

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the mentors in my life, past and present, who have helped me get to where I am now. Although many, none did more than Captain J M (Jack) Healy, who recognised my love of the sea at an early age and did so much to teach and encourage me while I was still a boy. While he has crossed the bar, as have so many others, I hope that this book will continue the process of transforming experiential knowledge at sea by mentoring that was so natural to seafarers like him.

It is also dedicated to my wife Debbie, without whose encouragement, steadfast support and sense of humour I doubt I would have even attempted much of what I have achieved over our many years together.

To our children and their spouses, Philip, Rachael and Kevin, Robert, Jen and their daughter Ava, our first grandchild. I am so proud of you all and what you have already achieved. Go on to even greater things.

Finally, it is dedicated with grateful thanks to all at The Nautical Institute who have supported and partnered with me through my master's degree studies, encouraged me to develop my research into a book, and go on to fully revise and update it into today's second edition. Special thanks to David Patraiko FNI, who has so fully supported and helped develop the concept of onboard mentoring from day one and coined the phrase 'mentoring is the very soul of seafaring'. Also to Bridget Hogan Hon FNI, without whom neither of these books would have been written – 'thank you' seems so inadequate.

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Thank you to the following people for their time and their careful, considerate and expert review of *Mentoring at Sea*:

Peer reviewers

David Patraiko FNI is Director of Projects for The Nautical Institute and a long-standing advocate of mentoring in all its forms. David has worked closely with the author since André's early years of researching mentoring for his university dissertation, helping him translate that knowledge into a user-friendly format that is promoted by The Nautical Institute around the world. David has provided insights, advice and real-life examples of mentoring in practice, both for this revised and updated edition of *Mentoring at Sea* and the original version published in 2012.

Captain Sarabjit Butalia FNI specialises in maritime education and training. Captain Butalia has years of experience as an onboard assessor and holds a master of science degree (MSc) in maritime affairs from the World Maritime University, Malmö. In addition to lecturing on many of The Nautical Institute's courses, Sarabjit designs and develops safety modules and training programmes based on need analysis to enhance skills and efficiency.

Technical editor

Steven Gosling MSc AFNI is Head of Information and Publications at The Nautical Institute. He spent 10 years at sea in the cruise industry, benefiting both as an early career mentee and later on as an onboard mentor for ratings, cadets and junior officers on various ships. He obtained an unlimited Master's certificate in 2010 and stepped ashore the following year to work for The Nautical Institute as Training and Quality Manager, championing some of the key messages in the first edition of *Mentoring at Sea* at conferences and seminars globally. After a few career hops, Steven returned to The Nautical Institute in 2023, assuming responsibility for the institute's publications, knowing as a former mariner himself how highly regarded and respected they are by industry. It was, therefore, a great privilege for him to be part of the editorial team that brought this new edition of *Mentoring at Sea* to fruition.

Foreword



by **Captain James Foong MBA FNI AFRIN**
Master Mariner (New Zealand)

Anyone can be a mentor. We can all look back and remember those who made an impression on us, be it on how we felt, what we learnt or how we conducted ourselves in the course of our work and lives. Mentors have long been part of life at sea, passing down their knowledge and helping those coming after them to 'learn the ropes'.

Mentoring supports every aspect of life on board. It is not coaching and it is not training – although it can certainly enhance and inform both. A strong mentoring culture on board a ship can boost morale, improve safety and bring people closer together as a team. The author provides plenty of case studies and anecdotes in the book to illustrate these important benefits.

In this book, Captain André L LeGoubin explores the art of mentoring, pulling together multiple strands to define and explain a wide-ranging, yet deep-seated concept. His warm, conversational style and clear passion for the subject make it an easy read and essential companion for anyone who is involved in mentoring at sea or interested in finding out more.

He also provides an excellent proposition in his '10-minute challenge' – an invitation to everyone to spend 10 minutes calmly reflecting and passing on to others their experiential knowledge. This proposition is twofold – not only an invitation to be available to mentor someone else, but also to be mentored and seek the wisdom of someone else, no matter their age, rank or experience.

