

Successful Recruiting: Potential Lessons from the Canadian Navy

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Historically, recruiting seafarers has been a challenge for the shipping industry, and the same is true today as the demand for seafarers remains high. Increased opportunities onshore, lifestyle concerns, and other factors have been identified as barriers to successful seafarer recruitment. However, the shipping industry is not alone in its quest to recruit suitable candidates for a life at sea. Another maritime entity that faces similar recruitment challenges is the Canadian Navy, and it might be worthwhile for those in the shipping industry to examine one approach to recruitment that has been employed by the Canadian Navy. Since the early 1990s, the Canadian Navy has partnered with the Marine Institute, a Canadian MET institute, to offer training programs through the Naval Technician Training Plan (NTTP), whose graduates fill vacant shipboard positions. This paper examines the approach used by the Canadian Navy to successfully recruit candidates via these programs and compares it to the approach used by shipping companies in their recruitment efforts, with an aim to learn from the Navy's apparent success. To conclude, this paper examines the results of a survey taken by students involved in the NTTP programs who were asked questions modelled after a Shiptalk Life at Sea Seafarer Attraction and Retention Survey. The results indicate that the NTTP programs are an effective recruitment tool, and in particular, an integrated approach to training and recruitment is one of the keys to the Navy's apparent success in recruitment.

Keywords: recruitment of seafarers, MET and industry partnership, integrated recruitment.

1. Introduction

A number of published reports indicate that the shipping industry is about to experience a shortage of seafarers, particularly officers. One publication predicts that the shortfall will reach 27,000 by 2015 [1]. Drewry estimates a current shortfall of 19,000 officers worldwide and predicts that this figure will rise to 21,700 by 2018 [2]. Given that over 90% of the world's goods are shipped via sea [3], if these predictions come to fruition, it could have ramifications on virtually every supply chain in the world as shipments are delayed for longer and longer periods of time due to a lack of qualified seamen. Keeping seafarer numbers up consists of two things – recruitment and retention, or the ability to hire new people and the ability to keep them once they have been hired. While recruitment and retention are often discussed together, they are each significant topics on their own, and because recruitment has specifically been cited as a serious problem in the shipping industry [4], this paper will deal solely with this topic.

A number of factors have been cited as reasons for this staffing shortage. For example, issues such as the criminalisation of seafarers around the world, piracy, tough regulations, good job opportunities on shore, and concern for family may dissuade many from considering a career in shipping [5]. Others point to the poor image of the shipping industry in the eyes of the public as another reason for this staffing shortage, arguing that if the industry were viewed more favourably by the public, then recruiting might be an easier task [6].

The issues facing the shipping industry are not unlike those once faced by the Canadian Navy when it experienced a shortage of skilled technical personnel to fill vacant shipboard positions. The parallels between the Navy and the shipping industry are apparent: they both operate fleets of seagoing vessels, and they both require skilled personnel to fill shipboard positions. Therefore, this paper will investigate one way the Canadian Navy addressed its shortage of skilled technicians by partnering with a Canadian civilian MET institution, namely the Marine Institute in St. John's, Newfoundland.

This paper will provide an overview of the approach employed by the military to successfully recruit new candidates into their technician training programs delivered by the Marine Institute and whose graduates fill vacant shipboard positions. Brief descriptions of the training programs and of the Marine Institute will be followed by an overview of the recruitment process used by the Navy as compared to that traditionally used by the shipping industry. Finally, this paper will conclude by examining the results of a survey given to students enrolled under the Naval Technician Training Plan (NTTP), which consists of both the Naval Combat System Technician Training Plan (NCSTTP) and the Marine Engineering Technician Training Plan (METTP). This survey was structured to ask questions similar to the Seafarer Attraction & Retention Survey Report carried out as part of the Shiptalk Life at Sea Survey 2007/8 [7]. Where appropriate, the responses of the students will be compared to those of the Shiptalk survey to assess how successful the Navy's approach has been in addressing its recruitment efforts and whether there are potential implications for the recruitment of seafarers into the shipping industry.

