

Keynote by USCG Commander Weist

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you Roberta for that kind introduction. I really am humbled to be speaking with you today. We just heard from an incredible array of speakers with a ton of experience, I know that I've learned a great deal from hearing from them. Can we give them another round of applause?

I also want to offer a big thank you to all the donors and particularly to David Sharp for donating the use of this beautiful historical vessel for this conference. Thank you David for being a great operator here in the port and for allowing us the use of this vessel.

Captain Merchant, my boss and the Captain of the Port sends her regards, she would have really loved to be here today but unfortunately, she had already committed herself to another event. She has a very busy calendar, she is more inspirational, more dynamic, and she definitely has a better twitter following than I do, so my apologies! When she took over as Sector Commander she implemented her command philosophy, Forward with People, Forward with the Mission, and Forward with Partnerships. Roberta, you have most certainly lived up to this creed. Your initiatives through the Worldwide Ferry Safety Association has certainly created lasting & productive partnerships, you have made major advancements in your organizations mission, and you've certainly prevented significant loss of life. Roberta, will you please join me? In the U.S. Military we present challenge coins to recognize special achievements, and sometimes we present them to civilians who help to promote our mission. Roberta, your mission with the Worldwide Ferry Safety Association and that of the Coast Guard could not be more closely linked. On behalf of the Coast Guard I would like to present you with Captain Merchants personal Coin. It depicts lady liberty. For those who traveled to be here, perhaps tomorrow if you get a chance to ride the Staten island ferry you'll get a close up view, but something few people notice is that her leg is lifted as if she is getting ready to take a step. Many locals believe that it's because she's running away from the state of New Jersey but we believe she's taking a step forward... thank you Roberta for your efforts to get all of us to keep moving forward. Thank you Roberta!

I grew up near the Ohio River on a sheep farm.. My great grandmother played on one of the first women's basketball teams in in the Ohio River Valley back when they didn't believe women could physically run up and down the court. She took a river barge, likely similar to this one, to get to her games, would sleep on the court and then would catch another barge back downriver in the morning before school. She eventually married a man, who went to work for the coal mines. My grandmother had three children and when my grandfather was barely ten years old his father died in a coal mine fire. The mine caught fire and back then, there was no rescue plan, they simply sealed the mine until the fire had burned itself out. My great grandfather was among 66 who died.

When I was contemplating college, my great grandmother, who was known to be a spit-fire, had a few pieces of advice:

1. Don't ever work in a coal mine.
2. Do something in your life that will help others.
3. Don't ever fully rely on a man.

Like I said... even in her old age... a spitfire. I think I lived up to those expectations. I never have worked in a coal mine, and while my initial plan was to work in mine safety I quickly realized college was expensive! The CG had a great deal where I could give up 9 years of my life in exchange for an engineering degree and I found that I could do something to help others by preventing accidents in the maritime community, something else that was closely linked to my upbringing.

The coal mines are few and far between and I feel very grateful to be part of this maritime community, helping to promote safety in a very risky industry of critical importance to our nation.

I have spent the past 17 years doing regulatory work, mostly with vessels but also some facilities and as you just heard from Roberta, in my previous job I was very active in the International Maritime Organization. In that job I helped to

organize U.S. positions across the interagency to help the U.S. negotiate safety and environmental standards. I was also deeply involved in the Technical Cooperation Committee where many of the issues we are talking about today were discussed so that we could help member states not only get regulations on the books, but help provide the training needed to implement them.

In the 2020, the height of COVID I took over as the chief of vessel inspections where I oversee the inspection of just over 900 vessels in the port of New York and New Jersey. 326 of them are passenger vessels which carry just over 50 million passengers annually.

Now for the disclaimer... I have never ran a ferry system and am by no means an expert, I am simply offering my perspective and things I have observed over the years. I love the job but the best part BYFAR is getting to work with some of the folks you just heard from and my team of marine inspectors, folks who are supremely dedicated to safety, people who make this job worthwhile.

Regulations won't be the thing that fixes everything....

