

Effective Maritime Instructors – What are they?

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(Image Above : Modern training centres balance between theory, practical and assessment, with modern teaching techniques)

Poor training can lead to catastrophic accidents both financially and with loss of life, this is an unavoidable fact. The maritime industry is sadly far behind its counterparts in the aviation industry with regards to the importance placed on good quality, practical, effective training and this urgently needs to be addressed. But where does this importance start? Is it with the crew? The ships? The companies? I believe it begins with the trainers; Good quality training must come from passionate, dedicated instructors who understand their responsibility to the maritime community.

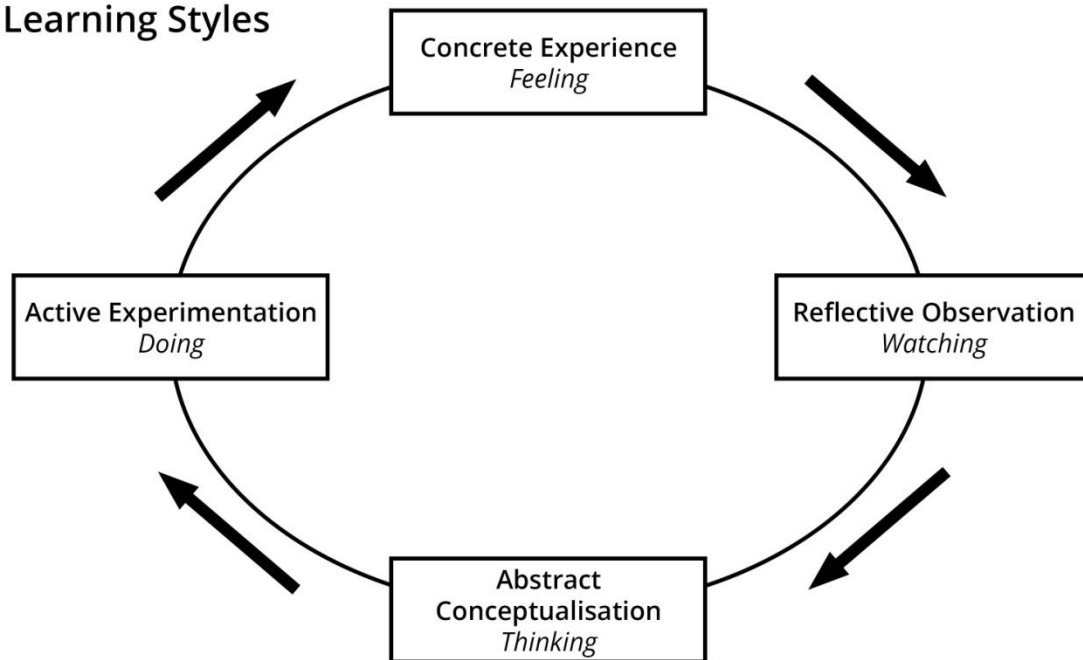
Food for thought: “Is a good maritime instructor someone with good maritime experience or someone with good instruction techniques that can pass on information effectively? Naturally the answer should be both, but from your experience of training schools, how many instructors exist with both attributes?”

Effective training delivery has always been and will always be a deep rooted passion of a good maritime instructor, and one that I certainly refuse to water down under increasing pressure from an industry that often looks to reduce training requirements. Having looked extensively into Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) as well as Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), as an industry we don't need to go anywhere near as far as this to achieve effective training as we strive to deliver motivated crews to vessels. As an instructor for over 50 HELM courses (at both Management and Operational levels) as well as a number of IMO 6.09 "Training Course for Instructors" and IMO 6.10 "Train The Simulator Instructor and Assessor" courses over the last few years, this has thrown up many questions, but one central/pivotal question continually rears its head.

Question. As an industry are we simply looking for a financial return from sending crew members on training courses as they supposedly reduce marine risk, or, are we actually looking for a tangible improvement in the quality of the seafarer and the industry as a whole?

