

INSIDE VIEW:

A HUMAN SHIP

A conversation with Captain Agostino Fazio, Master of Carnival Glory

by

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While 2010 was Captain Agostino Fazio's first assignment as the master of Carnival Glory, he was no novice. A veteran captain, he brought years of experience to this assignment which included commanding most of the ships in the Carnival Cruise Lines fleet. Based upon this experience, he has developed firm convictions as to what is important for a ship to be successful. During a port call in Canada, I had the opportunity to speak with Captain Fazio about his career and about commanding a cruise ship.

Captain Fazio's Career

A native of Genoa, Italy Captain Fazio has been with Carnival Cruise Lines since 1979 and has seen the line grow and change over the course of his career.

After graduating from maritime school at 19, Captain Fazio did his compulsory military service in the Italian Navy. He applied for and was accepted into the naval academy and became an officer. His tours of duty included time on a corvette (a small surface warship) and time working in conjunction with the Italian special forces. While being an officer on a warship is obvious-

ly different than being an officer on a cruise ship, Captain Fazio believes that his military experience taught him lessons that have been useful in his later career.

"It gives you structure. You are a little bit more demanding from yourself. The navy asks you to give a lot and you become very critical as well against yourself. So you put yourself always under self-examination. It was a different approach to things and I think that makes you more complete."

Following his time in the navy, Captain Fazio worked on a tanker and on cargo ships. The freighters were not modern container ships but rather traditional ships where the cargo was stored in the hold and unloaded with derricks and booms. Whereas a container ship will stay in port sometimes less than a day, these ships would sometimes be in the African ports that they visited for 15 days while the cargo was unloaded. "Again, it was another good experience," Captain Fazio smiled.

Next, Captain Fazio decided to make a career change and signed on to be third officer on a ship that had just been purchased by a relatively new passenger ship company. The ship was the *Festivale* and the com-

pany was Carnival Cruise Lines. His contract only called for him to stay for four months. However, "I liked it so much I stayed there 13 and a half months."

The *Festivale* had not been built for Carnival. Rather, like her fleetmates, *Mardi Gras* and *Carnivale*, she was a former ocean liner that had been refurbished for cruising.

"They were not meant for cruising. [The *Festivale* had been the] *SA Vaal* [also known as *Transvaal Castle*] and it had been transporting mail, precious cargo and a certain number of passengers between South Africa and England. They had to go around Africa and that was a [difficult] trip. You had to be ready to encounter any sort of sea. Those ships were tough to be able go in any sea at any time. They were like ice breakers almost."

Today's cruise ships deal with severe weather by avoiding it. Using modern weather forecasting and communications technology, ships know the type of weather they will encounter. "We never take them into bad seas - - a bit of choppy seas, yes, but not into a hurricane. In fact we have procedures in place to inform guests that there might be a chance that we are going to divert the ship to another itinerary."

While the old ships were very strong, they were not as maneuverable as a modern cruise ship like *Carnival Glory*. "The bow and stern thrusters [on *Glory*] are quite powerful and so in 99 percent of the situations, we do not need tugboats." Not only is this more efficient but today's ships are not limited to ports where tugboats are plentiful.

The guest areas were much different as well. Today's "ships are conceived in a different way. They are conceived to have big spaces, which those ships did not have. Remember the lounges were one deck lounges, now we have three deck lounges. The theater there, the show place, was like a slit "

"On the open decks, there was just a pool and a bar. Now the area has become much wider and more articulated. You have the Jacuzzis and the waterslide with a lot of twists. And you have now, this new concept the *Serenity* area." (The *Serenity* area is an adults-only premium retreat).

The type of people who took those early cruises was also different from today's guests. "Cruising was not so well-known. It mainly attracted a lot of singles. [There were also] a lot of workers - - people who talked



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Captain Agostino Fazio

about it at work and decided 'let's go cruising.' There were also families but they were not as common as they are now because a family would not see that the environment was totally safe. Now people have been strongly reassured and see that cruising is a safe type of vacation."

As Carnival grew in popularity, it began to build its own ships that were designed for cruising. Captain Fazio went to Sweden where the first purpose-built Carnival ships were being built to help oversee the construction of the *Holiday*, the *Jubilee* and the *Celebration*, which was later to become his first command. He then served on the next generation of Carnival ships, the 70,000 gross ton *Fantasy*-class "superliners." These were followed by the *Destiny* class and *Conquest* class mega-cruise ships of over 100,000 tons. Captain Fazio has commanded the *Victory*, *Conquest*, *Valor*, and *Liberty* as well as the *Glory*. "I think I have been cap-

tain of at least 15 ships."

