



# Marketing an invisible industry:

## Multi-level strategies to attract and retain Canadian seafarers

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# We have a problem

- Increased international trade
- Shortage of seafarers
  - Officers, qualified and experienced
- Difficulty attracting and retaining
- Invisible industry at best
- Poor image at worst





# Why do we have the problem?

- Perceptions about the industry
  - Awareness, image
  - Is there a career?
  - Lifestyle issues
  - Baby Boomers
  - Generation X and Y





# The invisible industry

- *Well I don't believe that the image that it does portray is having a lot of impact ... It's not a central issue as far as the community is concerned, it doesn't occupy their hearts and minds on a day-to-day basis like health, public safety, education, even roads which they travel on, and unless they actually live in the precincts of a port or within the industry it is never much on their radar.*
- *I think it is a very bland image, they don't actually portray themselves as important...it's just very bland.*





# What are we doing about the problem?

- Shortage recognised, yet few solutions
  - Improved marketing and company/industry practices
  - Holistic and strategic approach
  - Marketing and human resource strategies





# Possible multi-level solutions

- 2 levels
  - Employer of choice (EOC)
  - Industry of choice (IOC)
- One is not possible without the other
- Total industry effort needed
- Integrates HRM and marketing strategies





# Employer of choice strategy

- Widely used in other industries, why not shipping?
- *Company that attracts, optimizes and holds top talent for long tenure because the employees choose to be there*  
(Parr 2001: 5)
- Six interlocking strategies  
(Alrichs 2000)





# Situation in Canada?

- Canada not seen as a maritime nation
- Similar shortages
- Plenty of recognition of EOCs
  - Canada's Top 100 employers
  - Canada's 50 best managed companies
- But not for shipping or transport
  - One exception





# Are we a maritime nation?

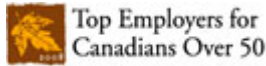
*“Australia is a maritime nation and scarcely knows it. An astonishingly high proportion of Australians live and work in the seaport capitals, and the Australian industrial machine relies on a great shipping wheel circling the continent serviced by specialized industrial port installations.*

*Hardly any new developments within the interior can take place without a supporting development upon the coast. Australia is, after all, an island continent and almost all her trade must pass through sea gateways”.*





# Canadian top employer lists



This is the industry's challenge 10



# EOC strategies

1. Strategic approach to recruitment and retention
2. Communicating reputation and image
3. Recruit the right people
4. Retention – employees as customers
5. Development of employees
6. Leadership and workplace culture





# Kokoszko and Cahoon (2007)

- Recruitment and retention difficulties
- Poor image
- Benefits - \$\$, travel, breaks
- Career paths?
- Expectations  $\neq$  reality
- Marketing role not appreciated





# EOC conclusions

- HRD and career paths
- EOC important but what if industry unattractive
  - Don't know great companies exist
- Inclusive top down approach needed
- Marketing solutions to HRM problems





# Industry of choice strategy

- Extends EOC strategy
- Emerging but elusive concept
- Although used but,
  - Not often defined or explained
  - How to achieve IOC?
  - Maritime examples?





## EOC or IOC – which image?

- *I think probably no image. I think it's because [the industry is] busy just doing what they do, they're not necessarily interested in having an image. The individual companies brand is far more important than the image of the industry overall.*
- *...the problem is that it does portray a positive image but the [message] just doesn't get out into the general community.*





# Wilkinson and Cahoon (2008)

- Extends Kokoszko and Cahoon (2007)
- Investigates
  - Australian shipping industry assocns
  - Seafaring and uni students
- Tests IOC strategies
  - NDA (2006)





# IOC strategies (NDA 2006)

1. Build an effective employment brand
2. Embrace diversity and offer opportunities for all groups at different levels
3. Establish widely available work/life balance programs





## IOC strategies cont

4. Recruitment practices that match skill sets and experience with industry needs
5. Learning and development programs
6. Unified and transparent culture





# Results

- Ineffective or little desire for image
- No image = no employment brand
- Work/life balance = shore leave
- HRD recognised as necessary
- Industry culture not attractive
- Career path needed – ship to shore





# Research required

- National and international issues?
- What does EOC and IOC mean for shipping?
- Shipping's image and empty brand?
- Multi-country comparative research
- How serious is shipping about finding solutions – funding required





# Final thought...

*Without the right people in the right jobs, no strategy can be fully implemented, no goal met, and no significant profits made...  
[therefore] ...employers of choice [and IOC] have elevated improved recruiting and retention goals into their strategic plans*

Ahrichs (2000:44)



# Thank you

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