I would argue that it cannot be our motivation as lecturers to just read out facts and figures in a haphazard fashion, such as the `tick box` courses of the past. We must inject all our efforts and approach training delivery in a dynamic fashion in order that we expose - as much as humanly possible - students to a concrete learning experience that not only passes skills designed to reduce marine risk, but also make the individual a better seafarer and improves the industry long term as a whole. This approach is summarised by David Kolbs, an Education Theorist.

Kolb's Learning Styles



Above Image: Kolbs four stage learning cycle.

This is so they will know When, How and Why to apply the principles of their new found skill in a measured - autonomous fashion as opposed to a petulant “That’s what the instructor told me to do” mindset. After all we must never forget we are `The Guardians of the Standards` for delivery of training packages in the 21st Century.

Some of the qualities I believe we must develop and nurture as we become instructors.

There is one very important aid that we put in front of all students which can have more impact and influence on the effectiveness of training than any other media.....YOU. We can all recognise what we consider to be a good instructor and that one instructor is very different from another.

Qualities an instructor should possess:

- **Confidence.** You need to have confidence to be fully effective; firstly confidence with the material that you are instructing and secondly confidence in your abilities to deliver that material.

- **Bearing.** How do you appear to the class? Be aware of your image in front of the class and ensure that that image is not in itself a distraction.
- **Mannerisms.** Avoid anything that could be a distraction to the students. This may be something repeatedly said such as “ok” or “right” or constantly jangling keys or coins in your pocket or pacing up and down over the same area.
- **Voice.** Modulate the voice and use pauses for effect and emphasis. Varying the rhythm, speed, volume and pitch of your voice will help to keep the attention of the class.
- **Eye Contact.** Eye contact is one of the most important aspects of Body Language. Making eye contact with your students will help you to gauge whether your message is being truly received and understood.
- **Conduct/Behaviour.** Your attitude is important as this ultimately will influence the rapport you have with your students.
- **Enthusiasm.** An enthusiastic manner adopted by the instructor can have a greater effect on the learning process than any other quality. It has the ability to make a mediocre lesson into a good one and conversely, lack of enthusiasm can turn a good lesson into a poor one.

In conclusion, below is an extract from an interview with a newly qualified assistant Marine Instructor, who has never been to sea or instructed in a professional environment before.

"When I joined the training centre I was originally employed to manage and facilitate IT equipment, from basic desktop computers to advanced electronic programmes. Based on my computing knowledge I soon found myself assisting the established Maritime Instructors with chart uploads and VRD playback. I was under the impression as I watched other instructors that lecturing was just the process for throwing a load of facts at a student, they learnt it, we test their ability to learn it

*and then they go back to sea. When I was approached and asked if I felt comfortable delivering part of a lesson (the technical side of the course) I jumped at the chance as I thought that that was all I had to do.... **I was wrong!** Previous to this I had only delivered training on a voluntary basis within my passion for technology. As a standard course of action, the company encouraged and guided me as I underwent the full remit of train the trainer courses available. I was naturally apprehensive but gained so much understanding of the industry and how it, and more to the point I, can make mistakes as a result of simple complacency. The lessons I have learnt stayed with me and I draw on those skills on a daily basis.*

As a result I moved over and started to support the bridge course as the exercise controller and swiftly found myself becoming a Co-Teacher. Having now completing the IMO 6.09 "Train the Trainer" Course, this for me has paid dividends as it pulled all my skills together and assembled them in a more structured form as opposed to a hap hazard order. This in turn allowed me to understand how proper measured training packages are formulated and that instruction is not just a matter of regurgitating chunks of information; there is a whole thought process that goes into it which I was unaware of. The approach to teaching crew members (Adults - Andragogy) is very different to teaching children (Pedagogy). Having studied the differences extensively, I think that this (Pedagogy) is how many training packages have, or are, being delivered in some elements of our industry from my observations.

Looking back at the 6 week training/education package that I received in Whiteley, Southampton, using the process of Andragogy, develop my understanding, skills and the knowledge to become an effective instructor, I am fully aware that my current skill set needs to be nurtured as I move forward as an instructor in our industry, a challenge and prospect that I am looking forward to. I am a non-mariner, and non-conventionally trained instructor, however, in the role of teaching support I can clearly see that the ability to effectively pass information is just as important as the lead instructors maritime background and teaching qualifications."