

Shipping stereotypes

William: The Ship Manager

By Namrata Nadkarni *with kind input from Fleet Management Ltd.*

Drawing by David Parkins

William the ship manager begins his morning with a hot cup of coffee and a rapid crossword puzzle – the perfect combination to get him in the mood for his day. As the ultimate caretaker of a fleet of 136 ships across the world's waters, he prides himself on leading a team at Topmanager Shipmanagement that comes up with the best solution, within the quickest time for all problems, marine or otherwise.

From the minute he walks in to his multi-storey offices in Hong Kong, he is bombarded with a barrage of emails, phone messages and faxes. After he answers the most urgent of the missives, he heads into the daily morning meeting with all the senior directors for a company-wide overview incorporating technical matters, quality and safety, newbuilds, fleet personnel and accounts. The meeting lasts just over 40 mins and is interrupted twice by his P.A. bringing in updates to the subjects under discussion – and a much appreciated caffeine boost (although not by his ulcer!).

William must draw on his extensive experience from over 20 years in the industry to make decisions to ensure his goal: the safe and efficient running of each vessel in the fleet, adhering to regulations and demanding schedules. Each judgment must be weighed against factors such as costs and time, with each solution slotting in to place to create a cohesive whole. The final shape of the puzzle hovers just out of reach.

'How many of our seafarers have completed the ECDIS training on the simulators? Good, good. I want to be ready much before the 2012 deadline,' he says examining a report. 'Have we made progress on our bid to manage the container newbuilds for Tradition Lines? There should be three vessels from the Korean yard

coming through in Q2 2011 and I want to finalise the management agreement. Vikram and I will fly to London to meet the owners next week to seal the deal. Joanna, please make sure that we each have an outline of the proposal to read on the overnight flight.' William has accrued enough air miles to fly his family first-class to Fiji every six months for the next two years – a scenario that would hold greater appeal if his wife didn't hold a deep distrust of airplanes.

The technical director is the first to excuse himself from the meeting room for a Skype conference call with the Singapore office about an impending quarterly inspection of one of the company's tankers – one of two to be undertaken that day. The personnel director follows on his heels as all of Topmanager's crew undergo an appraisal process every three months. Reports of both, the vessels and staff, are to be prepared and sent to the company's clients.

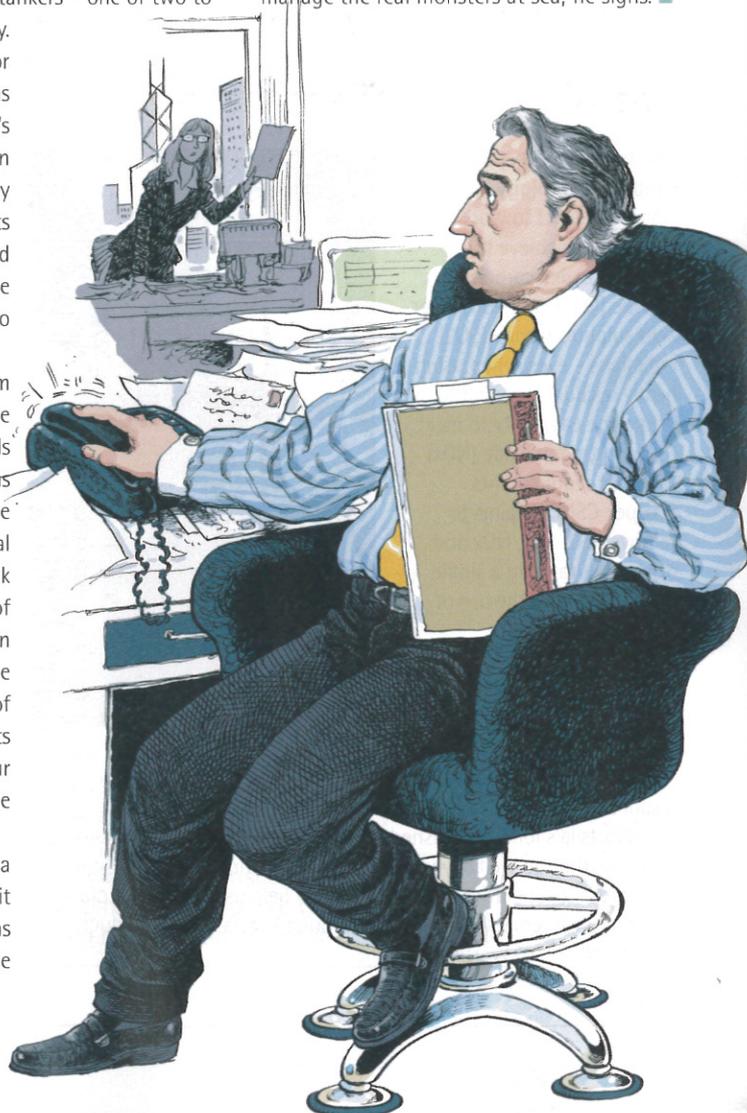
By the time William returns to his desk, he has another 30 emails to answer, and has confirmed his presence at two international conferences to talk about the hot topics of the day: criminalisation of seafarers, the increasing incidence of piracy and the effects of the Maritime Labour Convention on the shipmanagement industry. He makes a note to buy a new suit since his wife has pointed out that he

was wearing exactly the same outfit in all the pictures from the last few conferences.

Unlike some colleagues who relish overseas trips, William begrudges being constantly on the move. Besides missing his family, he laments how much has changed in just 10 years.

There were fewer emails back then, friendlier interactions with clients... and even time to visit the hotel gym, he wistfully reminisces.

He worries about the future with its impending issues: tightening regulation, multiplying world fleet and reluctant workforce. 'With every graduate wanting to sit in a bank there remain but a few men to manage the real monsters at sea,' he sighs. ■



With acknowledgements to 'Social stereotypes' in the UK's Daily Telegraph