

Playing the “What If” Game



The “Problem – Prevention – Response” model is a proven way to avoid disaster.

PROBLEM

- Fire
- Flooding
- People Overboard
- Disease
- Loss of Power
- Terrorism
- Inappropriate Behavior

PREVENTION

- Acknowledgement
- Awareness
- Maintenance
- Monitoring
- Policies

RESPONSE

- Strategy
- Tactics
- Tools
- Training
- Practice

BY CAPTAIN JON KJAERULFF

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CRUISE SHIPS ARE ALL ABOUT HAVING FUN. How different people define “fun,” of course, is a subject of endless discussion and conjecture. Some define it as partying, gambling, and dancing. Others prefer romantic dinners, elegant surroundings, spa treatments and exotic ports of call. Still others favor adventure and exploration in the world's farthest, wildest corners.

Whatever the proclivity, there's probably a market and one or more cruise lines that serve it. And regardless of how “fun” is defined, cruising for most people is a dream, a fantasy – a chance to put the

world on hold and forget about life's hardships and challenges, if only for a while.

While life on a cruise ship should be wonderful and carefree for the guests, it's de-



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pendent upon the hard work and diligence of the ship's officers and crew. The hazards of the real world still lurk around the perimeter and must be held at bay by the professional men and women who work behind-the-scenes day and night, seven days a week.

That they are generally absent from the passengers' collective consciousness is a tribute to the crew's effectiveness at isolating their guests from reality. In other words, the better the crew does its job, the more likely the guests will subscribe to the illusion of safe detachment from the unpleasantness of the world around them.

Tuning In & Tuning Out

Danger comes when ships' officers and crew start to believe the illusion of carefree casualness and lapse into a vacation state of mind themselves. Crewmembers work hard to help guests enjoy their vacations, but they must work even harder to keep them safe. Knowing that the majority of people on board have "tuned out," crewmembers at all levels must be trained to "tune in" to potential threats to the safety of any or all persons aboard.

As with most endeavors, proficiency in emergency preparedness begins with aware-

ness. In other words, you can't manage a situation unless you are aware it could exist.

Certain risks and hazards, such as fire and sinking, are common to all vessels in all areas, not just passenger ships. Other dangers, such as piracy or heavy weather, may be more specific to the vessel, season or location. Regardless, officers and crew aboard passenger vessels should always be alert to the experiences and sometimes misfortunes of others serving aboard similar ships in similar situations.

While the guests are busy enjoying all of the ship's amenities, the crew can also find a degree of challenge, if not entertainment, by playing the "What If" game.

"What would we do if we lost power and started drifting towards the rocks?"

"What if a passenger makes threats against another passenger or staff member?"

"What if a guest does not want to leave their room when the Captain gives the order to abandon ship?"

The goal of the exercise is not only to ascertain crew awareness of standard emergency procedures but also to develop a mindset of creative problem-solving.

"P-P-R" is an effective model for passenger and crew safety and builds on the

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Unfortunately, prevention sometimes fails. In that case, the problem demands a response, which is the “R” in “P-P-R.” Response is not the next step after prevention – it runs parallel to it as shown in the first diagram. When the fire breaks out, efforts at preventing it have by definition failed, but an effective response may prevent it from becoming worse.

“What if” exercise. It can be utilized by all hands at all levels and is easily customized to any vessel, based on any number of factors.

The first “P” is the problem itself. In other words, ask yourself what could go wrong. Fire, flooding and persons falling overboard are common on all ships. Problems specific to passenger vessels might include food poisoning, contagious diseases, loss of power, violent behavior or even hijacking. Experienced operators recognize that, in spite of their best efforts, “stuff happens.” The where, why, how and when may be unknown, but over time problems will arise. A healthy discussion among the crew regarding potential problems is not a sign of bad attitudes but rather an activity that can help prevent a situation from developing or mitigate its effects if it does.

The second “P” is prevention. Once the potential for a problem is recognized, what steps can be taken to prevent it? Most mariners would agree that the easiest fire to fight is the one that never breaks

out. Therefore, no-smoking areas are established to help prevent fires. Good galley sanitation helps prevent food poisoning. Maintaining watertight integrity helps prevent flooding. Alert servers and hotel staff helps detect the early stages of inappropriate behavior, and so on. Challenging crewmembers to connect the dots is a form of active learning. Giving them ownership of the process is far more effective than an endless stream of passive safety reminders handed down from Mount Platitude.

Unfortunately, prevention sometimes fails. In that case, the problem demands a response, which is the “R” in “P-P-R.” Response is not the next step after prevention – it runs parallel to it as shown in the first diagram. When the fire breaks out, efforts at preventing it have by definition failed, but an effective response may prevent it from becoming worse. A small fire effectively managed may simply require cleanup and some fresh paint whereas a poor response may require



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passengers to risk their lives in the lifeboats. When the hull is breached and water is threatening the ship's ability to remain afloat, execution of a timely and well-coordinated response may determine whether passengers suffer only mild inconvenience or perish. If a guest becomes aggressive and unruly, crewmembers must respond before people are hurt.

Checklists

Most ships have checklists for managing problems. The procedures they describe are usually well-thought-out and represent effective solutions to the situation at hand. Checklists are intended to be broken out and followed once a problem has developed and a response is required.

Unfortunately, if crewmembers wait until a problem has surfaced before referring to the checklist, it may be too late. The purpose of the P-P-R model is not to take the place of checklists but to help develop a mindset of recognition, prevention and response before problems occur.

Helping guests enjoy their time aboard and, perhaps even more importantly, plan to come back as repeat customers should be the goal of every mariner who works aboard passenger ships. While the paying customers look forward to a stress- and incident-free experience, seasoned mariners

know it takes a lot of work to make something so complex look easy.

Officers and those in charge of crew training should strive to instill confidence and competence in their subordinates to help prevent problems when possible and respond effectively when required. Their goal should be to teach crewmembers how to read situations, evaluate alternatives and make good decisions based on established procedures, experience and good marine practices.

A Culture of Safety

Like most people, mariners are far more likely to follow instructions from above when they make sense than when they are simply told to do so. Engaging the crew in the development of prevention and response procedures gives them a degree of ownership and helps establish a more robust culture of safety.

Captains and vessel owners can't anticipate everything that might go wrong, but they can empower the people entrusted with passenger safety to keep things running smoothly behind the scenes.

MarEx

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