Mentoring at Sea is the result of a lifetime of experience, working across many ships and crews from all corners of the globe. Anyone with an interest in sharing knowledge, gaining new perspectives and paying forward the gift of mentoring to others will find much to reflect upon and enjoy in its pages.

Finally, to the younger professionals out there, remember, you are the only person you can compare yourself to. It is essential for all global citizens to unite in the shared mission of protecting our seafarers – let us work together towards a sustainable future.

Foreword



by **Bridget Hogan Hon FNI**

Director Information and Publishing (2009–21),
The Nautical Institute

Mentoring can provoke polarising reactions in people, yet it is a gentle and subtle craft. For mentoring you could substitute words such as ‘encouragement’, ‘empathy’ and ‘help’. Notice I don’t include ‘coaching’ or ‘training’.

This is explained clearly in *Mentoring at Sea*, the first edition of which I was delighted to publish in 2012. I am honoured to have been asked to contribute a foreword for this second edition. It is not a textbook, but it sets out simple ways to build success. Its anecdotal style will instill confidence and prompt consideration of situations that crew members and Masters may have faced at some point in their careers, helping to demystify the mentoring process.

Here is mentoring for mentors – for those who are doing it, those who are contemplating doing it and those who have never given it a thought. This book will help you to build teams, build confidence, reinforce training and ensure that teams work. Its straightforward approach explains how leaders could discuss practical solutions to help alleviate issues on board such as isolation, where speaking a single language in common areas will make for a more inclusive workplace.

Some people think legal action could be taken against mentors if they get mentoring wrong. This is to misunderstand the whole point of the exercise. Mentoring may reinforce training, but usually not directly. By helping people to settle into their work and living environments on board ship, mentoring will help to ensure people face their training and tasks in a positive manner. This is especially important on vessels. People ashore usually have access to multiple potential mentors – colleagues, acquaintances or even neighbours. However, in the much smaller world on board a vessel, issues can magnify and take on heightened significance. This is why mentoring is both a leadership and a retention issue. If people on board feel isolated or alienated, they will not perform well – and may possibly leave.

One experienced Master told me how, as a lonely and overwhelmed cadet, he had been mentored by a kindly engineer who ensured that he had the confidence to complete the voyage and go on to the next. That engineer showed leadership traits. Did the Master observe and take note? We can only hope so, because he didn’t have your good fortune – which is to have this book as your guide.

Preface

This is the second edition of a book about mentoring, but not mentoring in the formal sense of the word, when a relationship between mentor and mentee is established and continued long term. It is a book about an informal system of onboard knowledge transfer that has existed for as long as ships have sailed the seas. This can be undertaken during normal operations, will not take more than 10 minutes of your time and can have a significant impact on those in receipt.

This book also reflects on the merchant navy over the years. It looks at how things are at sea today and what we can do in the future to better support the current generation of seafarers that are sailing and those that are preparing for future careers at sea.

The first edition of *Mentoring at Sea* was published in 2012. At that time, I was returning to sea after a long period ashore. Today, I am still at sea. I have, during the intervening years, gained a much deeper insight into life on modern merchant vessels, the onboard challenges today's seafarers are facing and, most importantly, what we can do to assist with these challenges. I have been able to test the methodology of what I am proposing to make sure that it works, is practical and is acceptable to those on board. I have talked to numerous people ashore and afloat about mentoring. In doing so, I have come to understand the impact mentoring can have on a seafarer's life even in today's digital age when information, support and advice is so readily available online.

It has taken a long time for me to write this edition and I am often asked (and ask myself) why. I think it is primarily due to the speed things have changed at sea over the past few years and the difficulties of trying to write a book while keeping pace with those changes. Think of the major changes we have experienced in our industry since the previous edition:

- the demise of paper charts;
- new ballast water treatment regulations;
- the new Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) regulations;
- StarLink;
- the acknowledgement of and training in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI);
- initiatives to decarbonise the world fleet by switching to cleaner, greener sources of fuel; and
- the Covid-19 pandemic.

These are just a few; I am sure you can think of many more that have affected you personally. Each time one of these changes has come about, I have gone back to my draft and amended it. I have also found that perceptions and opinions about life at sea are constantly changing. I have had to ensure that I write in a way that is acceptable and aligns with the experiences and expectations of the current generation of seafarers who are running our ships.

