The prudent mariner takes avoiding action

Bernardo Obando-Rojas discussed the need for seafarers to build a portfolio of skills to ensure their employability. He shall argue that they need to think beyond their immediate and foreseeable careers and plan to keep their options open.

Until recently, I was a serving deck officer. I believe I am well trained, highly qualified, and I was fortunate to be working for a good company and to have a secure position. However, as I reached my 40th birthday, I increasingly became aware of how vulnerable my position actually was. I realised that no matter how good I was at my job, or how many qualifications I had, if my health failed me or I had an accident, I would soon find myself unemployed and unemployable. Unlike many shore-side jobs, seafaring requires that the employee meets stringent medical requirements. Indeed, in many cases, seafarers who now find themselves unemployed owing to serious accidents, it is possible to do part-time courses while on leave or at sea to develop skills or acquire new ones. The aim is to “Do what I would if I couldn’t continue at sea.” Hopefully, it will never happen, but in the course of my work as a researcher, I have met many seafarers who now find themselves unemployed owing to serious accidents, some because their skills are no longer required, such as radio officers.

Thirdly, and perhaps the most difficult for many seafarers is to ensure that, if and when they join a fit place to work. The most important thing is to know what you are signing and to have a secure position. The owner’s P&I cover for seafarer injury and death, or killed? What are the medical provisions, and what is the process for making a claim for compensation should the need arise? International Maritime organisation (IMO) guidelines require that all ships have an injury or illness that is displayed in the accommodation for seafarers to inspect. And, very important, is the ability to manage your finances in a way that allows you to buy some time should you be unable to work for whatever reason. The good mariner is traditionally the prudent mariner, the one who takes action to avoid the storm.

A DIFFICULT problem for seafarers to address is ensuring that the ship they join is a fit place to work, so they don’t end up stranded without pay like the seafarers on board the Asphalt Carrier and Al Baraka in Dubai. (Photo: Stephen Miller)