

MERCHANT MARINERS: ENGINEERING

The work engineering officers perform daily maintaining, repairing, and operating commercial or government vessels, is demanding and rewarding.

The maritime industry is very dynamic, not only from a transportation perspective, but also due to the variety of employment opportunities available. The fact our industry is critical to our nation's economic security and contributes significantly to our national defense also attracts those with ambition and purpose to our profession. The men and women I have sailed with over my career were obviously drawn into our industry for a reason, and I think that speaks to the type of person they are, having high expectations for achievement in a challenging career.

—Marshall Ainley
President, Marine Engineers Beneficial Association



RIISING TO THE CHALLENGES

Lindsay Smith

Chief Engineer, *MS Pride of America*

by LCDR ANNE BESSER
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Lindsay Smith was looking for a career in engineering when she learned about the Maine Maritime Academy, and its student body of just under 1,000. At this public maritime school in Castine, Maine, Lindsay found the hands-on training and education that put her on the path to a career trifecta. The maritime industry allowed her to work in engineering, stay out from behind a desk—most of the time—and afforded the opportunity to travel for work and leisure.

She credits Maine Maritime Academy, with teaching her how to prioritize work, manage time, and motivate a team to use its strengths to accomplish the task, thanks to several leadership roles. It also taught her that sometimes hard decisions need to be made and how to use all available information to make the best possible decision. “Maine Maritime was able to teach me the basics of what I needed to know, but I had the wherewithal to understand that I did not know everything,” Lindsay said.

After graduating in 2000 with a Bachelor of Science degree in marine engineering technology, Lindsay began her career with TransOcean as a third assistant engineer. As the only female on board, she initially found it difficult to connect with the rest of the crew. She recognized the experience was new for everyone and made a concerted effort to engage her coworkers in conversation about the uncertainty of having a woman on board. It was through developing trust and good communications that she built professional relationships during her nearly three years with the company, but in 2003, Lindsay began sailing with Norwegian Cruise Lines.

“Working for a cruise line is a completely different experience, compared to any other type of shipping company,” she said. “You have to work with human cargo, which can be challenging at times.”

In 2003, Lindsay began sailing with Norwegian Cruise Lines as a third assistant engineer. In her nearly 16 years with the cruise line, she has served in the positions of third, second, and first staff chief, eventually earning the title of chief engineer. In fact, upon her promotion to chief engineer with Norwegian, she became the first female to hold that position for a major cruise line.



Lindsay speaks humbly of her ongoing experience as part of a crew responsible for keeping a small city of systems that is a cruise ship, running. During her time with Norwegian, she has done things she never thought she would be doing while sailing. Onboard the M/S *Pride of America*, she oversaw much of the installation of four exhaust gas scrubbers, which allow the ship to reduce sulfur emissions. This was in addition to the installation of 32 new suites AND a new restaurant—all while the ship was in service. Those jobs alone would be a major undertaking, but Lindsay was asked to do them in addition to the everyday demands of her regular job. To balance her already busy schedule of port calls and voyages with the long-term orchestration of contracts, deliveries, onboard installations, and daily tasks requires superb skills and knowledge. It was her responsibility to ensure the vessel sailed and ran seamlessly while meeting new timelines and international rules, an often challenging endeavor, in addition to addressing new customer needs.

But Lindsay has not gotten to where she is simply by being a good shipboard engineer. She understands that her valuable work experience is something to draw upon as she continues to rise to each new challenge. “I’m not sure that I would do anything differently,” she said. “All of my experiences have shaped who I am and how I do my job today.”

It is her experience that she turns to as a maritime industry leader, and lead she must! She is charged with directing a department of 55 personnel, about double the normal crew size on a commercial ship. This experience, too, has served her well.

“I think that leading by example is an extremely important quality,” Lindsay said. “A leader should not ask their employees to do something that they are not willing to do themselves. They should be willing to work alongside their employees if the situation warrants it.”

The example she sets shows young female mariners the possibility of a future career path. There is also an important, yet understated, result of her role in the industry that not only influences budding female engineers, but also all maritime personnel. “With the new generation of engineers going into the industry there is a higher acceptance of women onboard ships because the men have grown up with women in these types of jobs,” she said.

The more women who enter and remain in the maritime industry means this male-dominated industry’s exposure to women will increase, as will conversations, communications, and connections. For Lindsay, it is all about the connections. Her favorite part of the job is the “unbelievable friendships” she has made since she began in this industry. “The best part of sailing is the guys I work with,” she said. “I have a great group of guys in the department and they make the job fun. It makes the long hours and the days away from home easier to handle.”

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Successful mariners often cite connections as a contributing factor to career advancement. Lindsay said a former boss, who also was a mentor, contributed to her success. “He was someone who was encouraging and was constantly challenging me to improve,” she said. “He was someone who I could talk to, vent to, ask advice of, and never have to worry about it turning into a negative experience. He was able to show me how to be encouraging and how to get the best out of people.” It is clear Lindsay values this kind of approachability, as well as the capacity to “listen when needed and lead when necessary,” in a leader.

When she is not leading her engineering department, she is traveling. While the long hours, days, weeks, and months away from friends and family can prove difficult, Lindsay encourages others to seek as much balance between sea and home as possible. When home, she tries to spend time with friends and family, but she also finds friends made while underway often make for like-minded travel buddies. Making the most of the unusual work schedule, she said she appreciates the long periods of time off, because it has given her the opportunity to see the world. For now, this arrangement suits her just fine. “There are never two days the same and I am never bored,” she said. “I guess when I start to hate my job or get bored, then I will look for the next chapter.”

Given the ever-changing technology and challenges the maritime industry faces, it is likely that will not happen for a long time. With her anything-is-possible attitude and don’t-let-anything-stop-you drive, it looks as though she will be rising to meet those challenges for a long time to come. 