

EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE BASED MENTORING

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Abstract

This paper was produced with a collection of online resources to create a base for the development of MARITIME INNOVATORS initiative – **Experiential Knowledge Based MENTORING** programme. The programme is aimed at encouraging all its graduates those at sea, and those ashore who support them, to incorporate mentoring into the daily on board routine. The knowledge gained through experience, when reflected upon, is a valuable resource, which is called **Experiential Knowledge**. There are many more to experience on board to supplement the foundation of knowledge obtained at collage and ashore thereby this brings the importance of experiential knowledge which can be studied through various means.

The ultimate goal of this programme is to create a vast professional network within the members of seafarers thereby facilitating of strong links among those whom graduated from Maritime Schools and will graduate from the linked institutes.

‘Up to 70% of skill is learnt from experience’ Trautman S. (2007).

Who can be Mentor and How Is it implemented?

In our definition, Mentor is someone who has worked in the maritime industry in any capacity for some years. This does **NOT** mean that the mentor must be someone who **knows all but has experience to share**. Nor does it mean that the mentor needs to be **a trainer**. A mentor is simply someone who is there to occasionally give guidance, answer questions, and provide advice within his/her experiential knowledge. If you have been working in the maritime industry for **5 years or more in any capacity**, you are almost certainly great mentor material.

When mentoring in the maritime industry does happen, it often takes place between people serving on the same vessel, and is typically **short-lived** because one of the participants, however, it ends up on a different vessel or different shift after some time. This is a problem because mentoring relationships are usually best when they are long lived, and when the mentor is not in a position of influence over the mentee. This difficulty of mentoring in the maritime industry is especially unfortunate for a number of reasons.

Mentoring relationships can take a variety of forms, but the most traditional (and a very effective) form of mentoring is **face-to-face mentoring**. However, despite the prevalence and effectiveness of in-person mentoring, its applicability can be limited in the maritime industry. The opportunities to interact **face-to-face** with a maritime mentor are rare due to the **isolation of being at sea** and **reduced manning at sea**. If a maritime career is compared to a traditional shore-based occupation such as being a teacher or accountant, you will find that these professionals may have access to hundreds of potential mentors in their office and through bodies such as professional associations, which meet regularly.

Mentoring does not have to be **so formal** or **time consuming**. It will work in any job at sea or ashore. Mentoring is not a training role. It is all about giving advice and encouragement. Mentoring is not a

training role. It is also packed with good advice from an experienced persona who has been a seafarer since childhood, with various mentors in the many different sectors and roles that he has worked in. We believe that anyone can be a mentor at sea and anyone can need mentoring. Numerous examples will be included based on maritime graduates experiences and their research, of how the flow of knowledge can be established in order to widen and consolidate the on-the-job experience of those progressing through the ranks, including newly promoted Masters. The mentoring has a role in improving communications and enhancing team-building, and hopefully leading to a reduction in accidents and incidents at sea which is in the agenda of administrations at local, regional, national and world wide level.

In the last few years, thanks the technology that it has provided a mechanism for those not physically co-located to interact with one another. That technology can be used to support mentoring relationships.

Why mentoring?

There have been many factors have led to a reduction in the opportunities for on-the-job experience, including changes in technology, faster promotions and reduced sea-time requirements between certificates of competency. There are also many barriers to the easy transfer of experiential knowledge, including language and culture, and there is the ever-lasting problem of pressure of work and lack of time. Furthermore, maritime graduates had the experience of being left aside and no further career progression apart from the path they were given at sea for some reason. Reality is that average working time of a seafarer at sea is 4.8 years therefore it is fundamental that these seafarers need to be linked with shore based responsibilities that they can contribute and develop in maritime sector with the unique experience they attained at sea.

The maritime industry has a tradition of learning from others on-board; therefore, the model is there. However, the on-board community is small and sometimes highly variable in timing and composition. Furthermore, on-board mentorship opportunities do not begin until the mariner is actually on-board, yet mentorship can be very useful well before that time. It would be wonderful if new workers and trainees had access to a larger and more stable community of peers and mentors. The world needs competent mariners and the availability of a welcoming community where connections can be made and answers can be found will contribute to the fulfilment of that goal. Hence, There is a real need for the new generation of seafarers to be guided so they acquire the skills and competence that instruction in colleges cannot deliver. This especially would create a great networking hence development opportunity for our graduates.

