

# Talent is the Heart of Maritime



# Amid Tides of Change, Talent Lies at the Core of Everything

*Shoring up the talent pipeline is crucial for industry transformation.*



**Jaime Niam**  
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Every worker matters. After a week in which much has focused on the lofty goals to digitalise and decarbonise, Singapore Maritime Week 2023 circled back to the most important factor to drive the sector: talent.

For all the talk about technology and transformation, it is talent which determines the continued evolution and elevation of the global maritime world. The ones who realise this soonest will move fastest and are most likely to succeed, said Mr Chee Hong Tat, Senior Minister of State for Transport and Finance.

“Workplaces will be transformed, and jobs will be redesigned. Companies and workers who can adjust quickly and effectively will stand to gain from the waves of change,” he noted.

His comments echoed that of Mr S Iswaran, Singapore’s Minister for Transport and Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations, who said at the opening of SMW on Monday that the future of the industry depends critically on the quality of its maritime professionals.

## Training matters

The talent supply chain must be holistic, said panellists during Friday’s Maritime Manpower Forum. It goes beyond recruitment – it must also include the development and retention of talent.

And they must cover all aspects of maritime, shared the panellists in a discussion on the emerging skills and future jobs in the industry.

“The mindset change has to start from the leadership; the top bosses have to buy in and drive it. Shoreside has to change first, to be an enabler for seaside,” said Praveen Shukla, Director, Crewing (Marine HR & Talent Development), Wallem Group.

The skills needed to transform maritime are not so different from other industries either. Soft skills like a growth mindset and learning agility are cross-sectoral and transferrable, said Nicholas Bizic, Vice President, Talent Management & Learning, American Bureau of Shipping (ABS).

The same goes for harder IT and tech skills, observed Richard Koh, Chief Technology & Security & Customer Success Officer (Singapore), Microsoft.

“Ships are just big travelling computers out at sea. Tech should be accessible and approachable, not something scary that requires a computer science degree. We should think of how tech can be co-pilots to all roles in the industry,” he said.

Caroline Yang, President, Singapore Shipping Association, and Vice Chair, International Chamber of Shipping, expanded on his point. “I want my seafarers to go back to doing seafaring,” she stated, pointing out that they are often sidetracked from



Caroline Yang, President of the Singapore Shipping Association and Vice Chair of the International Chamber of Shipping, talks talent at the third instalment of the Maritime Manpower Forum. Also featured on the panel was Praveen Shukla, Director, Crewing (Marine HR & Talent Development), Wallem Group (left).

their main duties by tedious tasks. “Push a button for a report to be generated – that’s what I hope to see on ships.”

To this end, effective, accessible, and affordable training is vital, and efforts are underway. Mr Bizic shared some of ABS’ training initiatives, including regular situational training for field surveyors, and safety and training simulations for liquefied natural gas (LNG) vessels.

However, the onus of upskilling should not fall solely on seafarers, but also companies and employers, stressed Mary Liew, General Secretary, Singapore Maritime Officers’ Union.

Ms Yang agreed, adding that engine manufacturers, fuel scientists, and designers “need to teach us how to manage (new vessels and fuels) safely”.

## Taking care of talent

But it was the focus on the well-being of seafarers that drew the loudest applause from the audience.

“We must tap on tech to improve their working environment and impact them in a positive way. If we can’t do so, we have all failed,” said Ms Liew in an impassioned plea to employers, earning the commendation of moderator Nick Potter, General Manager, Shipping & Maritime for Asia, Pacific and the Middle East, Shell, and Board Member, Singapore Maritime Foundation.

For her, this means welfare benefits like remote medical consultations and reliable Internet access, since seafarers can be at sea for months on end without seeing their loved ones.

Ms Yang’s unabashed embrace of foreign talent was similarly met by cheers. “We have a lot of good foreign talent in Singapore who leave us because they don’t feel appreciated. They can stay here for 10, 15 years, but cannot get anything better than an employment pass. I’m mindful of national considerations, but I’m just saying my wishlist,” she said. ■

**“I am agnostic to wherever you come from. If you have talent, passion, and you want to be in this industry, maritime wants you.”**

**Caroline Yang**  
President  
Singapore Shipping Association

Goh Jia Yong, Partner, People Advisory Services at Ernst & Young (third from left), speaking at the panel discussion. Also featured: Martha Selwyn, Manager of the United Nations Global Compact (first from left) and Zhang Xiaojie, Director of the Technical Corporate Division at IMO (second from left).

