

Cultivating and creating career openings

Halcyon's [Heidi Heseltine](#) explains how to move to the next rung of the shipping job ladder



Heidi Heseltine

Career planning is an essential part of life and key to getting forward in the shipping industry. Planning and setting milestones will not only give you a sense of direction and the opportunity to reflect on how your career path is progressing, but will also help you identify any shortfalls in your knowledge.

Shipping presents some interesting challenges when it comes to career planning. On the one hand, it seems an extremely small industry where everyone knows everyone and moves in the same circles. Certainly, it may appear that we are only ever one step removed from someone we may wish to be connected with. However, when you start looking at it from a career planning perspective, the opportunities are immense and incredibly diverse.

However, while employers may not deem it critical for you to possess specific qualifications, you will be a much more attractive proposition if you possess a relevant recognised qualification from a reputable learning body. This demonstrates commitment as well as providing you with a basic grounding in the area you seek to work in. Another benefit is that you are also starting to grow your own network: more of that to come later.

CHOICE OF THREE

Once working in the industry, personal and career development will take one of three routes. You can progress vertically from one role to another within the same sector, for example from a pure ship operator to heading a team of operators or from a broker to a head of desk. Another option is to move laterally across sectors to broaden your knowledge, such as moving

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from being a charterer in small tankers to a charterer in MRs or LPG. The third route, often presented by larger employers, is to move internally across departments to gain an in depth understanding of your existing employers' modus operandi and to keep your skills fresh and continually developing. As a general rule, shipping is extremely flat structured so vertical movement is relatively limited and it is important to consider this when planning your career.

The majority of larger and forward thinking shipping organisations understand the value of their existing employees and seek to develop them as much as possible. It is often internal policy for all roles to be advertised on an internal job portal with an open selection process for internal and external candidates. This is done to find the best match for the role, the company and its culture.

Soft skills are also playing an increasing role in employers' decision making. The focus today is very much on how you go about your role rather than simply the fact that you can do it. Your ability to interact with others, your negotiation skills and commercial capabilities will be looked at in depth when considering progression, so focus on developing these areas just as much as the technical skills you need to do your job.

An essential component to any career development is networking, irrespective of where you want your career to go. Networking is critical. Refining your networking skills and ensuring that the networks you create are relevant to your job choices and career aspirations should be a major consideration. Networking is not just about making contacts,

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Traditional roles such as chartering, broking and operations continue to exist, but are increasingly refined and split into further specialisms. New ways of thinking, developments in IT and software, and an increased emphasis on performance and risk management are creating new opportunities.

When looking for your first commercial role, it's fair to say that qualifications are desirable rather than essential.



Your negotiation skills and your commercial capabilities will be assessed

it's about making the right contacts and getting to know and earn the respect of those that may be able to assist in your career aspirations.

LOOK FORWARD

It is also important to understand what is happening in the shipping industry overall from a human resourcing perspective, to appreciate the changes that have happened and to consider the impact these may have on the future.

In the last five years, the ongoing global economic crisis combined with technological developments and the speed of doing business are the most significant changes that we have seen. There is much greater focus on cost control, budget management and increasing productivity. The use of technology is prevalent and will continue to be a major focus for organisations looking to improve processes, efficiencies and in utilising live, accurate data.

Improved human resource management is another ongoing change. We have seen significant developments in human resource strategies and those who are heading global human resource efforts. Often these people are coming from other more developed industries outside of shipping who are bringing in more forward thinking processes that can benefit our industry and the employees within it. One notable change has been a requirement to find individuals who are adaptable and open to change in addition to possessing the required skillset for their roles. Future proofing in an unstable environment has taken centre stage.

One challenge that individuals often come across when trying to understand roles that may be of interest when career planning, is where to find the information. Google may be an amazing search engine, but you have to know what you are searching for. This is when industry specialists come into their own. Your employer should be your first port of call, discuss with them what they believe are the options available to you with them and where they believe your skills are strongest. They should also help you identify areas for development to be more

effective in your current role which allows you to consider training needs as appropriate.

DIFFERENT CHANNELS

Networking will give you access to others across various sectors, as well as your alumni. We also recommend identifying specialist recruiters who can give you detailed guidance. It's not just about finding the right recruitment organisation: you should ensure you speak with people who have worked the markets for a sufficient time so as to possess a detailed working knowledge of the options available to you.

We should remember that career planning is a lifelong process and that in order to achieve our goals we need to enjoy what we do and be fulfilled by it, we need to actively search for career opportunities, and ensure that we continue throughout our careers to actively and professionally develop ourselves to meet our objectives.

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Networking is critical to any career development

The unquantifiable value of networking

It's hard to put an exact figure on the value of networking, but one report from ABC News calculated that up to 80% of jobs are found through networking. However, networking is often misunderstood and frequently maligned, writes Carly Fields.

Networking is not, as some jobseekers might think, all about them. It's not about constantly asking without giving – that's a sure fire way to drive potential contacts away. Instead, jobseekers should consider how they might be able to help others first, before they think of themselves.

In an article for Fortune magazine, Tom Farley, president of the New York Stock Exchange, gave four principles for building networks which serves as useful guidance for those looking for jobs in the shipping industry.

Firstly, he says, don't limit your network. It doesn't matter if someone is inside or outside of your industry, if they are interesting

and influential, be willing to commit time and/or resources to meet, connect or help that individual.

Secondly, do your homework. Once you've secured a meeting, phone call, or introduction to network with someone – don't mess it up, says Mr Farley. His personal rule-of-thumb is be prepared with at least two areas of common interest.

Thirdly, don't ask for anything in return. Networking is not transactional, says Mr Farley, but too often it's approached in such a way.

And lastly, aim high. Often people miss opportunities to network because they feel intimidated, particularly if the other person is more senior. However, there is very little downside when aiming high, other than a bruised ego from time-to-time. "The worst that can happen is they say "no" or ignore you," he says. **SN**