

# The Right Crew – Attract

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## Loss Prevention Briefing Series – The Right Crew

- 1 The Right Crew - Attract
- 2 The Right Crew - Recruit
- 3 The Right Crew - Retain

### Disclaimer

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## Introduction

This briefing, the first in our ‘The Right Crew’ series, is aimed at assisting North Members to **attract the ‘right’ crew**. It is complemented by two further briefings that deal with **Selection, Recruitment and Retention** of the ‘right’ crew.

The ‘right’ crew for your operations will, of course, depend on the type of vessels you operate, where you operate them, the demands of the sector(s) you operate in, and your own company preferences. The briefings are not a ‘how to’ but rather are intended to stimulate thought and discussion by highlighting good practice and innovative ideas.

The briefings in the series are based around Elements 3 and 3A of TMSA which states that ‘ship’s crews are at the heart of efforts to improve safety and the protection of the environment. It is vital that crew members are motivated, trained, qualified and competent to carry out their roles’.

Please send any feedback or good ideas to [loss.prevention@nepia.com](mailto:loss.prevention@nepia.com)

# Attracting the 'Right Crew'?

## Crew Availability

With respect to ratings there is no current or future shortage forecast. However, the picture with respect to officers is much less clear. There is considerable uncertainty as to the likely trend in seafarer availability over the next five years.

Forecasters agree that there is currently a small shortfall in the numbers of officers required.

For example according to the recently published BIMCO/ISF Manpower Report 2015 despite an increase in supply over the past five years there is currently a 2.1% shortage of officers.

	2015 <b>Officers</b>	2015 <b>Ratings</b>
<b>Supply</b>	774,000	873,500
<b>Demand</b>	790,500	754,500
Shortage	-16,500	Surplus 119,000
	-2.1%	15.8%

Table 1: BIMCO Manpower Report 2015 – Crew supply and demand situation in 2015

## Future Crew Availability

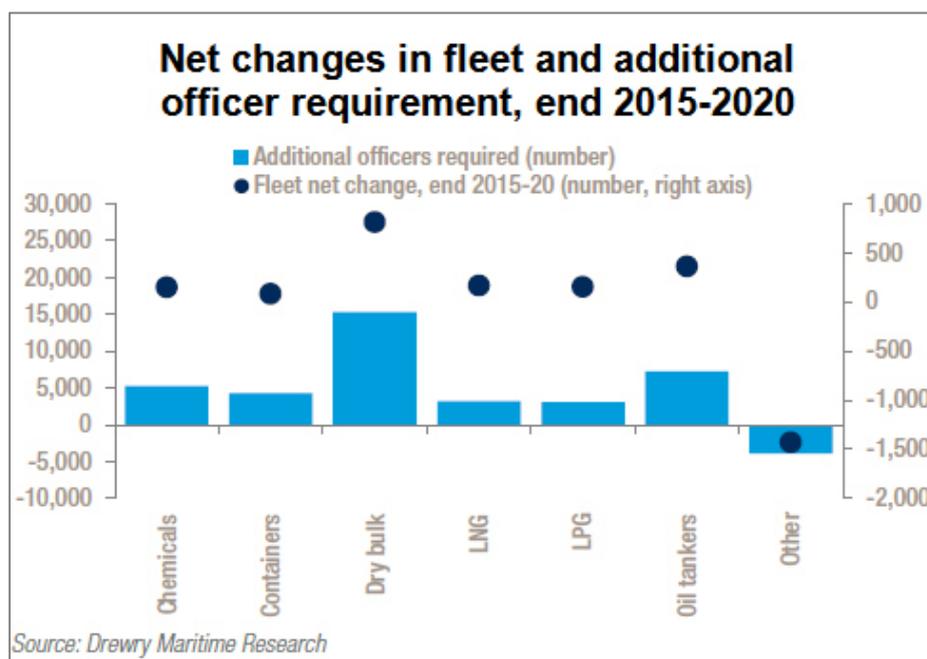
The BIMCO/ISF report indicates that the forecast growth in the world merchant fleet over the next ten years, and its anticipated demand for seafarers, will likely exacerbate the trend of an overall shortage in the supply of officers. Conversely [Drewry's](#) latest report 'Manning 2016' takes a different view and predicts that the officer shortfall will ease to about one third of present levels by 2020 due to the slowdown in fleet growth. Both reports still forecast officer shortages in 2020 but they differ widely as to the extent of the shortage.