Researches establish that a contributory factor to the increase in accidents is that experiential knowledge (knowledge gained from professional, 'on the job' experiences and reflected upon) is not being passed from senior to junior officers on-board many merchant vessels, in the traditional way that it used to be, by mentoring. Through this mentoring programme the Maritime graduates has been engaged in a conversation about mentoring and the need to pass on professional experiential knowledge. Marine accidents and incidents are occurring due to a lack of experiential knowledge transferred by mentoring, and to provide a practical guide to mentoring that will attempt to re-establish the flow. Experiential knowledge is not something **tangible**, nor is it a subject that can be taught in college, although the concept should be addressed and the candidates encouraged to participate in experiential knowledge transfer. There are variety of reasons why transfer of experiential knowledge is difficult to be transferred from one to another is one is the lack of time for informal training which is due to ships and long working hours prevents mentors to take time off their busy schedule and take personal interest in training of juniors.

Maritime practices and traditions are very deep and need to be transferred from one generation of mariner to the next. Mentoring would be an excellent way of conveying those traditions and knowledge.

The maritime industry is in desperate need of attracting new, bright young mariners. One of the best ways to do that in any industry is to raise the awareness and knowledge of the industry through the availability of career mentors and role models. As it stands now, how many mariner role-models are a young person likely to run into in the course of their daily lives? Very few - since most will be at sea! Young people need to see the profession as being full of challenge and opportunity. That is one of the surest ways of raising the number and quality of new employees and, as a result, the success of the profession as a whole. These factors make mentoring a particularly valuable activity in the industry. So there is a real disconnect in the maritime world where there is a huge need and very little opportunity for mentoring.

Who and how the mentoring will be done?

If we are asked 'Are you a mentor?', it is quite likely that many of us would say 'No.' and yet many people are mentoring without necessarily being conscious of doing so. Why is this? Probably because if we have read about mentoring, it is usually set out as a rather formal process and often on a designated one-to-one basis over a long time period. In some cases, people lay claim to having had a mentor for much of their career and are undoubtedly extremely fortunate to have such support and advice. An example of such a formal mentoring scheme is that of the UK's Honourable Company of Master Mariners - which links a young seafarer with a Master Mariner with the aim of the latter helping the former through the knowledge acquisition and experience process to become a Master Mariner. It is a good scheme and career-long mentoring has resulted from it in some cases as a friendship bond develops between the two mariners.

On-board/shore-based mentors will operate in an informal system of experiential knowledge transfer, to allow candidates to experience operating a vessel under the close supervision of an experienced person. We can imagine the difference it would make if every seafarer took just few minutes out of their busy schedule each day to pass on a piece of their knowledge to another seafarer as when it is needed. The volume of knowledge transferred would be huge and, would make an immediate and significant difference within our graduates in short term and wider audience in medium and long term.

Learning is a lifelong occupation and, as masters of our trade, each seafarers have a duty to pass this learning on. The young seafarers following on after us have a right to our knowledge. There is a limit to what can be taught at any maritime establishment and it is we who must fill in the gaps for them.

Why is this important?

Informal learning (learning outside of regular curriculum-based courses) can account for as much as 70% of the learning done by workers in any industry. A huge part of that is being able to connect with people who have **experience** in the industry. Nowhere is this more important than in the maritime industry.

The benefits of mentorship are deep and varied. For the mentees, mentorship helps with recruitment and boarding a new profession, it is a strong form of knowledge sharing, it can contribute to worker retention in the industry, and it contributes greatly to skill development. Mentorship helps people navigate career path choices, understand what it takes to advance and perform, and gives them an insider's view not generally otherwise available.

Being a mentor has its benefits as well. Aside from the overall global goal of contributing to and improving the industry, being a mentor can be personally very satisfying, can extend your professional network, and can even provide opportunities to recruit the best and the brightest.

What Would It Look like?

Unfortunately, we have been dictated with the rules and regulations where our voices are usually unheard. In an ideal community, policies would indeed be **community-dictated** to the greatest extent possible, but as it stands this platform will only be available to our graduates in short term and may well be accessed to wider audience in medium and long term.

