

Patting on the head	in
One-handed giving	in

4. Cultural difference at sea

- A. Do you think it is necessary to train seafarers on cultural differences at sea? Look at the following case.**



Cultural Factors:
insufficient verbal co-ordination between officers and ratings

The problems of misunderstanding due to differences in the interpretation of words and expressions between people of different cultures have contributed directly and indirectly to accidents. The following is an example:

The second officer of a German chemical tanker manned with German officers and a Filipino crew gave orders to prepare the cargo handling equipment for loading chemicals. For this procedure it was necessary to open some valves. The instructions were detailed and clear. After he had given the orders the officer asked a crewman, whether he had understood and knew what to do. The seafarer gave an affirmative reply. Later he opened the wrong valves and was injured by mechanical parts moved by compressed air. The analysis of the accident showed that the man had not understood what he was instructed to do. It was more of a cultural problem for him to admit that he did not know what to do or to ask for a demonstration, this was aggravated by a lack of English skills.

- B. Do you think that the following information on cultural difference would have been helpful to the officer who was involved in the case above? How could cultural awareness have helped?**



Asking Questions or Not Asking Them at All

There is a reluctance on the part of a Filipino to ask questions in situations where a Westerner ordinarily will. Officers who have managed Filipino seamen often wonder why they usually get a respectful silence when they expect them to react to certain issues they bring up in meetings.

One possible explanation for this is the Filipino attitude towards their officers and superiors. Since they are considered the epitome of wisdom, it is unthinkable for most seamen to question them. Secondly, Filipinos refuse to ask questions because they feel it is "shameful," *nakakabiya*, to do so. There is a popular belief that only the stupid and the ignorant and the *provinciano* (meaning "from the backwoods") ask questions. A Filipino seaman would rather pretend to understand the instructions given to him and risk making a mistake than ask questions.

A suggestion when giving orders to a Filipino is to ask him to repeat the order back to clarify that it has been understood. Be willing to repeat your instructions. Be patient. Don't ask face-threatening leading questions such as "Did you understand the instruction?"

Ask the Filipino to summarize what he understood. Speak clearly, using simple language and specific and accurate terms. To encourage the Filipino to ask questions, especially clarification

4. Andres, Tomas. *Understanding the Filipino Seaman: His Values, Attitudes & Behaviour*.

questions if he has not understood the instruction, make it easy for him to ask for a favour, by asking him "What can I do for you?" And when he hesitates, insist that he asks you the question with admonition not to be shy.

- C.** Read more about some cultural norms of Filipino seafarers. Those of you who have had experience working with Filipino seafarers, do you agree with the author? Underline the points you agree with.



The Filipino English

The average Filipino speaks English well; at times, however, Filipinos speak English with distinct regional accents depending on what part of the country they come from. Some dialects' alphabet does not have an "F", and so Filipinos tend to pronounce it as "P". Don't be too particular about the pronouns "he" or "she", or diction in general. Filipino seamen sometimes misuse "she" and "he" because in Filipino language there is no such distinction in gender.

Do's and Don'ts with Filipinos

Here are some general statements intended to help Masters and officers sailing with Filipino seamen.

Do understand the Filipino's body language:

1. The Filipino frequently nods in the middle of a conversation, which simply means, "I understand what you are saying", but it does not mean "yes".
2. The eyebrows are raised in recognition, and to answer "yes".
3. The lips are used to point.
4. "Sst-Sst" is used to get attention.
5. The common signal for OK where the thumb and index finger form a circle means for Filipinos money. The new sign for OK is the thumb-up sign.
6. Using one's forefinger or index finger upward to call a Filipino is considered degrading and only used for animals. A downward gesture of the hand should be used without making the arch too wide since this will appear too dominating.
7. Arms akimbo is considered arrogant, challenging, angry. It is not a posture that will win and influence Filipinos, unless you are a policeman about to issue a traffic ticket.
8. It is insulting to beckon someone by crooking your finger. Filipinos will point out a direction by shifting their eyes towards the direction indicated.
9. Two males holding hands or with arms over each other's shoulders are the accepted norm, free of any overtones of homosexuality.
10. The average Filipino requires less privacy than the average Westerner. He tends to require less personal space as well. Filipinos stand close to one another when walking and talking, - and do not find body contact in crowds offensive.

- D.** Which gestures are appropriate in Filipino culture, according to the text above? Tick .

