

Incentivisation, motivation and wellbeing

How can we best motivate our seafarers to maintain a healthy lifestyle whilst on board? Seafarers have a greater chance of obtaining their health and fitness goals if properly motivated.



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Enduring habits

Seafarers, like most humans, are creatures of habit. The habits or lifestyles they lead on board ships have developed over years of service at sea, making them comforting and hard to change. The club's research regarding lifestyle-related illness indicates that poor habits/lifestyles will often result in medical conditions that endanger the health and career of a seafarer. Strategies to change these habits and alter these patterns of behaviour can have many benefits.

Why change habits?

Organisations which employ human beings, regardless of whether they are shore-based or sea-based, suffer from the same types of issues. Ill health and days lost due to sickness are a drain on an organisation and reduce operational effectiveness. It is in the interests of organisations to promote healthy living to reduce the incidence of ill health and sick days. Many shore-based organisations have been incentivising such behaviour for years and have been very successful at reducing these problems.

Incentivisation – reward?

Reward

Many shore-based companies employ competition, teamwork and the natural drive to win, in combination with financial incentives, to promote specific desired behaviours. These often take the form of initiatives or elements of wellness programmes, for example:

- Weight loss challenges
 - Teams of employees compete to reach specific weight-loss goals
 - Identifiable rewards for the winners
- Team sports events
 - Team sports that are suitable for ships can offer excellent entertainment for participating crewmembers
 - Teams drawn from different departments add an extra element of competition
 - An organised regular programme of matches over the course of a voyage will help to improve levels of activity, fitness and social interaction

- Fitness-based challenges
 - Teams of employees compete to attain specific goals designed to improve fitness
 - Held over a number of weeks
 - Goals could include, pedometer steps, or miles cycled or run on exercise bikes/treadmills
 - This type of challenge can be referenced to a particular recognisable feature, such as the first group to cycle the combined length of 'Route 66'.
 - Identifiable rewards for the winners and runners-up
 - An example of this is the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network's (ISWAN's) [Training on Board](#) initiative, which allows different ships to compare activity levels and compete with each other via the internet
- Smoking cessation programmes
 - Organised programmes to help workers quit smoking
 - Often involving team-based programmes for mutual support
 - Various organisations provide guidance on how to launch such programmes
 - The British Heart Foundation's [We quit at work](#) materials are an excellent example of such guidance.

Disincentives

A [recent trial](#) involving 281 obese adults showed conclusively that human behaviour is motivated in predictable ways. Each of the 281 participants was tracked for 13 weeks and each was required to meet a 7,000 steps per day objective. The participants were rewarded for successfully meeting their objectives in different ways:

1. Some participants were simply told that they had met their goals.
2. Some were entered into a cash lottery.
3. Another group were given \$1.40 dollars each time they met their goals.
4. A further group was given an initial payment of \$40 dollars at the start of the study and were penalised \$1.40 for every day they failed to meet their objective.

When the results were collated, it was found that participants in the first three groups met their goal 30%–35% of the time, whilst the participants who 'lost' money for their failure to achieve their objective were successful 45% of the time. The higher achievement rate for the latter group has been attributed to participants' perception of having experienced a loss, rather than a gain, and that such negative incentives may serve to motivate people in a slightly more effective way.

Studies such as these should provide food for thought for those organisations which are considering ways to reduce obesity and increase the exercise levels of seafarers. In this case, the negative incentive could take the form of deductions from a cash bonus provided at the start of a contract for each failure to meet a specific objective. On the face of it, \$1.40/day appears to be a relatively inexpensive way to motivate crewmembers and the theory is backed by solid science.

Conclusion

Seafarers use many methods to adapt to the rigours of life at sea, some of these adaptations can be negative, such as comfort eating. Research has shown that human behaviour can be altered by incentives, team spirit and feelings of accomplishment. Organisations can harness rewards or disincentives to get their crewmembers exercising, eating better or to quit smoking. If crewmembers are successfully engaged in such programmes, it is hoped that the costs of organising them will be offset by the reduction in lifestyle-related illnesses suffered by the crew and therefore the associated costs for their employers.

