

HR management becomes paramount on ships

Masters and Sailors have to keep an open mind to maintain harmony on board: *Laxmi Chaudhry*

.....By Anil Nair

Laxmi Chaudhry is a global citizen in every sense. Born in Tanzania and brought up in England she is proficient in four Indian languages though her ancestors belong to Punjab. She has worked in UK, Europe and across Asia Pacific. She is Director of 1 Stop HR, a company that helps organizations in recruitment of candidates at all levels, HR strategy and planning, HR policies and procedures, Performance Management training and implementation, tackling issues connected with employment law and compliance, providing Cross Cultural Awareness training besides helping in change management divestment & acquisition. But talking to her on human resource management makes one feel that she is probably endowed with the rare quality of understanding both the worlds -- the East and the West. When she spoke to the Marine World she was insistent that human resource management of seafarers is even more critical than in corporate offices on land. Anil Nair found out the details in an exclusive chat with her when she was on a recent visit to Mumbai.



Excerpts:

TMW: Can you tell us how important is human resource management in a ship, especially for the higher officers and the captain?

Laxmi Chaudhry: The importance of human resource management in a vessel emanates from the fact that shipping companies have to employ a large number of people from varied cultures, working in a closeted environment, away from home for long periods of time. There are differences in language,

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nationalities and cultural nuances. It is actually a tough task for both the higher-up officers as well as the crew for varying reasons. We have seen many instances of mishandling of situations on the high seas which can result in often tragic consequences.

TMW: What kind of behaviour should the officers as well as the crew follow so as to maintain harmony during sailing.

Laxmi Chaudhry: The captain and the officers who manage the

people on the vessel have to understand the needs of the sailors and try to resolve them. There is a big difference between the job on a ship and those on land. If an employee in any company on land is dissatisfied or does not like the culture of the company he is working for, he can move jobs which suit his culture. On a ship, the sailors are held up in the same vessel with the same people for three months to six months at a stretch and without a break. Also, on land, one spends his time in the office for not more than ten hours. The rest of the time he has for himself which he can spend with people he likes, such as family or friends thus, the management issues on ship become paramount to maintain harmony on board. After all, a good voyage also tells on the bottom-line of the company.

TMW: And about the cadets, how should they try to bring about a successful voyage?

Laxmi Chaudhry: The cadets too, have to mingle with various cultures and languages of people working with them and they should assiduously maintain a working relationship with the team. The best thing for a person from a minority is that he should try to make others understand the positive side of his culture or belief. At the same time he should keep an open mind about people around him. Stereotyping does not help anyone. The cadets should also talk to each other and understand the diversity in a positive light. Here I would like to state

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that Indians have an edge over others because we are born and brought up in a diverse country where we live with varied cultures, languages and creed. That helps us to manage diversity.

TMW: What are the other advantages of being Indian on board a ship?

Laxmi Chaudhry: By nature Indians are risk-takers, innovative and adaptable to various cultures. Secondly, we have a strong English speaking population, which is an edge over competitors. Also, by nature Indians do have a hierarchical culture and adapt well to procedures and following instructions. These traits help Indians to succeed in the shipping industry.

The shipping companies while recruiting a cadet should also, in addition to psychometric tests, try to assess the suitability of the candidate as a team player.

Finally, Ms Chaudhry said that good HR practice as well as cross cultural awareness on board ship will help to motivate staff. This is critical in the marine industry which faces staff shortages and so the ability to recruit well and retain good staff is imperative.

Laxmi Chaudhry can be contacted on email laxmi@1stophr.net

T: +44 (0) 1628 630064, M: +44 (0) 7793 742767

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