# From Sea to Shore: Easing the Transition for the Maritime Workforce

*Tackling the manpower shortage will require collaborative and individual efforts.*



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A ship at port is plugged into the global maritime trade. Once it sets sail, however, it enters a bubble. For seafarers accustomed to the isolation of life on board, transitioning to a shore-based role might be a jarring experience – one that could cause them to leave the industry.

“The maritime industry is facing an acute shortage of people, and enhancing the attractiveness of maritime jobs and providing more sustainable career pathways to attract and retain talent will be key,” said Hor Weng Yew, Chairman of the Singapore Maritime Foundation and Chief Executive Officer of Pacific Carriers Limited.

The issue is an urgent one. As the industry continues its push to decarbonise and digitalise, the United Nation’s Maritime Just Transition Taskforce estimates that some 800,000 seafarers will require retraining by the mid-2030s to handle new fuels and technologies.

“Shipping is at the heart of the green transition – we need to use this to engage and recruit youth,” noted Martha Selwyn, Manager of the United Nations Global Compact, at the panel discussion moderated by Mr Hor on preparing the maritime

workforce. The compact is the world’s largest corporate sustainability initiative.

Manpower crunch aside, the industry is facing other headwinds. Training institutes are not keeping pace with developments in decarbonisation and digitalisation, said Dr Shahrin Osman, Regional Head of Maritime Advisory and Director of the Maritime Decarbonisation and Autonomy Centre of Excellence at DNV.

“The technology is there, but more investments need to be made in training facilities at a regional level,” he observed.

### Structure must come with purpose

Mega-trends come with mega-challenges, panellists agreed. And challenges need to be approached in a structured manner to inspire confidence in the workforce.

**“Shipping is at the heart of the green transition – we need to use this to engage and recruit youth.”**

**Martha Selwyn**  
Manager  
United Nations Global Compact

Governments and the private sector can drive this confidence by working together to help people understand how ways of working will change, and what kind of skills they need moving forward, said Goh Jia Yong, Partner, People Advisory Services at Ernst & Young.

In particular, Singapore can be “the tide that lifts all boats in Asia”, said Bjørn Højgaard, CEO of ship management firm Anglo-Eastern. He noted that the city-state’s position as one of the world’s preeminent maritime centres puts it in good stead to play a leadership role in the region.

Meanwhile, regulatory bodies like the International Maritime Organization (IMO) should capitalise on the green and digital transitions to diversify the workforce. As shipping transforms from a traditional industry into one that incorporates elements of automation, digitalisation, and remote work, more women and youth can be roped into the sector, noted Zhang Xiaojie, Director of the Technical Corporate Division at IMO.

The transition must also come with a sense of individual purpose.

“Rather than thinking of it in terms of millions of people who need upskilling, we need to unleash an inner motivation in each individual,” said Mr Højgaard. “People need to have a sense of purpose. We change the world person by person, day by day.” ■

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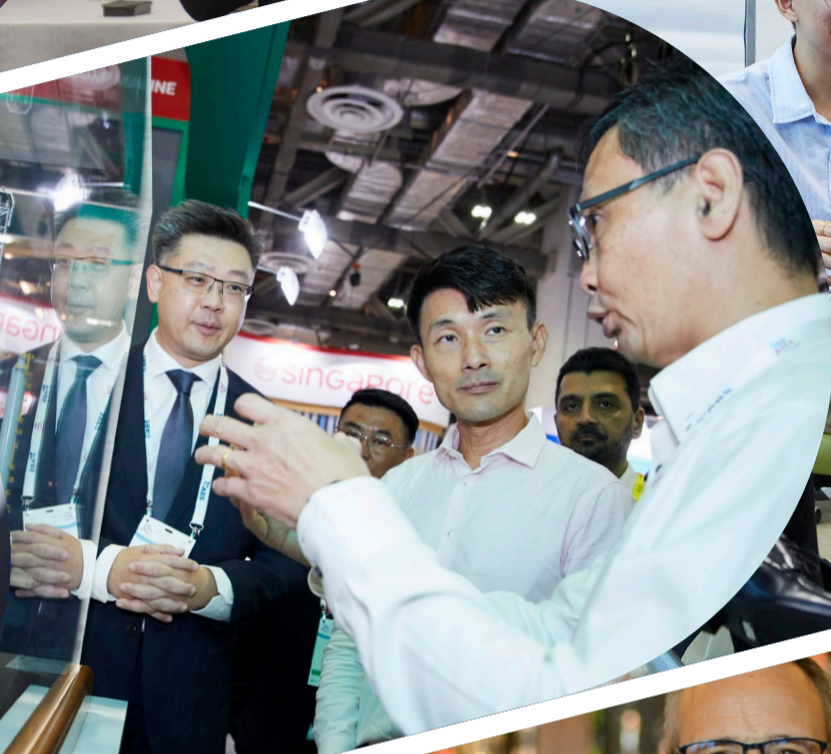
# SUSTAINABLE SMW