Whatever the future holds it is clear that those owners seeking to employ the 'right crew' still need to attract sufficient numbers and quality crew to their company.

	2015 <b>Officers</b>	2020 <b>Officers</b>	2025 <b>Officers</b>
<b>Supply</b>	774,000	789,500	805,000
<b>Demand</b>	790,500	881,500	952,500
Shortage	-16,500	Shortage -92,000	Shortage -147,500
	-2.1%	-11.7%	-18.3%

Table 2: BIMCO/ISF Manpower Report 2015 – Estimated Supply-Demand for officers

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Where demand exceeds supply more or less all STCW certificated officers can expect to find employment as owners are under pressure to crew their ships. It is therefore inevitable that there will be a percentage of officers, who will be well below average in terms of ability and/or attitude, who circulate in the employment market. These are the people that can introduce inefficiencies and risks to your organisation - the 'wrong' crew. Employ the 'wrong' crew and the consequences can be very costly.

There is considerable competition to attract the 'right crew'. All crew will have STCW certificates – this series of briefings is about looking at ideas to assist you to employ the 'right' crew for your ship.

This briefing deals with how to attract the 'right' crew. The second briefing explores selection and recruitment. The final briefing of the series deals with retention of your key assets – your best people.

Many of the suggestions in this briefing – Attract - will have a cross-over into and be further developed in the 'retain' Loss Prevention briefing.

## Attracting Crew – How to Get Plenty of Interested Crew to Select From

The focus of the various manpower reports is on quantity and focuses on the number of officers and ratings in global supply. Whilst quantity will always be an issue where there is a supply shortage, this series of briefings provides ideas about ensuring the crew you hire are of sufficient quality i.e. they are 'right' for your organisation.

In the crew selection and recruitment briefing we suggest that the key to getting the 'right' crew is to filter out the 'wrong' crew as you start with the selection process and go through the recruitment process.

Before you can do this the challenge is to attract a sufficient pool of crew and from them you can select the 'right' crew with the personality, attitude, and experience to do a job properly and consistently.

There are industry barriers to attracting crew and addressing the shortfall in the supply of officers. Improved training, more respect for seafaring as a career, a more positive image for the maritime sector are just some of the issues which need to be addressed if the industry is to attract better qualified young people to a career at sea, to retain them, and then to see them come ashore to work in the vital 'support' industries.

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## Industry Issues

The industry needs to continue to re-establish the general respect for and status of the people who are prepared to leave their homes and families for many months at a time to operate complex and expensive ships in an often difficult and hostile environment. Restoring the respect and status of a job in the merchant navy should help to attract people to go to sea not simply because it is a job, but because it offers a career and one in which they can have pride, earn respect and find the opportunity for professional development.

Ship operators can play their part by making their fleets much more attractive to young people – a poor public perception of the industry does nothing to help. There is no doubt that a major challenge facing the shipping industry today is the recruitment and retention of sufficient qualified and competent seafarers.

To make your fleet more attractive to people entering the industry or to existing crew there are some questions to think about:

How do you attract bright young people into an industry that might be poorly perceived? Can you differentiate your company? How can careers and life at sea be altered to take into account family life and the need for regular communication?

Having a robust policy for working hours, fatigue and paperwork can make a fleet more attractive to job hunting crew. Those crew with the right personality and attitude will have identified these issues as barriers to doing the job properly and consistently.

How do you sell a career that once offered the benefits of 'seeing the world' but now has seafarers sometimes unable to leave their ships during their brief, busy stay in port? What job stability and career pathway can you provide?

## Enhanced Training

Ship operators who invest in training facilities, training material, training software and hardware, and trainers to do additional training are sending a clear signal to the employment market - we invest in our people – and this is likely attract a pool of seafarers looking for employment.