If there is one thing I have learned as a regulator, regulations cannot be created overnight and even once implemented, without a strong enforcement mechanism they are as worthless as the paper on which they are written. Even in the United States, where we have a robust regulatory program and a large corp of trained marine inspectors and class surveyors **we still have accidents**. Don't get me wrong, regulations are important... they establish a floor.. a minimum standard that everyone should exceed. However, the reality is.. inspectors normally only visit these vessels once per year. Their time onboard might be sufficient to identify an issue with a shipboard system. But now, after hearing from our second panel, we learned that human factors play an important role.

Human Factors are the cause of the majority of accidents...

Studies of maritime accidents whether related to passenger ferries or any other types of marine transportation have been credited as the leading factor in more than 70% of cases. As you heard from our experts, human factors is an incredibly complicated science and could easily be consider an umbrella factor that covers all the other issues we discussed.

While not intentional, people trained in one specialty tend to underappreciate or even dismiss people in another. Oh... those people in HR... do they even work? This innate human behavior leads to divisions. Additionally, a lack of common language makes the unification difficult particularly in industries like the maritime where people have such specialized jobs. The compartmentalization of expertise, affects our ability to properly understand and overcome human-factors. As an example, in both state run and commercial for profit ferry systems, pressure may be exerted from those who control the money, to continue on the trip, or to forgo the maintenance, or to order a cheaper part. It's incredibly important that everyone understand the seriousness of the issue and the potential repercussions of the decision. Communication is very important and key decision makers must be aware of the risk they are assuming.

Company safety culture is key. In my experience as a regulator I have worked with hundreds of companies, the key thing that sets apart the good from the bad is safety culture. That starts with the owners and operators and trickles down to the deckhands onboard your vessels. Without a strong safety culture everything else will crumble. Changing the culture can be very difficult but first you have to get an idea of where you stand and you have to ask these questions and be honest with yourself.

Does the lowest person in the Organization feel empowered to speak up if an issue arises and do they have confidence that it will be addressed promptly?

How is your company incentivizing reporting? (Give example of company disincentivizing).

In the United States we consistently talk about safety management systems, these systems can be daunting but they don't have to be. I believe one of the easiest places to begin is by establishing a clear set of guidelines as well as go, no go criteria for your operation. For instance...

Over the course of your route, how often do you expect your Captains to re-evaluate weather conditions? This is something that cannot be overemphasized... Weather is becoming more difficult to predict and lack of available observations on the water and in certain regions of the world exacerbates the issue. Establishing protocol for weather reports is a must.

Where are ports of safe refuge along your route? I'm talking pre-identified locations where the Captain can safely moor or anchor should he or she have an issue.

Under what conditions will you cease operation of the vessel? Fire pump inoperable? If you have a loss of propulsion in a single engine? If you are on a rivers route and you are taking on water are there areas where you can safely ground the vessel?

Establishing a safety management system that covers every aspect of a vessels operation can be overwhelming but in my experience the go/no go criteria this is a great first step.

You cannot prioritize money over maintenance

Maintenance must be scheduled the same way we create an operating schedule, it must be built in and it must happen without fail. Some deferred maintenance is normal but there has to be a solid definition of what is acceptable and what is not and those lines should not be crossed. We heard a great deal about that today but I am not telling you this as a regulator... the research exists, companies that have prioritized maintenance and a strong safety culture have a more successful business in the long run.

The United States isn't perfect... after all we're human..

In 1838, due to the high number of explosions, the United States enacted a law to provide for the better security of lives of passengers onboard vessels propelled by steam. That was almost 200 years ago and was the predecessor to the United States Coast Guard who performs passenger vessel inspections today. At the time of its establishment, the Steamboat Inspection Service was authorized nine inspectors, today we have hundreds of marine inspectors in the United States and the fleet of passenger vessels we inspect is probably similar in size to the fleets of some of the countries represented today and we s t i l l h a v e a c c i d e n t s . People are people and people sometimes fail. You may fail to get your maintenance done. You may fail to verify weather conditions. Ultimately, the best you can do is to find and hire the right people, people like the ones in this room who care about this as much as you and I do. People who have a bias toward action and will not allow unsafe conditions to go unchecked because People create safety.

We are never going to be able to Prevent every casualty, but we can choose to educate ourselves and ensure that we putting the control mechanisms in place to best mitigate the risk. Now let's get to the real show! The design competition! Thank you so much for your time.