



## **THE RETURN TO THIS SHIP A THIRD OFFICER JOURNEY**

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### **Culture of Safety**

Mr Sanket Srivastava, a Third Officer was returning back to his ship along with other fellow seafarers by boat. He was happy after having bought his new laptop. And why not, he got a very good laptop bag and an I-pod along with it free. The boat came alongside. Ship was at anchorage. Mr Ronaldo, an able seaman was at the gangway. He lowered the gangway. Sanket smiled, waved at Ronaldo who reciprocated. There was a bit of swell which made embarkation a little difficult. One by one, everybody started to go onboard. Sanket had his laptop bag in one hand. It was his turn now to get onboard. He waited for next roll to come and as soon as the boat came up, within a second he was standing on the gangway. But within that second, many a thing happened.

With the roll, the boat moved away and so did the stanchion from his only free hand. He had already moved his free hand away from the support in the boat and had leaned forward towards the gangway. He couldn't have gone back and so he sort of jumped towards the gangway. He landed on gangway successfully without any untoward incident.

He came up the gangway. Ronaldo said, "Third! I saw." Sanket replied, "Yes, I realized". "Don't worry, I will not write a STOP CARD. Else, everybody will know", Ronaldo said with a sympathetic smile implying that it would not be good for the Third Officer's image if people would come to know of the near-miss. Sanket stopped, looked at Ronaldo and said, "No, you must. Each should know that something went wrong and what is the correct way," adding smilingly, "and don't you want to win this month."

The correct way was of course that the Third Officer should have passed the Laptop bag with a line first and then tried to get on the gangway with both hands free. Sanket knew that a mistake



committed by one is a very good opportunity for all to learn. Safety is the best heroic act at sea.

### **The Concept of STOP CARD**

This was second contract for Sanket in this company. When he joined last time, he came across with this concept of 'STOP CARD'. Its salient features were:

1. Any crew member who observes a bad practice, near-miss or an accident, can report the same through a STOP CARD. A good practice observed which deserves an appreciation could also be reported through STOP CARD.
2. STOP CARD is a postcard size card with a printed format and requires details as name and rank of the person reporting, type of practice – good or bad, date & details of the incident (without mentioning names) and the corrective action taken.
3. It is easily accessible at Bridge, Engine Room and Smoke Rooms.
4. STOP CARDS are to be put in a locked collection box, which is opened during the Monthly Safety Meeting. All cards are read out

without the name of the crew member who reported the incident and everybody is told about the incident and the correct procedure.

5. Subsequently, all are sent to the head office which will decide three winners for each ship.
6. The winners were awarded cash awards of USD 50, 30 and 20.

Sanket remembered his last company had a different practice and they used to send only near-miss and accident report to the Head Office in a prescribed format by the Master or Chief Engineer and this process had the least participation of the rest of the crew. It was not an encouraging practice as it was deemed reflecting on the competencies of the Top four – the Master, Chief Engineer, Chief Officer and Second Engineer- that they were unable to train other crew members properly and get the work done in a safe manner. This would have obvious results. Most of the near misses would go unreported.

### **Environment in the Present Company**

Sanket found that in his present company, safety is a culture. Crew



found it sport to bring out bad practices and told of a better way to carry out a certain task safely. They were willing to accept the mistakes and learn. They would not take it as a remark on their competencies. They understood that learning is a continuous process and safety is the most important learning on ship. Each chance shall be utilised for the learning. A very small precaution which you may tend to overlook, may result in a fatal incident. It is always better to learn from the mistakes committed by others than to commit it yourself and learn. A mistake can prove highly costly.

The top fours were also very encouraging. They will not remark upon any crew based on any incident reported. On the contrary, they will use that opportunity to make others aware of the safe working practices. They encouraged crew to do tasks safely.

Sanket understood the importance of safe working practices onboard ship and for that matter any other profession which has high risk to life and property. Seafaring is considered

to be the third most dangerous profession in the world. Safety is indeed a high requisite. Replacement is not easy and it involves a heavy cost. In many a cases, it is not immediately possible and may take weeks till the ship arrives at a Port. For each day a person is not able to carry out his duty due to an injury, someone else has to do overtime. It may affect or delay shipboard operations, which again may result in huge costs. The best way to avoid such losses is to have a safety culture and minimise any such incidents.

### **Evolution of Best Practice**

Sanket realized that the concept of STOP CARD was a very innovative idea which had played a very important role in the culture of safety in his present company. It made crew more aware towards importance of following safe working practices. He discussed with his superiors and understood idea behind the STOP CARD. There were a few important points regarding it which made it very successful.

1. Ease of access to tool to report –



- The STOP CARDS were easily available
2. Ease of submission of report – The collection box was kept in smoke rooms, so that any crew member can drop his card at his own convenient time. He could even choose to drop card when nobody is observing.
  3. The collection box was transparent and locked. Crew would be able to notice any entries to it and therefore, management could not remove any card if submitted.
  4. It was opened during monthly safety meeting and all cards were read out during the meeting. Crew became aware of all the incidents and they were told of the best safe working practices. Minutes of the meeting were prepared and sent to the Head Office.
  5. Appreciation for the efforts – Cash awards were an act of appreciation by the Company for the efforts of the crew and it encouraged participation. The award was a big stimulation and it instilled a healthy competition among crew to submit their entries.
  6. Monthly exercise – The award was given each month and for each ship separately. This increased probability to win and encouraged more participation. Moreover, it also meant that they could relate with the winners whom they would know.
  7. Praising in front of all – The names of the winners were published in the Company's monthly newsletter which would be there for all to see.
  8. Encouraging Attitude of the Management – The Management had a very encouraging attitude. They would mention in the monthly newsletter, the ships from where they received maximum number of STOP CARDS with appreciation and ships from where they received minimum number of STOP CARDS as needing improvement. It would also help the Masters to maintain a positive attitude towards the whole exercise. He would not want to have name of his ship seen as needing improvement in front of whole company. He, would therefore, encourage his crew to be more and more participative.
- Sanket realized that this whole exercise had subtly created a high level of safety



awareness. It was a frequently occurring process and had all the attention of the crew. He knew that though the STOP CARDS will not reduce in numbers, the reported incidents will slowly become less significant. It is an ingenious idea and certainly qualifies for being recognized as a Best Practice