2. Overview of the NTTP Programs

What is now formally known as the Fisheries and Marine Institute of Memorial University, or simply the Marine Institute for short, was founded in 1964 as the College of Fisheries, Navigation, Marine Engineering and Electronics. In 1992, the Marine Institute became a part of Memorial University, and since that time, it has grown to offer a wide range of educational opportunities to the marine sector, including short industrial response courses, diplomas of technology programs, advanced diploma programs, and bachelor and masters level degree programs. The mission of the Marine Institute is "To foster economic development in strategic marine sectors of the Newfoundland economy, particularly the fishery and offshore development and to enable Newfoundlanders to participate in the marine industry, nationally and internationally" [8].

The current version of the METTP was launched in 1994, and the NCSTTP began in 1992 [9]. The METTP program is currently ongoing, but the NCSTTP program was put on hiatus in 2013.

For both the NCSTTP and METTP, the Marine Institute was the winning bidder in a competitive bidding process for the training contract with the Navy. After selecting the Marine Institute to carry out the training, the Navy worked in partnership with the Marine Institute to develop academic programs that were tailored to the specific staffing requirements of the Navy and which would also incorporate the academic rigour expected at a civilian MET institute. Deazly [10] provides the following summary of the NTTP programs: "Fully subsidized and accredited, both programs provide students with a two-year technician's diploma in one of three fields: marine engineering, electronics engineering and electro-mechanical engineering. Members completing one of the three programs are employed as naval electronics technicians (radar, sonar or communications), naval weapons technicians or marine engineering mechanics." The programs require academic training at the Marine Institute and sea time aboard Navy ships. Students who are trained under the NTTP are enlisted in the Navy during their training program, must attend basic training, and are subject to the same expectations as all members of the Navy, which includes physical fitness and drills even while they are in school. Finally, new recruits must commit to the Navy for six years when enlisting to undertake NTTP training [11].

The Marine Institute does not operate in isolation from the Navy in its delivery of NTTP training as there is regular contact between Navy staff and the staff at the Marine Institute through a detachment of the Canadian Forces Naval Engineering School (CFNES) that is located at the Marine Institute to help oversee NTTP training. This office houses several staff who provide divisional and administrative support for the students and who liaise with senior Marine Institute staff and instructors to coordinate administrative and logistical requirements [12]. Jobe, a former staff member at the CFNES office at the Marine Institute, stated, "The Marine Institute supports the NTTP program in every respect, and ensures that students' needs both academically and outside of class are foremost in their approach. The accessibility of staff and instructors, and a low student-to-staff ratio are the envy

of most institutions. Without a doubt, the close co-operation and support between the naval detachment and the Marine Institute continues to be the key to producing naval technicians of the highest calibre” [13].

3. Recruitment Models

Dessler defines recruitment as “the process of searching for and attracting an adequate number of qualified candidates, from whom the organization may select the most appropriate to staff its job requirements” [14]. While this definition may help the academic treatment of recruitment by oversimplifying matters, in that recruitment ends when resumes or job applications have been collected, it has little practical use in the real world of human resource (HR) management. At its core is the assumption that an organization can simply select the best candidate, and that he or she will accept the offer. In many cases, the best candidates may have to be convinced to accept a job offer. A broader definition of recruitment comes from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, which yields the following for the verb recruit: “to secure the services of <~engineers>” [15]. While this definition is too broad to be useful in an HR setting, the best elements of both definitions may be combined for a more useful view of recruitment: the process of searching for and attracting an adequate number of qualified candidates, from whom the organization may select the most appropriate and attempt to secure their services to staff the organization’s job requirements. Therefore, recruitment should be treated not only in terms of soliciting applications from candidates but also in terms of convincing suitable applicants to join the organization once they have been selected.

The first part of this process is letting potential applicants know that an organization is looking to recruit new talent. To this end, there are several methods and approaches that are commonly used such as help wanted ads, postings on internet job sites, soliciting at career fairs, and relying on referrals from those already working within an organization. Partially because there is no military draft in Canada, in this aspect of recruitment, the Navy and civilian businesses, such as those in the shipping industry, take very similar approaches to get the word out that they are recruiting. However, it is whom the Navy targets that differentiates its approach from that of much of the shipping industry.

