

COMMENT

The issue of succession is of major relevance to the maritime industry. It has long been lamented that there is a lack of new blood circulating into this industry that has the potential to offer a fulfilling and challenging career both at sea and ashore. At an event I attended recently a maritime colleague actually stated that it was time to “get out” of the industry – basing his comment simply on what he sees as the lack of suitably qualified people coming up through the ranks.

That’s a real indictment on the industry. It is, however, more accurate in some sectors than others, but a reality that the industry must face and address nevertheless.

For a succession plan to be in place, the employment base of the maritime sectors needs to expand. It needs to embrace the notion of internships and developmental training. And it needs to promote potential career opportunities to the youth at an appropriate age.

But let’s be fair. There are those companies, institutions and government bodies that are doing their fair share to champion the industry and provide us with a line of successors. SAMSA’s National Cadet programme comes to mind and a recent visit to Smit Amandla Marine revealed that they have a well-developed internship programme that has attracted young talent to most of their departments where they are supervised by mentors. These are not isolated and all credit to those who are accomplishing similar successes.

But the question remains – are we strategically and methodically planning for the next generation to knock us off our pedestals and take over an industry that can continue to expand? Yes – no one is completely indispensable, but the industry possesses a valuable and dwindling skill set that needs to be replaced, maintained and even expanded.

Think of some of the icons of the industry and decide whether their knowledge, experience and skills could easily be replaced. We are working in an industry where those with rare skills are notoriously sought to stay engaged beyond retirement. There are many examples of this and many maritime maestros that continue to provide valuable intellectual commitment to the industry.

And so it was particularly gratifying to receive an email from one of these maritime icons recently that outlined the beginnings of his own succession plan. Head of the Lawhill Maritime Centre in Simon’s Town, Brian Ingpen, has identified Debbie Owen to step into his shoes in this capacity.

She will join the Centre at the beginning of July this year with the view to taking over leadership one year later. It’s one of those natural fits that should elicit approval from

most corners of the industry. Both Brian and Debbie have an innate sense of passion and enthusiasm for developing the industry and the next generation. Both have endless energy for the maritime cause and both could be considered maritime brand ambassadors.

The next step in Brian’s succession plan will have to deal with the creation of a regiment of maritime educators that can provide the same inspiration that he has given to so many learners who have passed through his halls.

Similarly you will have read about the retirement of Arend de Boer as managing director of SMD Telecommunications in our last issue. This was another example of some good planning as he took very definite steps to ensure that the company maintained its course and continued to show signs of growth without him at the helm.

Some would say that no succession planning is required in government. Ministers are political appointments and these seldom bear testimony to the incumbent’s experience in any given relevant field that relates to the department that they are meant to head. We’ve just seen a new cabinet appointed and now sit with a few new personalities in departments that deal with maritime-related matters. In some cases, there has been some welcomed continuity.

Speaking about government departments, some may remember the slight controversy surrounding plans to replace Tsietsi Mokhele at the head of the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) towards the beginning of last year. Fortunately his contract was renewed for another five years, but five years go by quickly and my understanding is that he cannot be appointed for a third term. Here’s hoping that SAMSA and the National Department of Transport (NDoT) are planning a well-plotted succession plan that aims to seat an equally involved and determined head of this entity.

And so my question to the industry is: what’s your succession plan?

Colleen Jacka, editor

■ EDITOR’S CHOICE:

RECOMMENDED READS:

SWOT analysis of Aquaculture written by Claire Attwood - see page 6.

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