

THE EMPEROR HAS NO CLOTHES

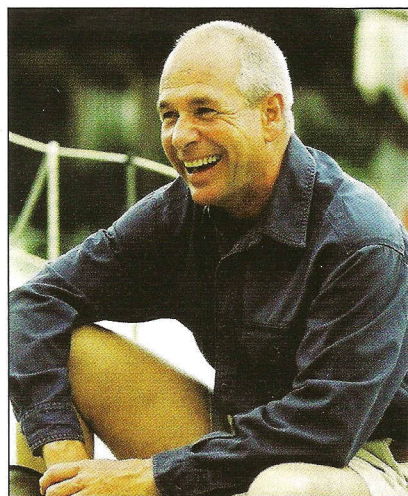
BY PATRICK ESTEBE

Hans Christian Andersen's story has very little interest for most kids; they cannot imagine that people would be that stupid. As adults, unfortunately, it sounds so real...

(Of course there is not such a thing as an 'approved training', as the ISPS has only defined the curriculum of these trainings, not sanctioned any approved course, but that is another story...)

In Andersen's story these trainers are like the coat bearers who would say: 'Let us not discuss whether or not there is a coat, but let us just learn how to carry it.' Indeed, it is not easy to remain truthful and speak your mind when such a juggernaut is in motion.

Following the path of least resistance has always been the sailors' way. For



ISPS, some captains who see this as just another hoop are ready to follow this path, and prefer to get ready to jump through it.

ISPS is this new wonderful cloth, which will leave us totally naked when it comes to actual security.

Interestingly enough, many instructors of the 'approved' trainings have given up arguing about the effectiveness of the code and end up with the default statement: 'This is the law, let's abide by it.'

This path of least resistance, however, is laden with many traps, and following it may have dire consequences. ISPS is not just another manual to gather dust on shelves. ISPS constitutes a tipping point, which will allow bureaucrats to have the final say in the last remaining place where owners could still get privacy and safety, and captains their independence.

The yachting captains who do not see this danger have an antecedent they can refer to:

Thirty years ago Airline pilots were people we were all looking up to. But bureaucrats of all feathers, from governments to airline management, brought them down from a commanding position to their present status of mere employees driving airplanes.

Many would like to bring yachting captains down to mere employees driving boats. There is more at stake here, however, than the status of the captains. Indeed the privacy and safety of the owners will suffer the same fate as the captains' status.

To avoid repeating myself, I will take an example from a different field.

The Army is the ultimate procedure machine, it is a broad sword, and it has huge power... Yet when results, especially precise results must be achieved, Special Forces are brought in.

Interestingly enough, Special Forces do not follow procedures. It is interesting to study their way about authority; they certainly follow orders and give satisfaction to their boss, but it is definitely a relaxed authority, with a wide margin of manoeuvre for the individual and often 'carte blanche' for the captains.

It sounds to me as if yachting captains are indeed the special forces of the marine trade...that technocrats want to transform into boat drivers.

Now who will the owner want to command his yacht, ensure his safety and his privacy?

A captain who has allegiance only to him, who will have the capacity to act intuitively and creatively just like a special forces captain?

Or a boat driver following a mountain of procedures and answering to all kinds of bureaucrats while trying to accommodate him?

Bureaucrats are looking for captains with neither balls nor claws, but will owners be happy to depend on such individuals for their safety and privacy?

Yacht managers can easily be judged from this criterion: on which side of the fence between bureaucrats and captains do they stand? In these difficult times, they probably could use the logistical support of creative and effective people. As far as security is concerned, the owner, without a doubt, is better off relying on a 'Master and Commander' who has the management, and everyone else involved with the yacht under his command.

It is true that a few captains have brought shame to themselves. It is also true on the other hand, that some owners have dismissed their trustworthy captain after listening to self-serving managers. The world is not perfect yet...

Most owners are great people though, and it is unlikely that they will want anyone but a great captain to command their great yacht. I have been lucky enough to serve with a few sharp owners (if somewhat older) who had inspiring captains.

Owners may have a lot to loose in an ISPS world. Yachts are the last place in the world where they can find peace of mind, relax and have fun away from it all. One has only to see yachts whose owners have diametrically opposed economic or political interests, sharing peacefully the same dock or anchorage, to see how true this is.

Yachts are not only far safer and private than any peace of real estate; they are the last islands of peace in a world that has been lost to the bureaucrats.

What will remain of this world once all yachts have AIS; so that anyone can pinpoint them, know their ETA and any relevant data? What will be the consequences of abiding to procedures, which make sense only to the bureaucrats who wrote them, but constitute an invasion of privacy and a breach of security?

Bill Gates in his book said a few years ago that most people overestimate what can be done in two years and underestimate what can be achieved in ten years. Surely it will take a good two years for ISPS to be steaming at cruise speed. Will there be any ocean traveller left in ten years?

But, the fate of yachting captains does not have to be the same as the fate of the airline pilots. The only recourse airline pilots had was to talk to the airline managers who were all too happy for this opportunity to clip their wings.

Captains however can talk to their owners. Without lobbying, or demonstrating they can give the owners a few pointers. Owners by definition are fast learners and only need pointers. One of those pointers is found in the scriptures where it is repeated several times to make sure that it won't be missed: 'But no one can enter the strong man's house, unless he binds the strong man first, and then he will plunder his house.'

This describes the modus operandi of all the bureaucrats of the world. All captains by now have discovered that the ISPS is quite binding... It may be the right time to mention to the owners that the binding targets them as well.

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25 years of real field experiences in the world's worst hot spots and ocean travels beyond civilisation have convinced him of the superiority in a soft approach to security.

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