Personally, and through The Nautical Institute, we have amassed a substantial amount of feedback from the first edition, most of it positive (but not all of it constructive). Where appropriate, we have acted on that feedback by incorporating it into this second edition. Foremost of this was to include all ranks and vocations on board the vessel and not concentrate solely on the deck department, as I now realise I did. I am grateful for all feedback and suggestions received from my engineering colleagues. I hope with this edition I have addressed your feedback.

I want this book to accurately reflect life at sea today and to be useful and acceptable to those on board. So much of every aspect of the governance of ships comes from those ashore, but not always from those who have sailed in the recent past – and some from those who have never worked on a ship! I am not being disrespectful to those of you reading this who have transitioned your careers ashore, but I want to be sure that you know how things are today, not frozen at the point when you left the sea.

This is a book for *all* seafarers and those involved in shipping in any capacity who have an influence over seafarers. Having said that, you still hear me talk a lot about captains and Masters of ships, but that is because I am one myself and they are the ones I mostly work with in my current role. However, the same principles apply in the engine room and across the ship as a whole. Whether you are a Master or a chief engineer, a deck officer, engineering officer or electro-technical officer, a hotel manager or catering officer, mentoring matters. It makes a difference. When I talk about the ‘crew’ I am referring to everyone else on the vessel – whether they work on deck, in the engine room, in the galley or anywhere else on the huge variety of today’s modern and multipurpose vessels.

Although this is my second book, I do not consider myself a professional writer, and this is not a textbook. I am an ordinary mariner who is passionate about mentoring and who would like to have a conversation with you about mentoring. Imagine that I have come on board your ship or to your place of work. I am with you on the bridge, in the machinery control room, in the mess room or in your office having a discussion on how, between us, we can improve life at sea for today’s seafarers.

We have started chatting about mentoring, as often happens to me. You will have your views and I have mine – I respect that. In this book there will be as many questions as there are answers, but that is no different from any conversation. All I hope is that you will read this and find at least some of it thought-provoking enough to pass on some of the knowledge you have gained to someone else, or to encourage others to take up the act of mentoring at sea. For that is what it is all about. If that happens, then I will have achieved my objective for this book: encouraging mentoring on board.

Who am I?

Let me tell you about myself. I was born on the British island of Sark in the Channel Islands, an island of just 3 miles by 1.5 miles, located 19 miles west of the coast of France. Although I was the son of a baker, it was soon apparent that the sea was in my blood. By the age of four, I am told, I had decided that I was going to sea. Of course, at that age, I was going straight to be the captain! I never wavered from that desire. From the age of eight, I spent the majority of my spare time with fishermen on board a lobster fishing boat.

At the age of 11, I passed the 11 plus, an academic streaming examination that enabled me to attend a grammar school in either Guernsey or Jersey, two of the larger Channel Islands. As we lived on a small island accessible only by boat when the weather was OK, I would have to go away to school to board there during the school term. My parents decided that, rather than break up the family, we would all move to Guernsey, a somewhat larger island situated nine miles from Sark.

Once settled in Guernsey, I again spent my spare time at sea – this time on a small cargo and passenger vessel trading between the islands of Guernsey and Sark. Working as a deck boy had the most profound effect on me. I had tuition in the art of old-fashioned seamanship from the Master of the vessel, who was a strict and principled Irish man. He was born in 1921 and I believe he ran away to sea from Ireland, some time before the Second World War, when he was just a boy. Today, I still reflect upon those times and regularly use the skills he taught me, such as basic shiphandling, reading the weather and cargo work. I am trained to a far higher standard in these areas today, but his teachings provided the solid foundation that all else was subsequently built upon.

When I turned 16, I was legally able to sign on and so became a paid member of crew during my school holidays. I obtained my steering certificate, my first merchant navy qualification. In my subsequent high school summer holidays, I signed on as a deckhand on board a slightly larger coastal vessel trading between the Channel Islands, England and France. How I wish the industry today still allowed young people opportunities to go to sea and learn their trade, even before they leave school. The people who taught me those early skills were, in my opinion, true mentors.