Crew who see a job at sea as a respected career with status may well be looking for a comprehensive programme of additional training. If you attract the sort of people who have a proactive approach to training they are more likely to the 'right' crew for your company.

Offering a comprehensive training programme is one way of increasing the attractiveness of your company.

For more on enhanced training and loss prevention programmes see **Loss Prevention Briefing 3 – The Right Crew - Retain.**

Since 2015 KVH Media Group have been - through their website Crewtoo - asking seafarers how happy they feel with their life at sea. Crewtoo has about 112,000 seafarer members across over 50 nationalities with ages ranging from 16 to 69. Over 15% of participants in the survey are serving Masters.

The Crewtoo Seafares Happiness Index is growing in popularity and could provide you with valuable crew recruitment feedback. If you want to attract and retain the 'right' crew then using crew happiness index of your own could help show what you are getting right and what can be improved. Set it up on survey monkey and ask your crew to fill it in. Great for benchmarking your performance and can be used as an additional tool to market your company to potential recruits.

The Crewtoo Seafares Happiness Index is based on 10 questions. Why not use these 10 questions on your own website or in hard copy and get all your crew to feedback regularly. This way you can look at crew 'happiness' on individual ships, across your fleet, and also benchmark against the Crewtoo Seafares Happiness Index.

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Each question is scored from 1 being unhappiest to 10 being happiest – this gives individual data for each question and an overall 'happiness' index which Crewtoo say is currently 6.33.

The Crewtoo Seafares Happiness Index 10 questions with the feedback from January 2016 are:

1	 HUMAN ANGLE	<b>How happy are you generally when you are at sea?</b> Seafarers are fighting hard to remain happy with their lot, and there has been a small rise in the index. However, there are issues brewing, and it may well be hard to remain stoic in the face of so many challenges and issues. Budgets being cut and spending slashed – there are seeming problems ahead.	6.49	↑
2	 CONNECTIVITY	<b>How happy are you about the contact you are able to have with your family when you are at sea?</b> Seafarers again, as with other results, are craving connectivity. There are increasing calls to make Internet access for seafarers mandatory, thereby building on the recommendations already laid down within the Maritime Labour Convention.	6.57	↓
3	 GETTING ASHORE	<b>How happy are you about your access to shore leave?</b> Seafarers are finding it more and more difficult to find the time to even consider shore leave. With so much pressure from administration, paperwork and operations, many feel that they are unable to spare the time to get ashore - that is where they even can.	6.07	↑
4	 TALKING CASH	<b>How happy are you about your wages/salary?</b> Wages have been falling, with reports from offshore workers of salaries slashed by up to 40%. Some respondents claimed that this is the worst time they can remember for seafarer salaries.	6.23	↓
5	 MEAL DEALS	<b>How happy are you about the standard of food you eat onboard?</b> Good food makes a happy crew - that message came across loudly. There are concerns about the standard and qualification of ship's cooks - and also the levels of professionalism. Some called for an industry wide competition to inject some pride and prestige into the role.	6.49	↑
6	 EXERCISING	<b>How happy are you about your ability to keep fit and healthy onboard?</b> Seafarers do like to work out - but sadly, even with the MLC in place, there are many who do not have the equipment or opportunity. They want gym facilities to be improved, and time given to be able to enjoy them and take benefits. Fit seafarers perform better.	6.64	↑
7	 TRAINING	<b>How happy are you about the training you receive?</b> There are two schools of thought on training - there are many seafarers who want to learn, more and more, and to excel. While sadly there are others who see it all as rather a chore. The message does not seem to be getting through of the positives of learning and education.	6.33	↓
8	 TEAMWORK	<b>How happy are you about interaction with other crew members onboard?</b> Seafarers appreciate their shipmates, and on vessels, with sufficient organised recreation, there are excellent benefits to be had. Still too many are on ships where crew retreat behind closed doors, and there is too little social cohesion.	6.19	↓
9	 WORKING	<b>How happy are you with your workload?</b> Work levels are on the rise, but so too was the happiness level - which is rather intriguing. There are those who take pride in what they do, and they embrace everything that is thrown at them. However, there are problems over the horizon - smaller sized crews are being asked to do more.	6.38	↑
10	 WELFARE	<b>How happy are you with welfare facilities when you are ashore?</b> Welfare is a vital provision for those who can get ashore - alas fewer seafarers can. With charities and bodies seeking to find answers, seafarers felt positive that the right provisions can be found. Those who look after seafarers were singled out for praise and thanks by grateful crews.	5.98	↑