In the case of the shipping industry, MET institutions often recruit untrained individuals who will become qualified seafarers upon graduation, and then individual shipping companies attempt to recruit these graduates into vacant shipboard positions using various incentives such as pay and benefits. Therefore, the task of initially recruiting people into the world of seafaring is one often carried out by MET institutions.

On the other hand, the Navy oversees its own training programs in partnership with an MET institution. Using this approach, the Navy can recruit from the pool of untrained and unskilled individuals, which is a much larger candidate pool than the pool containing only candidates who have already completed an accredited academic program. This is an important distinction because it allows the employer, the Navy, to recruit directly from high schools and from the entire work force in general. It also means that the Navy acquires talent when it can be had for a smaller cost, when it lacks the training or qualifications to demand high wages and benefits from other competing employers, rather than having to compete against other employers for students graduating with a diploma. The effectiveness of this approach will be discussed shortly.

That is not to say, however, that some in the shipping industry do not already employ aspects of this strategy. For instance, in the UK, the Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB) offers recruits the chance to enter a sponsorship program whereby a shipping company will sponsor an untrained student and pay for his or her education at one of six UK MET institutions along with a salary during training [16]. The support of the shipping industry in the UK may be partially due to the tonnage tax there, which has also been adopted by other European countries, that requires shipping companies to invest an amount in cadet training based on the number of officers that it employs [17].

Such programs may be becoming more widespread as 44.1% of seafarers surveyed by Shiptalk reported that they had their training costs covered by their employers; 52.8% paid their own way through school, and 3.4% received a loan from their employer [18]. However, it is unclear as to whether the training costs covered by employers for the 44.1% included a salary during training, or if it just covered direct educational expenses such as books and tuition. In any case, this still leaves 56.9% of respondents who had to ultimately pay for their training out of pocket, which means that there is room for expansion of such sponsorship schemes. Please note that the figures presented in this paragraph are as they were presented in the original source where they do not add to 100%.

3.1 Incentives

In the earlier definition of recruitment, the first part involved getting applications from job seekers; after appropriate screening and selection, the next step is getting a candidate to accept the job, and incentives play an important role in this part of the process. According to Levitt and Dubner, “Incentives are the cornerstone of modern life. And understanding them-or, often, ferreting them out-is the key to solving just about any riddle” [19]. Therefore, understanding incentives may be one of the keys to solving the shortage of seafarers.

In the case of the Navy Technician Training Plan programs, the incentives may be appealing to many people, especially untrained individuals who have limited career opportunities. Here is a summary of the incentives offered to entrants into either of the NTTP programs: [20]

- Annual salary (as of Oct, 2006): 1st year (in school) – \$29,600CDN, 2nd year (in school) – \$38,500CDN, upon graduation (after two-year program) – \$51,000 CDN;
- Promotion to acting leading seaman upon graduation;
- Subsidized, fully furnished off-base accommodation close to the Marine Institute (e.g. two-bedroom apartment for \$82 per month);
- 20 paid days of vacation per year (starting);
- Full medical and dental benefits;
- Six-year contract, with offer for extension;
- Education 100% subsidized, including books and tuition;
- An accredited diploma from a civilian MET institution;
- Guaranteed employment after graduation.

Although it is an option for some, most prospective seafarers do not have the option of a fully funded education with a salary during the training period. However, for those whose education is funded, such as UK students sponsored by a shipping company, they are given perks that are similar to those outlined above for the Navy students, such as a fully funded education with a salary during training [21]. Often, however, incentives advertised by shipping companies often target those who have recently completed training programs or may already be working in the industry. These incentives may also serve to help retain current employees. Common incentives include excellent wages, stand by pay, pension plans, and performance, re-joining, and seniority bonuses [22].