On-line community where **mentors** and **mentees** can primarily connect where they ask questions, share experiences, post documents and web-sites, conduct polls, communicate both publicly and privately, and generally discover new people, information and resources, identify problems and bring their own solution which can help them in their new career. This would be

- 1- An online platform where members can find each other and connect and facilitate Networking – **Our suggestion is to use LinkedIn effectively**
- 2- Each member will have an profile and specify their experimental knowledge, expertise, knowledge, work-based experience etc
- 3- Each member to be appointed as Mentor and Mentee. Mentors will have the role of Mentor as described before. This will apply to Mentees.

Being devoted to mentorship in the maritime industry, we would also have the opportunity to create resources - which are specifically geared toward creating and maintaining mentorship relationships.

Mentoring is Not Training

In the maritime community, there is variety of cultural and general industry knowledge that can only be learned through **informal means**. Mentoring is a very powerful way to share some of that knowledge. However, there must be a clear distinction between **mentoring and training**. It is important to discuss this because there are organizations who attempt to use mentoring, sometimes in the form of **job shadowing**, as a way to accommodate for shortcomings in their training operations. Mentoring and training are each very valuable, but they are different activities used to achieve different outcomes. Mentoring is an outstanding supplement to training, but never a replacement for excellent training.

One main reason is that the process of mentoring is different than the process of training and mentoring does not lead to **reliable and valid assessment**. Training should be formal, structured, standardized, and well analysed. Mentoring is not formal, structured, standardized nor well analysed.

There is also a major difference in the topics covered during training and mentoring. There are **skills and knowledge** a mariner or other maritime worker needs to know to do their job safely and efficiently. On the other hand, there is also professional knowledge a maritime worker needs in order to make important personal, professional and career-related decisions. A mentor may not be able to tell a mentee how a particular piece of equipment is used but they can tell them what it is like to be at sea for extended periods of time, or what broad opportunities exist for advancement in the industry. Training and mentoring have different goals, teach different knowledge, and require different techniques and tools. They are both extremely valuable, but are very different from one another.

Mentoring relationships are **confidential, trust-based**, voluntary arrangements between a mentor (someone with significant experience in some area) and a mentee (someone who either wishes to work in that area, or is working their way through the ranks). The idea is that the mentor is able to provide guidance based on his or her experience - which will help the mentee make more informed professional choices. Mentors are **role models, advisors, supporters, leaders, motivators, network enablers and sources of wisdom, experience, and inspiration**. The most important characteristics of a good mentor (other than expertise and experience) include a genuine desire to be helpful, good communication skills and patience.

Good mentoring relationships and interactions have a number of characteristics.

1. **Sustainable:** The best mentoring relationships are often long-lived. That is not to say that good relationships never run their course. However, the value of a long-lived relationship is that the mentor has much more intimate knowledge of the personality, goals and context of their mentee. They often are able to follow the mentee through many stages of their career. It is this intimate knowledge that enables the mentor to provide appropriate guidance.
2. **Personal:** It is important to realize that mentoring relationships are personal relationships. This goes both ways. Mentors should be personally vested in the lives of their mentee. This personal connection makes them caring and responsive mentors. The implications of the mentor's guidance on the life of the mentee are significant, and the personal connection creates a responsibility to the mentee to respect this significance. Likewise, mentees need to feel comfortable sharing their questions and concerns with their mentor - especially those which might be difficult to share with a superior or peer. They need to feel as though they can trust their mentor, and this trust only comes from respect and, for lack of a better word, intimacy.
3. **Objective:** Mentors should never be in a position of conflict or influence with respect to their mentee. They should not be a superior of the mentee, should not be part of a **regulatory body** which oversees the work of the mentee, should not be from highly competitive companies, and ideally should not work at the same company as the mentee. We realize that this last point goes contrary to most maritime mentoring relationships. We have heard from dozens of mariners who owe huge debts of gratitude to, for example, a captain from their past who took them under their wing and acted as their mentor. These were, undeniably, very successful mentoring relationships. Therefore, you may or may not agree with this point, but it is important to consider it, regardless. Most experts on mentoring argue that such a relationship can never reach its full potential because there will be some topics which are difficult to broach due to the superior-inferior relationship.
4. **Win-Win:** The benefit of the mentoring relationship is great. The mentor will challenge their mentee via supporting, guiding, and even opening doors or making connections to others that will be of real benefit to the mentee. But interestingly, whenever you speak with a mentor, you invariably hear of the incredible benefit that they, too, have derived as a result of the relationship. Being a mentor challenging, keeps you sharp, connected with, and informed on the needs and issues of young academics. You will always learn something from each of these relationships, and every one of them was highly satisfying and rewarding - especially when you feel as though you made a real difference in someone's life. The benefits of mentoring flow both ways - being a mentor is not a strictly philanthropic experience.