Nine years followed during which I sailed deepsea with Cunard Shipping Services. I was lucky, as this was its cargo division and Cunard's wide variety of vessel types gave me a diverse learning experience. However, this was the 1980s during the infamous decline of the British merchant navy that we knew.

Towards the end of that decade, the fleet was seriously depleted, the voyages were becoming longer and conditions were changing rapidly. I decided to look for a new job in the ferry trade. Suddenly, I was in the right place at the right time and, at the age of 27, I was offered command of a passenger-carrying hydrofoil. This was probably the steepest learning curve I have ever had or will ever have. I have to be honest with you, it wasn't without its highly challenging moments. As I reflect on those times, I have come

to realise that although experiences can be good or bad, the knowledge gained from those experiences can only ever be good.

I stayed with the fast ferry trade for nearly 10 years, with the exception of three years working ashore for the local government. That time only served to convince me I needed to be at sea, working on ships and with seafarers. By now married with children, I moved to the UK mainland to work on high-speed car- and passenger-carrying catamarans crossing the Dover Strait. This role gave me a different perspective on maritime life as I crossed that narrow stretch of water up to six times a day. I had to weave my way through some of the approximately 300 ships that transit it daily with my vessel travelling at speeds of up to 43.8kt.

As we approached the millennium, the writing was on the wall for the cessation of duty-free sales between European Union countries. The ferry company I was working for was largely supported by the revenue from these sales and so I decided it was time to move on. I had, for a long time, nurtured the idea of becoming a pilot. My maternal grandfather had been a pilot for the Island of Sark, probably the first one, and he had written the syllabus for the pilotage exam I sat so many years later, when Master of a hydrofoil. During my Sark pilotage examination, some of the older Masters on the examination board that day remembered my grandfather well. No pressure then! I passed successfully and the party afterwards was certainly one to remember.

I applied to the Port of London Authority and a chance meeting with a pilot at a Nautical Institute meeting enabled me to take a trip up the Thames and gain introductions to all the right people. Following successful interviews, I joined as a trainee pilot.

If you had shown me then how my dining room table would look six months later, covered and weighed down with the charts, publications and paperwork of everything I would need to learn to become an authorised marine pilot, I would have said that I was not capable of absorbing that amount of information. As it was, I did manage to do so, but it was hard work and I can honestly say I have never studied so hard in my life. However, the feeling when I officially became London pilot number 241 made it all worthwhile.

I loved that job – even the study that took me through from Class 4 to Class 1 senior pilot. I particularly enjoyed piloting bigger and deeper-draught ships. After a few years, my wife and I became restless. We dreamed of moving to somewhere where the sun shines a lot more than it does in the UK. One morning, I was having breakfast and flicking through the latest *Seaways*, the magazine of The Nautical Institute, of which I had been a member for many years. I saw an advert for a marine consultant to join a worldwide company of marine and engineering consultants with an expanding office in Florida, work visa included.

We had visited Florida a number of times and loved the place, so I decided to research the company. I applied for the job, got it, obtained the visa, and within five months, we had packed everything into a 20-foot container and emigrated to Florida!

This sounds so simple when you put it down on paper, but it was one of the biggest decisions of my life. Most people were supportive, some thought we were daft and others thought that I must have done something terribly wrong to be leaving a job considered by most to be the pinnacle of a seagoing career. I can only agree with all those sentiments, except that I had not in fact done anything wrong. Imagine if, a few years later, we were still in the UK and playing the 'what-if' game.

Sometimes you just have to bite the bullet and go in what your heart says is the right direction. It wasn't easy, and I missed being a pilot, but the USA turned out to be everything we had hoped it would be.

I spent two years in South Florida and then moved to the company head office in Houston, where I stayed for more than six years. During that time, I could be anywhere as I spent much of my time away from home on board ships and offshore. I was engaged in many marine activities, primarily marine accident investigation and casualty work in all its guises.

In 2012, now a permanent resident of the USA, I found that the siren's call back to the sea became too strong once again. I left the consultancy and returned to seafaring, this time as a mooring master/pilot in the ship-to-ship (STS) lightering trade. Once again, I was introduced to the job and the company by a senior mooring master who was a good friend and fellow member of The Nautical Institute. (I hope you are recognising a trend here and the value I have found in being a member of The Nautical Institute.)