Overall, the incentives offered by the Navy and members of the shipping industry are similar. However, the fact that the Navy offers these incentives to unskilled labour with the offer to train them rather than trying to offer incentives to trained personnel after they graduate may be a better strategy as it allows the Navy to draw from a larger pool of prospective candidates. The fact that some entities in the shipping industry are following a similar path indicates that this may be an advantageous strategy worthy of wider consideration in the shipping industry.

4. Results of Survey Taken by Navy Students

In order to ascertain how effective the NTTP programs are as recruitment tools, a survey was administered to a total of eighty students who were enrolled in the NTTP programs at the time they completed the survey. In the NCSTTP program, roughly two-thirds were enrolled in their fourth academic semester with the other one-third studying in their second semester. In the METTP program, roughly half the students were enrolled in their second academic term, and the other half were enrolled in their fourth academic term. Overall, this means that some respondents were in the early stages their program, while others were close to completing it. The idea behind the survey was to mimic questions in the recruitment section of the Shiptalk Life at Sea Survey 2007/8 to compare if the students' reasons for joining the Navy were similar to the reasons given by seafarers for their career choice. Additionally, the author added several extra questions specifically related to the NTTP programs. The discussion of the results of the survey of Navy students will be limited only to those results which are the most important to the discussion at hand. Also, rather than cite each individual statistic from the Shiptalk survey, they are collectively cited [23].

When comparing the results of "Why did you join the Navy?" to "Reasons for choosing a job at sea," the same percentage of respondents, roughly 16%, answered for the money. 23.8% of Navy respondents joined because they wanted a career in the military as compared to 22.4% of seafarers who said that they wanted a career at sea, and 16.1% of Navy students cited better wages as compared to 15.8% of seafarers. The similarities in these responses demonstrate that recruits join the Navy for similar reasons that seafarers go to sea, with money or wages playing a noteworthy role in both cases. One large discrepancy, however, is apparent; only 4.8% of seafarers cited that they chose a job at sea for the better career prospects, whereas 19.6% of Navy students chose "Better career prospects in the Navy" as their reason for enlisting. Whether there actually are better career prospects in the Canadian Navy or whether there are limited career prospects for those at sea is not necessarily the point. Rather, the point is that these are the perceptions held by potential recruits to each career path, and if these perceptions are incorrect, it is up to the industry in question to help to change that perception if it is having a negative impact on recruitment.

Next, when asked about how they learned about their training program, Navy students cited a military recruitment office in 53.2% of responses. The shipping industry has no obvious counterpart to the military recruitment office, but given the results for the Navy, it may be something for the shipping industry to ponder, although it is not readily apparent to the author as to how the shipping industry could implement something as effective as the network of nationwide military recruitment offices. 20.8% of Navy respondents said they learned about their program from friends and family compared to 42% of seafarers who learned about employment opportunities at sea through friends and family. This seems like a large number for the shipping industry, and it may indicate that the industry has some work to do in publicizing its job and career opportunities. 9.1% of Navy respondents listed the internet as how they learned about their training program, and 8.5% of seafarers cited the internet in helping them learn about employment opportunities at sea. Given the low number of respondents in each case regarding the internet, improving their internet presence may be a future area for growth for both the Navy and the shipping industry, especially considering the target demographic of young adults.

In response to the question "Do you consider your career in the Navy a job for life," 63.9% of Navy students said that they thought of themselves progressing through the ranks and retiring with a

pension after a full life career in the military, which is somewhat higher than the 45% of seafarers who gave a similar response in the Shiptalk survey. Only 13.9% of Navy respondents said that they just wanted to stay in the Navy long enough to obtain some qualifications and experience and then look for a civilian job, but 30.6% of seafarers said they would look for a job onshore after obtaining some qualifications and experience. These results indicate that retention seems to be more of an issue in the shipping industry than in the Navy. Finally, 22.2% of Navy students intend to leave the Navy someday when they have family responsibilities as compared to only 7.4% of seafarers who intend to leave their career at sea for family responsibilities.