## Crewtoo

The Home of Seafarers Online [www.crewtoo.com](http://www.crewtoo.com)

These 10 questions cover all the suggestions and tips in our Loss Prevention Briefing series – The Right Crew. You could do a crew happiness survey immediately and then repeat after considering or adopting some or all of the Loss Prevention Briefing suggestions to gauge whether any changes are having a positive effect.

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## Attracting the Right People – 10 Tips to Think About

To attract the best you don't necessarily have to pay the highest rate but you will need to offer a competitive salary combined with other benefits. If you are known as an operator that pays good salaries and above average benefits you are likely to attract candidates who can make up the 'right' crew.

The following is a list – in no particular order – of suggestions for attracting the right crew to your company.

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- 1 **Focus on attracting quality leaders** into key ranks. Start individually with the Master and if possible expand to include at least the 'top four'.

Regardless of whether the crew is multi-national or single nationality, all shipboard teams require a strong leader who can get them motivated to do a good job but also provide the pastoral care and guidance needed when you work and live together on board. It is a well-recognised fact that happy crew who feel part of an on-board family will probably perform better and safer than a group of individuals poorly led. Getting on board leadership right is therefore very important. Happy crew tell their seafarer friends that they enjoy working on your ships which will potentially widen the pool of talent available to you.

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- 2 **Health care for the seafarer** and his or her family is pretty much a standard benefit. You will have to think beyond this if you want to attract quality crew. Above average benefits might include:

- Free child care
- Free or subsidized child education
- Dedicated health care or social centres for crew families
- Payment of study leave
- Retainer whilst on leave
- Retained whilst on study leave
- Paid sick leave
- A good bonus scheme – can be money or shares
- Sabbaticals
- Free products

Vouchers for products or service – perhaps for products or services provided by other group companies

You may need to consider some sort of 'pay back' term in the employment contract if you are going to pay well and provide above average benefits. For example if you pay for study leave and exam fees this might be on the basis of tying that person in to a fixed period of employment after they have passed their exams. This should not be an issue with most of your employees because, of course, you will be a company that they want to stay with anyway!

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- 3 **An inclusive social media policy and provision.** An effective social media marketing campaign might be one of the best ways to promote your company as an attractive career at sea. You might have to go better than free individual email and try:

- On board Wi-Fi and internet access – use of personal email rather than ship specific email
- Satellite TV channels to suit multi-national crew
- Website crew area with blogs
- Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Google+, YouTube, and LinkedIn accounts for crew to follow and share. They should showcase the company to prospective crew portraying a company that people want to work for.

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Remember that these social media platforms – although widely known – are not necessarily international platforms. An international industry needs to attract crew internationally.

Given that the current top five crew supply countries are China, Philippines, Russian Federation, Ukraine, and India you might want to think about:

- Weibo – equivalent of Facebook and Twitter in China
- Youku and Tudou – equivalent of YouTube in China
- Vkontakte – equivalent of Facebook in Russia
- Or similar to connect with crew of your chosen nationality.

You would need the resources to keep the social media presence up to date and attractive. You would also need to be clear about how access to social media on board must not conflict with any 'no distractions' policy that you have on board.

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4 **Press releases** designed to show case your company and promote a positive image of the industry will also assist in attracting the right crew to work for you. The type of person you want to employ will read your website and see your press releases in the media. Those that are not bothered to 'research' are perhaps those that fall into the 'quantity' category rather than the 'quality' category.