Mentoring Online in Maritime Context

Mentoring in the maritime industry is a long-held and incredibly valuable tradition with benefits accruing to both the mentor and the mentee. However, due to the unique nature of the maritime working environment, the opportunities to form and sustain a mentoring relationship are actually very limited. Therefore mentoring is vastly underutilized - despite its remarkable benefits. Fortunately, over the last few years technology has matured to the point where it can now come to our rescue by overcoming the constraints of time and location.

Mentoring is traditionally done face-to-face. However, opportunities to interact face-to-face with a maritime mentor are rare due to the isolation of being at sea and reduced manning. You would add to this the diversity of languages sometimes spoken on-board, and the fact that potential mentors are, more and more, burdened with paperwork and other activities while on-board, opportunities for mentoring junior crew are rare and becoming rarer. Even when mentorship does take place between a superior and subordinate serving on the same vessel, the relationship may be less than ideal. This is because mentored relationships are typically most effective when they are long lived and when the mentor is not in a position of influence over the mentee - neither of which can usually be satisfied by on-board mentoring relationships.

Online mentoring is simply mentoring which is facilitated by a web-based application. The main idea, of course, is that traditional mentoring relationships are constrained by time and distance - the mentor and mentee must meet at a time and location available to them both. This greatly limits the opportunity to find mentors and maintain a mentoring relationship. It provides tools for mentors and their mentees to interact without having to meet face-to-face, or for that matter, without even having to be available at the same time. This greatly increases the domain of available mentors for a mentee since the mentor could be located anywhere in the world (even in a significantly differing time zone), as long as both parties have reasonable internet access. While it is true that not all mariners do have reliable and continuous access to the internet, the numbers are growing and most certainly have reached a point where online mentoring is more than viable.

Another benefit of online mentoring is that it greatly enables opportunities for group-based mentoring. Most mentoring is done one-on-one. Even so, in some cases it is more efficient and more appropriate to conduct mentoring as a group (one mentor, several mentees). In the past, even when it was appropriate to engage in group mentoring, it has been especially difficult because the problems of time and distance constraints are made all the more complex when there are more than two people involved. Online mentoring, because it removes the constraints of time and location, makes group-based mentoring no more complex than one-on-one mentoring. This makes group mentoring a possibility which effectively did not previously exist. While group-based mentoring does not replace one-on-one, it can greatly improve mentoring efficiency, allowing one mentor to accommodate more mentees. It also creates the opportunity for peer-mentoring - mentees exchanging knowledge and experience to learn from one another.

Aside from those differences, the nature, outcomes and effectiveness of the mentoring interactions are the same for online mentoring and traditional (face-to-face) mentoring. The only real difference is that Online mentoring interactions are far more flexible in nature, and the field of potential mentors is infinitely larger. Both are good things.

Please note that online mentoring does not require that the mentor and mentee restrict themselves to on-line communications once a relationship is established. If it happens that they are located nearby one another and wish to meet - it may be very rewarding for them to do so. Online mentoring does not remove mentoring opportunities, it expands them.

This initiative will help remove barriers to career mobility for seafarers at sea/shore that will encourage more young people to apply for a career at sea, and ensure that when they decide to come ashore they can more easily remain in the maritime cluster in positions where maritime experience and qualifications are highly valued and are essential.

Initial Plans

The general intention for the site is to provide a venue where mentors and mentees can find one another and connect to share knowledge. One of the greatest values to mentees will simply be the ability to browse the expertise and experience of the various mentors to find those who can provide advice of value given the needs of the mentee.

The site will facilitate one-on-one or general mentoring, and will provide general mentoring areas where any mentee can ask questions of the community of mentors at large. Groups will be created in order to allow people to indicate their interest in (and connect with others who are interested in) specific aspects of the industry. This will help focus discussions and create repositories of targeted advice and knowledge.