Fast-forward to today and I am now a dual citizen of the USA and the UK, in a job where I can (perhaps) see myself spending the rest of my working days. At the request of some former consultancy clients, about a year after becoming a mooring master, I started my own business offering expert witness and consultancy services to the maritime community.

So, why am I telling you all this? I know you did not pick up this book to read the memoirs of André L LeGoubin. I simply want to give you a flavour of where I have come from and why I am so passionate about mentoring. I know that your background is different from mine. I also know that we have a lot in common, as you have met many people along the way who have helped you get to where you are now, just as I have.

These people may have been Masters, mates, engineers, superintendents, relatives, friends or complete strangers whom you did not know previously and have never met again. The one thing they had in common was that they shared some knowledge with you that came from their experience and you benefited as a result. They were your mentors.

André L LeGoubin

Introduction

Who or what is a mentor? Let's just pause for a few minutes and look at some of my definitions of words I will be using throughout this book.

Mentor

The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes a mentor as 'an experienced and trusted adviser'. It describes the origin of the word as being 'from the name of Mentor, the adviser of the young Telemachus in Homer's *Odyssey*'. In the context of this book, I simply define a mentor as the possessor and distributor of experiential knowledge.

Who or what is a mentor? What qualifications are required? Mentors are not mythical creatures or cloaked professors. They are you or me, a Master, mate, chief engineer, second, bosun, superintendent, friend or stranger – in fact, anybody who shares a piece of knowledge or experience. Anyone can be a mentor. The sharing of knowledge transcends race, language, creed, gender or any other difference we may experience.

Mentoring

One definition of mentoring is that it is a form of knowledge transfer based in part on altruism. I like this definition. For me, it sums up the unselfish act of knowledge transfer that I benefited from, particularly in my early days at sea. For our purposes, I have followed this theme and defined mentoring as the act of sharing knowledge without a designated reward. This definition in itself has caused, and continues to cause, a certain amount of debate, but I believe it suffices.

I have had lengthy discussions with various people about the definition of mentoring and whether mentoring comes with a designated reward. I do not believe that it does. However, many would disagree. This is exactly what I want! You will not agree with everything I say, I know that. If you think there is a reward for mentoring then that's great, but I am currently holding fast with my belief.

I am open to discussion. After finishing this book, I hope that you will engage with this conversation about mentoring and tell me what you think. To help facilitate this, The Nautical Institute has various discussion threads for mentoring on key social media and professional networking platforms.

Experiential knowledge

I have defined this as knowledge gained from professional on-the-job experiences that have been reflected upon. This knowledge can come from a wide variety of sources or experiences. In my opinion, it often has the most impact when it comes from an accident, incident or near miss. However, it does need to be reflected upon before it can become experiential learning. I will say more about this further into the book.

Mentee

In the first edition of this book, I struggled with what to call someone who receives experiential knowledge through mentoring. I thought about using the word 'apprentice', because traditionally that is what I think we are when receiving mentoring advice, but the word did not seem to encompass all that I wanted to convey. I tried 'mentee', but at the time that just did not sound right to me either, so I finally settled on 'candidate'. Things have moved on significantly since then and, I am glad to say, 'mentee' is now a word often heard throughout industry and seems to be completely acceptable, especially to the younger generation of seafarers. So, for this edition, that is what I am going to use. The term 'mentee' describes a person at any stage of their career because, as most of you would agree, learning never ceases. I define a mentee as anyone receiving experiential knowledge via mentoring.

Reflection

According to the Institute for Work Based Learning at Middlesex University in London, reflection is 'a thoughtful (in the sense of deliberative) consideration of your experiences, which leads you to decide what the experience means to you.' Over the years, reflection has become a useful tool for me, particularly to review the actions I have taken and to help me feel comfortable with the life decisions I have made. A little later in this book, I take another look at reflection from a practical mariner's point of view and tie this in to how, through reflection, we can be more successful mentors in today's merchant navy.

In this book, you will also hear me talk about:

New generation seafarers – These are generally Millennials (1980–mid-1990s birth years), at sea and sailing as captain, chief engineer or in a senior position on board (chief officer, second engineer etc). They are gradually taking the places of our Generation X (mid-1960s–late 1970s birth years) seafarers.

