling evidence that apprenticeships deliver strong business benefits, as benchmarked in the key areas of productivity, staff retention, reduced costs and a more diverse workforce. In fact, at BAE Systems, candidates taken from formal apprenticeship programs regularly fulfilled tasks correctly the first time at a rate of 85 percent, while external recruits had recorded a success of 60 percent.

A recent study by the Learning and skills network in the UK found that people who complete an apprenticeship ultimately earn more money, stay longer with employers and are more likely to rise to management.



**The Maritime Technology & Career Center, Seattle Wash.**

### **International Cadet Requirements: A Global Perspective**

International Shipping Federation (ISF) President Spyros Polemis recently chaired the annual ISF Manning and Training Conference on September 12, 2007 in London. Particular attention was given to the shortages of suitably qualified seafarers in many shipping sectors due to the rapid expansion of orders for new ships, as well as the need for at least one officer cadet to be carried on board every vessel. Captain Pradeep Chawla, of Anglo Eastern Ship Management, said the officer shortage was now so acute that radical action was required. In a speech given to the Asia-Pacific Manning & Training Conference, he warned that owners will need to double the number of cadets to keep pace with the world's new-building backorder book. He went as far as to say that an International Convention introducing rules to force companies to take cadets would be the only way to tackle the problems associated with "far too many companies which do not train any officers and only resort to poaching". His comments, of course, only reinforce what we already know: the best way to develop competent and loyal mariners is from within, using an apprentice system that is as old as time itself. It is way past time to incorporate the Apprentice concept to your recruiting and training program. To do otherwise merely perpetuates the growing problem of scarcity of qualified seafarers. The "status quo" option, obviously, represents no option at all.

### **About the Author**

Gregg Trunnell opened the Pacific Maritime Institute after an eight-year career at Sea where he worked primarily on Tankers with West Coast Shipping. Trunnell holds a Masters 1600 GRT, a Chief Mate Unlimited License and a Bachelors of Science Degree in both Marine Transportation and Business Administration.



He is also currently enrolled at the Seattle Pacific University for his Masters in Non-Profit Leadership Management. Trunnell's most recent work has been to assist companies with Recruitment and Retention problems. Under his direction, PMI has created a new division called the Workboat Academy. As of January, 2008 the Workboat Academy will have 70 students enrolled in a two year Apprenticeship Program working towards their Inspected Mates License with Full STCW and Mate Of Towing Endorsements with fourteen tow-boat and OSV companies. You can reach him at gtrunnell@mates.org