Participants who attended this year's Singapore Maritime Week (SMW) would have noticed the absence of single-use plastic water bottles, typically a standard offering at meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions. There were also no printed marketing collaterals such as newsletters and paper bags. Instead, large QR codes were displayed on easel stands placed around the conference venue, urging attendees to scan and read the Show Dailies produced for the week-long event.

The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) also worked with conference venue Sands Expo and Convention Centre to tune up the air conditioning temperature to between 25 and 26 deg C, to save energy. Over the five days of the event, delegates were reminded that there was no need for jackets and ties. They were also encouraged to carpool, or take the public transport as they travel to and from events.

As the industry looks to turn its net-zero ambitions into action, MPA shows how sustainability is more than a buzzword, and it starts from within.





# What Do Youths Want From the Maritime Sector?



Dr Kenneth Low (centre), Associate Professor and Cluster Director in Engineering at Singapore Institute of Technology, speaking at a panel on “Conversations between Youths and Industry” with (from left) Dr Cleopatra Doumbia-Henry, President of World Maritime University, and Lu Hui Ting, a MaritimeSG Youth Ambassador.

*Today’s veterans need to equip tomorrow’s talents.*



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**D**r Kenneth Low used to look forward to his seafarer uncle’s return every few months. As a teenager, he would pore over shipping publications brought back from the voyages.

“It’s just fascinating looking at the photographs of the horizons at sea. I was captivated,” he recalled at the final panel of Singapore Maritime Week 2023, titled “Conversations between youths and industry”. Alas, Dr Low’s parents forbade their only son from sailing for fear of the dangers at sea. Still, he went to pursue a diploma in shipbuilding and offshore engineering.

Today, he is Associate Professor and Cluster Director in Engineering at the Singapore Institute of Technology, and has also contributed to the production of Singapore’s elite warships.

His career – which also includes project management, business development, and merger and acquisition experiences – is an example of how opportunities in the maritime sector are as deep and wide as the sea.

## What youths need to do well

Like Dr Low, fellow panellist Punit Oza’s maritime career spanned various functions and locations. The founder of consultancy Maritime NXT and Vice Chairman of the Singapore branch of the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers has also been involved in bulk shipping and chartering, among many other specialties.

“I’ve seen multiple pathways where I could experience the industry in my own way. That is what makes this industry unique,” he said. “You

can build your pathway in the way you want to go. There’s no straightforward, stagnant way of doing it. It’s dynamic.”

This ability to embrace a plethora of experiences was highlighted by Aaron Chan, Chief Officer at shipping company CMA CGM, as a key to doing well in the sector.

“What I’ve learnt from the last decade of sailing at sea is keeping an open mind. This allows you to work with and learn from everyone, from captains to cadets.”

He was responding to moderator Akanksha Batura Pai, Chairperson of the Young Executives Group at the Singapore Shipping Association and Head of Strategy and Growth at Sinoda Shipping Agency, on what “undisruptable skills” industry

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**Punit Oza**  
Founder  
Maritime NXT

newcomers should have. Other valued soft skills include communication and a zest for learning.

But there is no running away from hard skills. Dr Cleopatra Doumbia-Henry, President of the World Maritime University founded by the International Maritime Organization, said she is constantly thinking about what skills the sector would require in 2040. The postgraduate institution’s response has been to devise a programme on the future of work, with a focus on technology and automation.

## What youths want from the sector

The panel also outlined what youths wanted from the sector. Lu Hui Ting, a Maritime Studies student at Singapore’s Nanyang Technological University and the panel’s youngest speaker, said growth is their key focus.

“(We want) a good starting point to secure the future roles we want (and) a place to provide the technical and soft skills to stay relevant in the industry,” said Ms Lu, who is also a MaritimeSG Youth Ambassador, a programme under the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore that promotes the industry among the next generation.

Mr Chan highlighted that it is also important for companies to build trust with the families of sailors and assure them that seafaring is safer than imagined.