Next generation seafarers – Our leaders of tomorrow: cadets, junior officers and young ratings who are part of Generation Z (mid-1990s–early 2010s birth years).

Younger career professionals – In the same category as new generation and next generation seafarers but working ashore.

Throughout this book you will find times when I get personal as I explain the concepts of mentoring and how mentors and mentoring have affected me. I make no apology for this as mentoring is personal; normally it is one-to-one between the mentor and the mentee. This is one of the things that sets mentoring apart from teaching or coaching. Mentors are not paid for it and, in my opinion, there is no designated reward. Therefore, mentors have to want to mentor – or at least want to share their experience. What could be more personal than that?

Before we go on, I need to mention something about the context of race, religion, gender, culture etc. You will hear me talk about language and cultural differences as I discuss various challenges around mentoring at sea. I do not want you to dismiss me as promoting any non-inclusive views – this is the last thing I intend or would wish to do.

I believe that whoever you are and whatever your background may be, we all share a common bond – the sea. That is really all that matters. Whether ashore or afloat, this shared bond between us is one thing that I can pretty much guarantee.

I love the sea. I was born near it and cannot remember a time when I did not want to build my career around the sea. Even now, I spend a lot of my spare time on, in, under or at least near the sea. My intention and reason for writing this book is simply to help those who are of a similar mind to share knowledge with each other and help and encourage each other's progress for our own sakes, as well as for the common good. It is important to me that you understand this.

Finally, I talk about examples of accidents and incidents in the context of mentoring throughout this book. These are not real accidents or incidents I have investigated. It would not be appropriate for me to use those without the express permission of all parties involved. The examples I have used are fictional. However, they are based on facts that I have acquired anecdotally from reading through hundreds of published accident reports, or from my own experiences. Unless I specifically say that an example is real, any similarity to cases I have attended is purely coincidental.



Chapter 1

The basics of mentoring

Mentors have always been extremely important to me. To begin with, there were the fishermen who put up with an eight-year-old boy on their boat and passed on the knowledge that set me on my way. There was the Master of the small cargo ship and his willingness to teach the fundamentals of seamanship to an adolescent boy who was keen to learn. I still think about him often, even though sadly he crossed the bar many years ago, during my second voyage to sea as a cadet.

Deepsea Masters, chief officers, second and third officers (and engineers) passed on so much to me in my formative years, as did my peers on the fast ferries and in the pilotage service who were so often willing to share knowledge. Then there were the marine consultants who guided me and helped me avoid some of the pitfalls that a new consultant experiences – although certainly not all!

Much has been written as guidance for seafarers transitioning from a seagoing career to one ashore and there is plenty of information available to help them avoid the major pitfalls. However, what about those, like me, who return to a seagoing career after a long period ashore? In my experience, there are not quite so many resources. This is consistent, I am sure, with the relatively low numbers who choose to make this move. This is where mentoring can be particularly important. I am grateful to my mooring master colleagues for the training and mentoring they so freely gave me.

As the years and my career progressed and I gained more experience, things changed somewhat. Not only was I gaining experiential knowledge from others, but I was now in a position to pass it on. Unknowingly at the time, I had crossed the line and become a mentor as well as a mentee.

Today I am constantly crossing that line as I gain experiential knowledge on the one hand and use every opportunity that arises to pass on my knowledge on the other hand. Do not get me wrong, this is not a perfect system. I am reminded of a situation not long after I arrived in America when I sought advice on a matter outside my scope of knowledge, only to be told by someone who had the information I needed, in no uncertain terms, that he would not impart it. This is where the ability to reflect comes in.

I considered his reaction and why it had come about. Was it my approach or was there something far more serious as the underlying cause? Having determined it was the latter, I moved on, found another person capable and willing to share the knowledge, and so got to where I needed to be.

Time to reflect

What I would like you to do now is take a few minutes of your time to reflect holistically on your career to date. In particular, consider how you have got to where you are now, much as I did in the preface to this book. Is there anyone who stands out as a mentor as I have described? I'll bet there is, and that you can remember their name and probably the occasion on which they passed on some vital experiential knowledge that has stayed with you throughout your professional career. If I am not mistaken, you have started smiling as you fondly remember certain people, or maybe just one person, and the experiences in your past that have made an impression on you. I love to do this exercise when I am speaking publicly on mentoring. From where I am standing at the front, I can see the whole room light up as attendees fondly remember those special people.