In addition to the questions that were modelled after those in the Shiptalk survey, the Navy students were asked additional questions that might shed some light on the mind set of recruits of the Navy's training programs. For instance, when asked which incentive was most important in their decision to enter their training program, 25.4% chose an accredited diploma from a civilian learning institution, and 16.9% cited good career prospects in the civilian world that would be available after they left the military. Therefore, Navy recruits seem willing to join the navy partially because it may eventually lead to a better civilian life if or when they leave the Navy. The parallel that can be drawn with the shipping industry is that in trying to recruit people to go to sea, it may help if the prospective recruits thought that their training and career at sea could eventually lead to a good career on land.

On the other hand, these were not the only responses given when the Navy students were asked about recruitment incentives. 23.7% of Navy respondents, the second highest response, cited a full salary during training as the most influential incentive, and 18.6% chose an immediate promotion upon graduation, which comes with a pay raise. The implication for the shipping industry is that while money is not the only important incentive, it is a very important consideration – especially if a salary is provided during the training period. Free tuition and books was chosen only by 5.1% of respondents, which may indicate that the steady pay cheque during training is considered more of a monetary incentive than the payment of education expenses.

As well, prior to entering a Navy training program, only 6.6% of respondents were already in the Navy. This means that 93.4% of trainees came into the program from outside the Navy. This is important because it demonstrates that this program does indeed bring new recruits into the Navy and that the training programs do not simply serve to train those who have already enlisted. Also noteworthy is that 18.4% of respondents came into their program from high school, which was the second highest response, but the vast majority of Navy trainees, 53.9%, had been working as civilians prior to entering their program. One might speculate that many of these in the 53.9% may have been dissatisfied with their civilian jobs, or it is unlikely that they would have been considering joining the Navy. The implication for the shipping industry is that high school students can be recruited if offered the right incentives, but perhaps the biggest potential source of seafarers is those who are currently working but are dissatisfied with their careers.

One of the most telling statistics became apparent when those students who had come into the program from outside the Navy were asked what impact their training program had had on their decision to join the Navy. 66.7% of respondents, or two out of every three, said they joined the Navy specifically to undertake their training program, and they otherwise probably would not have joined. This demonstrates that the NTTP programs are a powerful and effective recruiting tool for the Navy. The implication for the shipping industry is obvious – subsidized training programs, along with other incentives, help to recruit new talent.

Finally, Navy students were asked if they had not joined their training program, how seriously would they have considered a life as a professional at sea? 52% of the students responded either not at all or that they would only have given it minimal consideration while 24.7% stated that they would have ended up at sea in any case or that they would have seriously considered it, with the rest, 23.3%, falling somewhere in the middle. The 52% figure is very important for the shipping industry in that it

demonstrates that people with no real desire or ambition to go to sea may be enticed to do so when the right incentives are offered, such as those provided by the Navy through the NTTTP programs.

5. Conclusions

As the shortage of skilled seafarers is predicted to worsen, the shipping industry must investigate new and better ways to recruit new seafarers. The Canadian Navy may serve as an example to the shipping industry in this regard; in particular, the Naval Technician Training Plan programs offered by the Canadian Navy in partnership with the Marine Institute have turned out to be an effective means of recruiting skilled technicians into vacant positions on board Navy ships. The Navy's approach of recruiting unskilled individuals and having them trained at the Marine Institute, with whom the Navy works closely, appears to be working as the vast majority of recruits who had come from outside the Navy reported that they had joined the Navy specifically to undertake their training program. Furthermore, many students seemed to indicate that their training program was important in preparing them for a better life as an eventual civilian on land, and many indicated that money was an important factor in their decision to enrol. The majority of these students also indicated that they would not have likely considered a career at sea if it was not for their Navy training program.

There are several implications for the shipping industry. First, even though steps have already been taken by some in this direction, it might help if the industry were more willing to recruit unskilled talent and pay for their training, including a salary during training. Next, more prospective seafarers might be convinced to join the profession if they saw their career at sea eventually leading to a good career on land. As well, money is an important consideration, and excellent remuneration is more than an expectation for possible seafarers, it is a requirement. Finally, it is possible, with the right incentives, to attract people to the seafaring profession who otherwise may never have considered it.

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