This sense of well-being can be enhanced in the sector through a culture of mentorship, the speakers observed.

It is something Dr Doumbia-Henry wants to see more of. “What I want all of us to do is look around us and see who we can help to take the next step. We must not hesitate.” ■

# Transforming the Industry That Never Sleeps, One Challenge at a Time

When Quek Yong Jun first took on his maritime internship at PSA Singapore (PSA), he was not quite sure what to expect. He was posted to the Container Specialist Resource Department (CSR) at the City Terminals, which oversaw manpower planning for more than 2,000 crane operators in all PSA terminals.

It is a pivotal part of the business which works round the clock to facilitate smooth port operations. With PSA operating the world's largest container transshipment hub in Singapore, it plays a key role in ensuring a seamless flow of global trade.

For the 24-hour port operations to run without a hitch, resource management and manpower allocation had to be on point. There were situations where workers had to take emergency leave which could disrupt staff scheduling and work flow.

Yong Jun, an industrial and systems engineering undergraduate, was still finding his footing, but realised he could help review and digitalise this

urgent leave application system to enhance operational processes and efficiency.

## Teochew lunches

He started by getting a better understanding of his department's work processes during his three-month stint. While Yong Jun, 24, was the youngest in his department, he became the go-to person when it came to questions on technology and systems. "When my colleagues had IT problems, they were at first hesitant to approach a newcomer. But I showed them that I was there and was open to helping them."

In turn, he learnt the ins and outs of the maritime industry from these "uncles", whom he calls his mentors. Some had worked at the port for decades and would share their wealth of experience with Yong Jun, including teaching him about technical aspects of the machinery.

The National University of Singapore student built a strong rapport with this group of seasoned colleagues over lunches. Many of their conversations were in Teochew and Mandarin. Yong Jun understands the dialect as his parents use it at home. "We talked about anything under the sun, from what we should eat for lunch and current affairs, to my queries on the industry."

## The first of many

It was through these casual conversations that Yong Jun realised that he could contribute and play a part in continuous process improvement and efficiency optimisation in the department. As a recipient of the MaritimeONE scholarship by the

Singapore Maritime Foundation, such an experience would be a fruitful eye-opener at the start of his career.

Yong Jun noticed that one important area that could be enhanced was the urgent leave application system as it affects a large number of staff. Staff usually applied for leave well in advance through the existing leave system but, at times, would call to inform their supervisors if they had last-minute leave requests. This meant that additional time had to be factored in to attend to and arrange for such urgent requests.

To minimise the disruptions from the ad-hoc phone calls, Yong Jun devised a digital solution for the operators to submit their requests. To facilitate a smooth transition, he made sure the user interface was friendly and would be on hand to guide those who needed help. What used to be a multi-step process was streamlined significantly. In addition, the information collected could be used for analytics to identify trends and insights to inform decision-making.

"To work alongside a dedicated team to implement a positive change like this was very encouraging and inspiring for me," said Yong Jun.

It is the first of many challenges he hopes to transform in the maritime sector, one which he says never sleeps. "As PSA embarks on the transition towards Tuas Port, there will be opportunities abound for us to step out of our comfort zone and to learn and grow in the process," said the avid rock climber, who is excited about embarking on more adventures in the dynamic and growing maritime sector in Singapore. ■



Photo courtesy of PSA Singapore

Derek Wong

# The Only Female Onboard? No Problem

Sailing runs in Andrea Mckeown's family. Growing up, she was captivated by stories that her uncles and cousins shared as marine engineers out at sea. "It sounded exciting – living and working on a ship," she said.

Listening to these nautical adventures compelled her to join the Singapore Maritime Academy's Marine Engineering Diploma Course in 2021 at Singapore Polytechnic. She is a rarity – in her class of 20 students, she is only one of three females. "It's a male dominated industry," said the Year 3 student. "But you shouldn't be intimidated."

She is also not one to be deskbound. "I like to do practical things, hands on work," she said. And with marine engineers tasked to maintain complicated machinery onboard such as freshwater generators and compressors, the job seemed an ideal fit.

Becoming a future seafarer is also a badge of pride. "The maritime industry plays an important role in Singapore's progress and development," said Andrea, who is also a recip-

ient of the Idan & Batia Ofer Family Foundation - MaritimeONE Scholarship. Sponsored by Eastern Pacific Shipping, this initiative by the Singapore Maritime Foundation looks to nurture talent by organising events such as maritime confer-



ences, networking sessions, and talks by former scholars.