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5 Consider **proactive recruitment**. If you hear or know of quality crew – identified individuals – then do not be afraid to approach them with a job offer. This approach might be particularly effective for recruiting 'top four' quality leaders that are not internally promoted. Many such approaches may not succeed in recruiting a quality person who is already happy with their existing employment. But some will succeed and others may be tempted if they decide later on to move companies.

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6 **Introduce a friend fee!** Ever heard of the saying 'birds of a feather flock together'? That means your already 'quality' leaders hang out with other leaders of similar 'quality'. So if your 'star' second mate can introduce another potential 'star' second mate – then offer an 'introduce a friend' bonus.

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7 **Pay**

The wage structure in place will depend on lots of factors e.g. the sector your vessel is in, its operating area, your crew nationality mix and the pressure on employment of certain ranks. There will always be pressure to keep wages as low as is practicable, particularly when vessel earnings are depressed. However, you cannot go too far below the average for your sector/nationality or you will have problems attracting the 'right crew' even where additional benefits are in place.

Decisions taken on pay will have direct consequences on attracting and retaining the 'right crew'. These consequences can be positive if you offer an average or above average rate for your sector plus extras and similarly they can be negative if you are offering pay at below the going rate. It is therefore essential that you are aware of the market rate for your sector/nationality, and what other companies are paying. This will allow you to develop a package that will attract the 'right crew' for your organisation.

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8 **Reduce the administrative burden.**

The very fact that we call it a 'burden' acknowledges that excessive administration is a time consuming problem. An easy way to make the job more attractive is to reduce that burden in any way possible.

Crew will be attracted to your company if they see that the actual job is the focus and that the administrative side of the job is well designed to reduce time spent.

Take near miss reporting as a typical example. If you operate 10 ships and require each ship to submit 6 near miss reports a month – that means 60 reports a month – 60 forms on the DP's desk every

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month. That is 720 forms a year. But what if the ship has actually had only 10 near misses in a year? Why are they still required to fabricate another 710 near miss reports?

Does the DPA read and action all 720 near miss reports? This requirement only indicates that there is no understanding of what a true near miss is and generates unnecessary administration.

It may even be counterproductive in safety terms – near misses are seen as an exercise in administration rather than a chance to learn and make the vessel or company safer.

This is just one example in many where administration can be reduced or refined. Any step you can take to reduce and refine the administrative burden will make jobs on board your ships more attractive.

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## 9 Let the Master and the crew run the ship.

Most people have an in-built ability to accept and respond positively to responsibility and most people are happy when they feel in control of their work.

Who controls the budget for the ship – the technical superintendent or the Master? The Masters job is more attractive and rewarding if he has control of the budget with the assistance of the crew and a superintendent. Everyone feels they can make a difference and they are in control.

This would also help with retention. If the job is made more attractive it will become something to aspire to – junior ranks will want to stay because they can see a rewarding job with respect and status to aim for.

Consider allocating crew to specific ships so they know they are returning. Maybe start with pairing Masters on dedicated ships and allowing them to 'run' the ship between them. They can agree on budget expenditure and – subject to a few continuity guidelines - decide on their voyage rotas. Consider extending the idea to include the 'top four'.

If you have selected and recruited well you can trust people to do their job well. That's what you employ them for. If you have the 'right crew' you can trust them and don't have to employ lots of other people to supervise or control them.

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## 10 Make sure the job advert includes all the attractive things you do from the list above.

If you want to attract the 'right' crew don't just adopt the 'rank to be filled' approach.

Everyone in the industry understands the job roles for seafarers. Your job adverts – whether in the press, online, or on your website – will mention the rank, should mention a competitive salary, but should also include the attractive above average benefits that you can provide.

Career seafarers – some of whom will go on to fill important roles in your company ashore – will be attracted to a job that offers:

- A clear career path – we want you to join us and stay with us
- Respect – we project a positive image of the shipping industry
- Status – we value the contribution of all crew – we are not just 'filling a rank'
- Above average benefits – we operate a successful fleet – share our success
- Pastoral care – become part of our on-board family.

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For more on the 'right' crew see **Loss Prevention Briefing 2 – The Right Crew – Recruit.**