



Maritime Specialisation Services

## Changing the Human Performance for the Future

### **Editorial**

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Katerina Skourtanioti  
*Managing Director*

Dear All,

We are delighted to continue the communication campaign titled '**GET TO KNOW THE HUMAN FACTORS**' with a targeted article on *Leadership: 'Mount Everest – Reaching for the Top!'* from our esteem colleague and expert on Human Factors, Gerasimos Kontos\*.

As previously discussed, every article will be disseminated to our clients and the maritime community. You can also find it on our website to download for any further publication. Once more, our goal is to promote the role and capabilities of the human element, the most valuable asset within our industry.

\*Gerasimos leverages hands-on expertise and broad cross functional knowledge across the aerospace industry. Strongly believing in people and their potential, Gerasimos currently works as an advisor for a major airline in UAE for simulating unexpected flight events and scripting the applicable training scenarios.

Before joining VENLYS Maritime Specialisation Services, he was a Fulbright Visiting Professor at San Jose State University (CA, USA), department of Aerospace Engineering.

## Get To know the Human Factors

# “Leadership lessons from the thin air”

By

Gerasimos Kontos

**BASED ON THE TRUE STORY**

### **MOUNT EVEREST – REACHING FOR THE TOP**

Imagine you enter an area known as the “death zone”, because at 26,100 ft / 8016 m above sea level your brain and body literally starts to die from oxygen deprivation.

Imagine you feel your hands starting to freeze when you remove your fogged goggles to get a glimpse of your surroundings.

Imagine frozen bodies lie in the distance emblematic of bad decisions, bad weather and bad luck.

Now imagine, in this moment, you have to look into the eyes of your team and make a critical decision:

- Push on to the summit and risk death
- Turnaround and come off the mountain alive

For the hundreds of climbers who have attempted to reach the summit of Everest and for the few that accomplished it, effective leadership literally meant the difference between life and death.

Decision making under such circumstances is extremely difficult. If you are still alive, shock would be shown through feelings of helplessness, loneliness and hopelessness. And these feelings can get you killed.

In the vessel, like in the mountain, leadership lessons have a far greater urgency. When problems arose, they could rapidly escalate or be resolved – depending on how quickly people put into action leadership concepts.

In other words, decisions made in uncharted waters definitely result in life-or-death consequences and they will test you, as you had never been tested before.

## What is Leadership anyway???

Ascending mount Everest demands technical skills, planning for the right amount of oxygen and supplies, a strong team and some luck. Unfortunately, the most important and difficult factor to measure is the human skills needed for building and leading a team that can meet the challenges of each climbing situation.

In the maritime world, vessel teams face the same challenges. Despite having the right technical skills and sound plans, successful performance is often dependent on the leadership dimension of how the team works together to overcome the bad luck of unforeseen challenges or to exploit new opportunities.

Either in the ocean or in the mountain, you can't reach the summit without communication, crisis management, teamwork, optimism, and effective solving of conflicts as they happen. This is the art and science of leadership - Taking decisive actions when everything falls behind.

A true leader knows that his team is only as strong as its weakest member. He / She also knows that for survival in complex and high stakes situations, teams rely on his / her ability to set objectives and analyze alternative strategies that will best meet these objectives.

## Leadership lessons for surviving in uncharted waters

- In uncharted waters, conflict is inevitable, but a true leader intervenes to prevent the conflict to escalate into full scale rebellion. Problems won't go away by themselves. Deal with every issue as soon as possible.
- Oceans teach us that although the technical skills are very important in management, the real differentiator is how leaders shape and direct the team's social interaction and synergy for creating a trustful environment.
- They also teach us that often, doing nothing, is the wisest course if the alternative is to act precipitously. And not only must leaders keep an eye on themselves, they must also dissuade others from rash decisions.
- Leaders always pay close attention to how they balance competing pressures in their vessels and how their words and actions shape the perceptions and beliefs of their team members.
- Leaders clearly communicate their messages, so that everyone knows what is expected and has a clear path. Poor communication is as bad as not communication in the first place, and poor communication is one reason why many brilliant strategies, fail miserably in execution.

## MARITIME LEADERSHIP LESSONS – CLOSURE

Vessels, like mountains are the ultimate classroom. Extreme conditions force you to get to know yourself and to figure out how to perform when you are completely outside of your comfort zone. At this point, you learn that you can push yourself far beyond your self-perceived limits.

Choices and decisions, depend not only on your own personality, but on your situation and your team synergy. When the situation demands, act according to the challenges at hand, not the plan, but always inform your team.

That's what Leadership is really all about. It's not about spending a couple of minutes up top. It is about the lessons you learn along the way and what you are going to do with that information to be better going forward.

Every day.

**THE END**

**Thank you!**



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