



The Helm Club[©] SETTING COURSE

Navigating the Challenges & Sharing the Waypoints for Healthcare Leaders

"It is not the ship so much as the skillful sailing that assures the prosperous voyage." -George W. Curtis, writer, author, educator

Focus on Prevention: Anticipating the Ride and the Challenges!

As a captain, one will undoubtedly face problems and challenges that arise as part of an outing on the water. In preparation for a journey, the four major areas that need to be inspected and cared for carefully before embarking include:

- 1) **Making sure your fuel tank is full.** You need to know the average fuel that you anticipate burning per hour by tracking the anticipated hours of use and the speed at which you expect the cruise to occur for safe operation. Plan for increased usage at high speeds or lower usage at slower speeds and make an appropriate calculation of consumption. The general rule of thumb for safe operation and arrival times would indicate one third of the fuel to the destination, one third back home, and one third in reserve.
- 2) **Make sure your battery is charged and functioning.** The checklist is not that long. If the engine doesn't work, check the battery connections; check the backup batteries; check for jump cables; and make sure you have a tight Deadman ground.
- 3) **Know where you are going.** Familiarity with applicable charts, the weather forecast, and the headings and waypoints which are necessary. Remember, shift happens! Familiarity and planning before you leave port obviates major problems during the trip.
- 4) **Have backup plans.** As stated, no one purposefully plans to get stuck out on the water, hence location tracking devices and function of a good VHF (Very High Frequency radio), numbers for emergency, life jackets, and an EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon) are important features to have and know how to use.

Similarly, these principles also apply to a leader of a healthcare team. Your fuel, in my opinion, is your most important item. Without fuel you aren't going anywhere, despite the amount of great equipment you have onboard. As stated, you need to calculate the fuel for an outing – growth plan or project. *Your people and your team* are your fuel. They truly are your most valuable asset. They make your objectives, strategic initiatives, and targeted goals a reality and will be essential to continue and maintain effective operations.

You also need to have the *right fuel* for normal operation. Sometimes you need to use "stabilizers" and "additives" who bring special talents during moments of challenge. These additives (consultants or people with special knowledge or talent) need to be knowledgeable of *your business*, seasoned, wise, and appropriately positioned to work closely with your team. Purchasing fresh fuel is part of proper refueling. (Younger people who will become the future and hopefully contribute new ideas and become valuable



contributors to the attainment of your goals and objectives.) As stated, the additives that periodically need to be introduced to your team are people who have new ideas, new thoughts, experiences beyond that which your crew may have, and can be extremely beneficial to your journey.

The battery of your ship is your vision and sparks your efforts to where you see yourself going. With the tank full, your vision ignites the efforts of the team toward attainment of your vision.

Your familiarity with the surroundings and your headings is part of laying out goals, objectives, and strategic initiatives. Those goals, objectives, and strategic initiatives need to be monitored carefully through KPIs (Key Performance Indices) as you leave port toward fulfillment of your strategy. Your management operating reports are akin to your helm dashboard which includes GPS, maps, tracking icons, and speed and weather indicators.

Your backup plan is the experience and the wisdom of your leadership colleagues and team and their know-how - having likely navigated challenging waters previously - realizing that, as stated, shift happens. A seasoned crew with adequate prep for the journey and appropriate consideration and time spent addressing backup plans or alternative approaches when challenges surface is capable of weathering the storm or the unexpected crisis.

Again, cognizant of all mentioned above, I would emphasize the fact that all is secondary to having your greatest asset – the right people functioning at their best. It is your team – the people you surround yourself with – that will rule the day. . . for your success, their success, and the success of your organization.

The reality is that the sea is magnetic. It draws us in with its beauty, its forcefulness, as well as its challenges; so too is healthcare delivery when it highlights compassionate caring and purposeful work for those who entrust their lives and wellbeing to our care and knowledge.

In conclusion, I wish all a good voyage, with the admonition to stay the course for the right reasons despite the distractions, challenges, and faux pas so often thrust upon us in the complex environment in which we find ourselves. Oh yes. . . and remember the other piece of equipment that should always be with you – your anchor (values). Never leave port without them. **HC**

"There is nothing more enticing, disenchanting, and enslaving than life at sea."

Joseph Conrad—Polish/British writer



Strategically, you may have to change course to reach the destination. —Ron Riner, MD

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