The mentoring interactions can take place via the site's discussion areas or direct messaging as appropriate. For those who have the ability, connection through other avenues such as Video Conferencing can be facilitated. As much as possible, I will try to have the site issue notifications and

communications via e-mail in order to accommodate those who are on vessels with e-mail, but no web access.

This will be kept very simply in the initial stage. To this end, a “steering committee” of mentors whose maritime experience and expertise help guide the initial configuration of the site and the mentorship process.

The initial work of this initiative are to:

1. Create a directory of maritime graduates will act as mentors and mentees, including a description of their expertise, years of experience, location, languages spoken, etc.
2. Facilitate a “Find a Mentor and Mentee” function for mentees so that they can find mentors who match their career aspirations.
3. Provide a venue where mentoring can take place - including one-on-one mentoring, group mentoring, and peer mentoring.

Creating a Directory of Graduates

When a mentor joins the site, they are asked to create a profile based on LinkedIn and whether to register as a mentor. When doing so, they are asked for various bits of information including their areas of expertise, languages spoken, years of experience, etc. This information allows mentees to find mentors who match the career aspirations they have.

Finding a Mentor

Mentee will be able to find their Mentor with their experience areas, languages spoken, etc. The site then searches the mentor database for any mentor matching at least one of the desired attributes. The resulting mentors are then listed for the mentee, in order from the best match to the most minimal match.

The mentee can look through the matched mentor profiles to see which mentors look most appropriate. They can then initiate contact with the potential mentor using the site’s messaging mechanisms. Through this discussion, both mentor and mentee can determine whether they believe a good experience and personality match has been found. If so, the mentee is invited to join the mentor’s group and mentoring begins.

A Venue for Mentoring Interactions

Once a mentoring relationship has been established, mentoring can proceed in a variety of ways. There is no incorrect way to mentor, so long as the relationship is respectful, supportive, and productive for both mentor and mentee.

Some will choose to communicate through the mentoring site using the messaging system or the discussion areas of the mentoring group. Others will choose some external mechanism such as e-mail, telephone, or Video Conference. Still others may actually see one another in person, if that option is available.

In addition to these mentor-mentee interactions, the site also has an area for general discussions and support among the entire site membership. Here, questions can be asked and answered, polls can be conducted, and information can be shared. Ultimately, all of these interactions will form a knowledge base that future generations of mentors and mentees can draw upon.

The Value of Online Mentoring

Online mentoring would simply mentoring facilitated by a web-based application (Such as LinkedIn). The main idea, of course, is that traditional mentoring relationships are constrained by time and distance - the mentor and mentee must meet at a time and location available to them both. This greatly limits the opportunity to find mentors and maintain a mentoring relationship.

Online mentoring overcomes these barriers. It provides tools for mentors and their mentees to interact without having to meet face-to-face, or for that matter, without even having to be available at the same time. This greatly increases the domain of available mentors for a mentee since the mentor could be located anywhere in the world (even in a significantly differing time zone), as long as both parties have reasonable internet access. While it is true that not all mariners do have reliable and continuous access to the internet.

Another benefit of Online mentoring is that it greatly enables opportunities for group-based mentoring. Most mentoring is done one-on-one. Even so, in some cases it is more efficient and more appropriate to conduct mentoring as a group (one mentor, several mentees). In the past, even when it was appropriate to engage in group mentoring, it has been especially difficult because the problems of time and distance constraints are made all the more complex when there are more than two people involved. Online mentoring, because it removes the constraints of time and location, makes group-based mentoring no more complex than one-on-one mentoring. This makes group mentoring a possibility which effectively did not previously exist. While group-based mentoring does not replace one-on-one, it can greatly improve mentoring efficiency, allowing one mentor to accommodate more mentees. It also creates the opportunity for peer-mentoring - mentees exchanging knowledge and experience to learn from one another.

Aside from those differences, the nature, outcomes and effectiveness of the mentoring interactions are the same for e-mentoring and traditional (face-to-face) mentoring. The only real difference is that Online mentoring interactions are far more flexible in nature, and the field of potential mentors is infinitely larger. Both are good things.

Mentoring is essential in the Maritime Industry due to the rather fragmented make-up of its' sectors, especially shipping, which may leave young professionals feeling isolated and with no one to turn to for advice on firstly their original choice of employment and secondly on how to progress into one of the many other areas of the Maritime business.