Let me share one of my moments with you from my early deepsea days. I was a mid-term deck cadet on board a product tanker transiting the Gibraltar Strait eastbound. It was the evening between 20:00 and 24:00 and the third officer on watch was on his first trip. The Master was on the bridge and, due to the large amount of traffic around, took the con (the navigational control of the vessel). The Master was talking about teaching in colleges and how he would never make a good teacher, as the three of us grouped around the radar. This was long before the days of electronic chart display and information systems (ECDIS) and integrated bridge equipment.

The Master asked me to pay close attention to crossing traffic both visually and on the radar and let him know if anything was coming. A little later, he asked why I had not reported the ferry that had just left the African side. Simple: I had not seen it! There were too many background lights to pick it out visually, even when I knew it was there and there was nothing showing on the radar – or so I thought. Then the 'old man', as the Master is commonly and affectionately known, showed me the 'piece of cliff' that had detached itself from the coast and was heading in our direction.

I have never forgotten that moment as I received that invaluable piece of experiential knowledge from a man 'who could never teach'. How important it was to become, some 13 years later, when I became Master of a cross-Channel ferry on the Dover Strait.

Now, I want you to reverse the process and reflect on an occasion when you have been a mentor and passed on a piece of experiential knowledge. I wonder how easy this is for you – probably not as simple as when you reflected on those who had been a mentor to you. It is not uncommon for people to be unable to think of one occasion when they were a mentor, even though they know that they were passing on experiential knowledge.

Do not worry too much about this. I have been studying the subject for years and still sometimes find it hard to think of specific occasions when I acted as a mentor. Yet I frequently hear stories about people who have helped others on their way and the bond that has subsequently formed between them. These stories generally come from the mentee, but certainly not always.

There must also be many other stories that exist where mentoring has taken place on an *ad hoc* basis where, even if a bond did not form between mentor and mentee, experiential knowledge was still transferred.

I remember one occasion as a consultant when I had a lovely opportunity to pass something on. I was on board a ship at anchor in a small cut off a river, where there was little room either side or behind us, where a number of barges had moored.

On the advice of the pilot who had brought the vessel in, it was moored with only two shackles (on deck) on the port anchor, approximately 54 metres of anchor chain. While I was on the bridge, I noticed the wind had increased slightly and that we had started to drag anchor. The duty officer had not noticed this as he was monitoring the position using the differential global positioning system (DGPS), rather than looking out of the bridge window.

I quietly pointed out to the third officer that we were moving and suggested he call the Master, which, after a little persuasion, he did. They successfully moved the vessel back into position and re-anchored, this time with just a little more anchor cable. There we remained for a considerable time.

The third officer was quite embarrassed by this and later in the day when I returned to the bridge, he came to me to explain what happened. It was his first trip as third officer and he thought the DGPS would tell him when they moved out of position. It took just five minutes for me to explain to him how to use visual transits to tell if they were moving, and I was glad to do so. What pleased me even more was that I later saw him explaining it to one of the deck cadets.

Involve me, and I learn

I am often asked what the difference is between teaching, coaching and mentoring. For me it is the reward, or lack of it. Often you will never know if your effort made a difference, but that doesn't matter. It is just the pleasure of passing knowledge on. One Master I know summed it up really well, saying:

Mentoring on board should not be confused with classroom training or coaching, where payment of any fee or other secondary interest comes into play, or where the mentor and mentee do not share the same work environment.

A few pages back I defined experiential knowledge as knowledge gained from professional, on-the-job experiences that have been reflected upon. What do I mean by this? Consider for a moment the worst experience you have ever had. Perhaps a maritime incident, a death in your close family or any number of dreadful things that make up a normal life.

As you have spent time reflecting on that experience, you have gained a significant amount of knowledge. This could be around what went wrong and how a similar incident might be avoided in the future, or how you were able to cope with a serious loss and move on. This is experiential knowledge. There will come a time when you can