

Ship Report Transcript

Friday, May 3, 2024

By Joanne Rideout

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It's time for the ship report the show about all things maritime. I'm Joanne Rideout. It's Friday, May 3rd, 2024.

Well, today I thought we could talk about an interesting survey that I just saw this week. One that is done in an ongoing way with maritime workers every quarter to assess their job satisfaction. And I've talked about this survey at different times on the ship report when reports are issued.

It's called the Seafarers Happiness Index. And the most recent report is out now. Now, the Seafarers Happiness Index is a quarterly survey by done by the mission to seafarers. The survey has ten questions addressing different facets of crews' professional and personal lives.

And the Mission to Seafarers is a non-profit charity group that serves merchant cruise around the world. So they'll have facilities in port. They may help sailors in when they're at the dock get things they need, and they just sort of serve in a support capacity to working mariners.

So why why does this matter? Why does the report matter? And what changes in the report? Well, recent data shows that older workers are aging out of the maritime industry and younger workers are less likely to choose a working life at sea than previous generations were. So how happy the people who are working in the maritime industry are - it's kind of an important matter.

The latest Seafarers Happiness Index report presents the findings derived from data that was collected during the first quarter of this year. So January, February and March.

Here's a quote from the report: After the previous year, which saw a consistent decline in happiness, we viewed this first data of 2024 with some trepidation. We were naturally concerned about seeing yet further falls in happiness.

Thankfully, that was not the case. Indeed, we saw a rise across every question and an overall increase from 6.36 in quarter four of 2023 up to a healthier 6.94. So almost seven out of ten in quarter one of this year. We are pleased to see indications of some improvement with seafarers reportedly feeling a little happier with their lot. It's to be hoped that these signs of optimism reflect lessons being learned by employers and of investment and compassion for those at sea. After a bad year in 2023, perhaps that is the most we could expect or even want. Close quote.

And so here's what they have to say about this quarter's survey data. This is a little more from the report:

Despite the inherent challenges of a seagoing career, resilience and determination in the seafaring community persist. So the issues raised are pretty consistent across the board in the maritime industry. Some companies address those concerns well and some don't. And the report also says that the mission to seafarers has recorded their highest percentage of female seafarers completing the Seafarers Happiness Index. This time responses made up just over 9%, which is a significant jump from previous reports. And that reflects an influx of women into all aspects of the maritime industry over time.

So they have a couple of lists of job situations that contribute to a good experience of life on board and list of those things that make life worse. And so I thought we could look at those because life at sea is so inherently different from work on land. Partly because mariners must be away from friends and family for months to do their work. So it gives you some idea of what things are important in that unusual environment. I think you'll see that some are common to all jobs. Some are really indicative of the unusual nature of work so far from home.

Here's the positive list: One is financial security. People, of course, appreciate good salaries and financial independence. Salaries paid on time that reflect work done. Those things really make a lot of difference. Number two, job satisfaction and teamwork. The highest satisfaction levels are from seafarers who have positive relationships with people on board with their colleagues. And when crews can foster a sense of camaraderie. That's a huge happiness boost. Three is company support... companies that work hard to get their people on leave when they say they're going to and when employees just all around feel respected by the company they work for, that is really important.

And staying connected with family. That is a really big deal. It reduces feelings of isolation and loneliness. Those ships that allow seafarers to have Internet access during the voyage. That's a real big morale boost. I've certainly seen in my experience of doing the ship report how when mariners get into port on a lot of ships and the ship anchors, everybody's out on deck with their cell phone. And some captains have even gone so far as to find out where the best cell coverage is within the anchorage and try to anchor there to give people a chance to call home. In fact, we even had a military ship that was kind of idling along the coast on its way up north to go to Portland and I had some people who saw it and were wondering why it was so close to the shore. And it turns out that the ship was early getting into the Columbia River. And so they slowed down a little bit. The captain moved the ship in towards shore to give the crew access to the cell phone signal that would be emanating out into the ocean a little bit closer to land. So that was a very, very considerate captain.

Another aspect is shore leave. And this is something that is not always possible for people when they come into port, but it's seen by people who answered the survey as being a vital ingredient for stress, relief and relaxation.

And so in the Port of Vancouver, Washington, for instance, there is a seafarers agency on land that has in the past, at least, taken crew members for rides locally to allow them to shop and also ship agents that work with the ships here. So really go out of their way to get the people on board fun food, perks, like good pizza and special pastries. Something to make life a little special for them while they are here in port is just a little bit of a break for them. Good food and drink.

Boy, this is a really, really important thing. I interviewed a captain once who stressed to me how vitally important good food is on board a ship. He said a crew is like an army, that saying about an army running on its stomach. That ship crews also run on their stomachs as well. And a ship with bad food will end up having other crew problems as a result. Meals are one of the few distractions and comforts for sailors who are at sea for long periods of time.

And overall in general, a work environment that allows people to get training and development so they can advance and improve their salaries and improve their work. And also just in general, a positive work environment. Now, the downside of all this is on ships that don't have these things, and those things really do make a difference to mariners. But I would think that of the two things that I've learned

so much about talking to people for years here, food and Internet access or telephone access is just really, really important to sailors.

So that gives you a little bit of an idea of the working conditions that seafarers are dealing with and how a relatively short but important list of priorities can make all the difference between a happy or at least a tolerable life at sea and an awful one that would tend to make workers leave at the end of their contracts and not return. since recruitment in the maritime industry, remains an issue for companies that need seafarers to work on ships, it would seem important for employers to read this survey and take it to heart.

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