It is said that "*You should learn from your mistakes*" – far better to "*Learn from others mistakes*" – and, indeed, their successes. Mentoring is more than just telling someone how to perform a task, more than imparting academic knowledge. It is the guiding of mentees to fulfil their aspirations and Continuing Professional Development, successfully, throughout their Maritime Careers.

Mentoring is the way to ensure a complete education in the profession that a "seafarer" will need during his or her duty onboard. Much can be learned from books and other sources, but when you suddenly have a problem, the written material can not tell you how to handle it. Person to person is a very effective means to solve things that appear and also to get clear answers what to do or not to do. Sitting down and discussing maritime questions will often give better answers because there is "life experience" behind the answers. This will give more that just reading from some written material, even if we for the moment do not have all the answers ourselves!

CONCLUSIONS

This initiative will create a platform for our graduates for further career development at sea and ashore by sharing experiential knowledge for the benefit of ourselves, and also those who will come after us.

It is motivating and challenging for both - mentor and 'mentee' - with great benefits. Helping someone is not hard if you can give them a little bit of knowledge you have gained over the years or the mistakes that bit you in the backside - would be a step in the right direction. It is stated that some of the seafarers learn nearly 90% competence through mentoring and on the job.

This mentoring system could be of service for our graduates at first and to all the young mariners from all over the world in medium and long run. Attracting young and talented people to this profession is getting harder and the maritime industry is facing an acute shortage of qualified seafarers. Seniors who love and have enjoyed this profession can contribute very positively in conveying the adventure and opportunities this profession offers.”

We need to encourage our graduates to get into the industry and represent our voices. Those are the people who will not have a natural network in the industry and often encounter difficulties. A mentor might be able to intervene at a high level to reduce barriers set up by a lower level employee to prevent advancement by such individuals. Indeed in some parts of the world the knowhow of this job is being lost due to lack of interest new fellows to whom we cannot pass on our experience.

Leaders onboard are failing in standards and neglecting their duties as coach/teacher because of poor upbringing. They feel that seafaring is just another ordinary job. We need to overcome these barriers when shaping better mariners for the future.

Experiential knowledge, that is knowledge gained from experience and reflected upon, is not being transferred onboard today's modern merchant ships in the way it used to be, by mentoring, and this is leading to accidents and incidents. Lack of experiential knowledge was the primary cause of an accident.

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Appendix 1 - Invitation

Subject: Mentoring the Next Generation

Dear Seafarers,

We would like to tell you about an important mentoring initiative which has been launched for the entire Maritime graduates. It is called “Experiential Knowledge Based MENTORING”. This initiative will help improve the graduates who will serve and serves in maritime industry in various areas.

Please visit the site at ([put a link](#)) and create a profile for yourself and consider becoming a maritime mentor or **mentee**, if you are in need of a mentor.

We would be very much please if you spread the word by forwarding this message to all of your links who are Maritime Graduates at first instance.

Kind Regards

Annex 2 - FUTURE ACTIONS

During the next few weeks, the work will be to:

1. Creating an initial set of community documents - which describe mentoring, introduce people to our initiative, provide suggestions for getting started as a mentor or mentee, and outline acceptable use.
2. Setting up the template for the community on LinkedIn, organizing the site, creating the initial groups and library topics, setting up profile fields, etc.
3. Getting the details of those who is volunteered to mentor. This initial message will provide a brief overview of progress and plans, and ask for volunteers for the small steering group mentioned above.
4. Writing a few articles about the value of mentorship in the industry and how online mentoring can be used. Our hope is that these articles will continue to spread the word about the initiative in order to solicit ideas and feedback, and to attract more mentors (and then mentees).

Next Steps for STEERING COMMITTEE

1. Everyone continue to get the word out to potential mentors. The more mentors we have, the deeper their experience, and the more varied their backgrounds, the better the offering we can make to this industry. Anyone who has years of seetime, anyone who has spent years onshore at a terminal, at a shipyard or in maritime administration - all have experience and knowledge to share.
2. We need help and ideas on how to get the word out to potential mentees. We will need help contacting maritime academies, maritime blogs and websites, maritime companies and organizations - any entity which can help get the word out to mentees. Please start thinking about ideas which will facilitate this goal.