And as maritime increases its efforts on digitalisation and decarbonisation, it is also an exciting time, she noted. "It's always interesting to me how so many people can work in the maritime industry. There are multiple sectors," she said, pointing to terminal operators and maritime law companies as examples.

But for her, being out at sea is the ultimate dream. After hearing all about seafaring journeys, it is now her turn to live it. In October, she will begin an internship by setting sail for six months as an engine cadet with Eastern Pacific Shipping. She might turn out to be the only female onboard, but it is something that does not scare her. In fact, she is relishing the challenge.

"Being by yourself out there, it's important to have be mentally strong," she said. ■

Justin Kor

Andrea Mckeown (pictured right) will be embarking on a six-month internship as an engine cadet with Eastern Pacific Shipping.

# Making Waves

In this series, we speak to individuals who are making a splash in the industry, from venture capital to championing the rights of seafarers.

*As a senior manager at BW Epic Kosan, Ms Maike Brinckmann handles debt finance and risk matters for a leading owner and operator of gas carriers. But the maritime industry veteran wears a second hat, as President of the Singapore chapter of the Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA). She tells Puah Rui Xian how she is growing the presence of women in maritime through WISTA.*

**Q: You entered the shipping industry in 2003. Did you face any obstacles as a woman?**

It was subtle things like being excluded from gatherings because “the guys were going out for drinks”. Looking back on it, I realise that certain behaviours by men may not have been the greatest.

Some WISTA members have also shared that there seems to be a bias against having women in leadership positions, or in technical or operational roles.

This is where WISTA comes in, to bring together role models in the industry and offer a strong support network to women at all stages of their careers.

**Q: Tell us more about WISTA.**

WISTA is an international networking organisation with over 3,800 members across 56 countries. Hosting regular events to bring members, supporters, and friends together is key for us. We also collaborate with other organisations to organise skills-development seminars on technical and operational industry topics, tours of port facilities or ships, leadership workshops, and fireside chats on personal development and mental health.

Additionally, the regional and international element of WISTA is very strong. Members on business trips can connect with somebody from the local WISTA chapter if they need support. Recently, we met a young naval architect from WISTA Florida. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she reached out to us to say, “I’m going to be based in Singapore for a couple months, and I don’t know anybody. Would you like to meet up?” That’s usually how this works. We’re fortunate to have regular visits from WISTA members worldwide.

**Q: Who are your members?**

We just passed the 90-member mark, which is a record number. It’s the most diverse membership we’ve had to date. There are members from all sectors in the maritime industry, including shipowners and operators, trad-

ers, even naval engineers and bunker suppliers, which are traditionally considered “male” roles. I find it very encouraging to see young women coming in with these backgrounds.

The more diversity, the better. We can all grow from talking to people who are different from ourselves.

**Q: How does an organisation like WISTA engage with men in the industry?**

Change initiatives are often considered women’s issues, but it should be the opposite. We need men to help, because they are often the ones who have a seat at the table.

What we do is approach men to be allies in this journey. WISTA Singapore elects male ambassadors, well-known industry leaders, who help to introduce their business contacts to the organisation. We get quite a lot of new members and raise WISTA’s profile that way. You do meet men who think it’s unfair how WISTA doesn’t accept individual male members, but that’s when I try to share stories about what women have experienced, why it is important to have an organisation like WISTA, and also try to offer solutions as to how men can get involved.

**Q: What is your best memory with WISTA?**

Last year, WISTA International held its Annual General Meeting in Geneva. Being in a room with hundreds of women from all over the world was a very special experience because usually, at the conferences I attend, it’s a room full of dark suits. There was a fantastic energy throughout the event that I carry with me to this day.

**Q: How do you measure your success in advancing gender equality?**

I believe that the boost in numbers and diversity of our membership reflects the industry’s progress. The profile of the organisation was also amplified in 2018 when WISTA International was approved for consultative status with the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Now we can attend IMO meetings and be represented at international forums.



**Q: What is on the horizon for WISTA?**

This year is WISTA Singapore’s 25th anniversary. We haven’t planned out the details yet, but we’re going to have a nice year-end party to celebrate.

I think we’re on the right path. Community building has to remain the key focus. Once we achieve gender equality, strictly speaking, WISTA will become redundant.

But personally, I think it never will be. The community is always good to have, for sure. Being a part of WISTA taught me never to underestimate what your own support network can do for you. Before you know it, you become part of the support network for others. ■