Not only have its ships grown in size but Carnival's approach to cruising has grown. "You have to change in all industries. [Carnival] has become more of an established business with dedicated procedures in each field. [It has] very bright people, people who know exactly what the needs of our guests are. The company has started a lot of new promotions, advertisements, a totally new approach. They have even changed some of the functions that you have onboard. Some of the old guests, especially if they have not cruised for awhile, come here and they see all these differences and they do not know how to take it. But in the end they have no problem and they like the way we are doing it now."

The changes Carnival has made are not limited to guest services but extend all the way to the bridge. "I like the new approach that we are trying with Carnival now. It is called Bridge Team Management. A captain is able to dock the ship himself more or less, giving straight orders here and there. But then you have passive people on the bridge who are there ready to receive orders but who do not comment [on what is happening]. Like any other human being, [the captain] could make a mistake. So, you want a different type of team. You want to have more interaction between the people on the bridge. [Therefore,] we are encouraging every one to think aloud - - even the youngest officers."

"Sometimes when we finish the maneuver now, I will say to an officer: 'I did not hear your voice during the maneuver.' I know that everything went fine but I prefer if I hear feedback - - if we are on course, if the depth is the correct depth, if the course over the ground is different than the heading. All these things are very, very important during the maneuver and where you have obstacles and shoals nearby, sometimes the margin is very, very little. In those sort of situations, to have information coming from everyone reassures you."

"The staff captain obviously and the navigator, who is in charge of the watch, are experienced people. I want feedback from them because they are going to become captains. But having a team like that is very important."

Despite all of the changes, the idea of providing a quality experience at a reasonable price remains central



Carnival Glory

to Carnival's approach. "You need to give an affordable product because otherwise you will go nowhere. The prices have to be correct. If you have a good product and [people] see that you offer good value, - - a good product in comparison to the price that you pay - - people [will be] attracted to come here."

A Captain's Perspective

When a ship's officer rises to the level of captain, he or she is in charge of the whole ship, not just the nautical aspects. "I am the one who represents the owner officially towards authorities and even to the guests, I represent the company. So my job does not end with steering the ship. It is also how the ship looks, how it functions. Obviously, certain tasks are carried out by people who know the issues in more detail than me. It is the same as when you have the mayor in a small town - - the mayor cannot know everything like how to operate the valves for the aqueducts or for the heating system. He needs to have a general view and be informed about all the issues that are going on."

Thus, rather than giving specific orders on every aspect of the ship's operation, a captain leads primarily by conveying an overall vision and his priorities to his subordinates.

For Captain Fazio, first on the list is safety. "People come here to enjoy themselves but they want to enjoy themselves in a safe way. They want to feel safe when they come aboard. Safety plays a big, big

part in the lives of all the crew members." This is not just the sailors but "all the different members of the hotel department have many hours of training on safety issues."

One aspect of the safety training is "what we call institutional safety, which is abandon ship or fire. But then there is occupational safety because people who come onboard do not want to hurt themselves. If they hurt themselves they are not going to enjoy their cruise no matter how nice the ship is. We work a lot on prevention. [For example] we are very much aware [that there are] issues of which a guest may not be aware because he has never been on a ship. So we try to keep the guests informed if there is an issue. You have heard announcements [warning that] it has rained and the decks are more slippery. When there are winds, we make announcements and we put signs on the doors because they can close back on you and trap a hand or something"

"Then also, we want to have our crew members healthy. These people come from the other side of the world and if they get sick here, they do not have their family nearby to take care of them. And we have our work to do. Yes, you can send them to the hospital but the best thing always is not to get sick and not to hurt yourself."

"So prevention is everything. We have made huge progress. In the last three years there has been a program of accident reduction and I think we have reduced [accidents] at least to half. We feel very proud of these results."

Another high priority for Captain Fazio involves the way the crew relates to the guests. "I would like us to be perceived as caring people - - people who are not here just to do one more job. [For example] you see people sometimes who when they come onboard are disoriented. They need information, they need reassurance. So you need to approach them. The crew needs to be available, approach people and talk to them. Talk to them in a personal way. The guests do not want people who are curt with them in their answers. They need people who listen, listen to what people are saying. And they have to be sincere in what they say. Then people will feel at home."

"I just received a letter from a guy whose wife had to be evacuated by helicopter. She was severely sick and she needed immediate attention. We called the Coast Guard and they came very quickly with the helicopter. They had great memories of our people from the period that she was being taken care of onboard, from the medical people to their steward to guest services - - everyone was there trying to see what they could do to alleviate their pain, their suffering. And people remember these

things. She went home and is still recuperating from what I understand but that's what you need - - people who at the moment demonstrate to you that they are human beings ready to help another human being."

Relating back to the Carnival formula of providing a quality product for a reasonable price, Captain Fazio sees concern for people as related to the high standards of performance he expects from his crew. "In your service you need to be as well prepared, as impeccable, as you can be. People like professionalism, people who know their jobs. Like when you go to a shop and ask what this product is, what are its properties, and they say 'I don't know,' you are let down. You want people who are able to explain it to you - - the properties, the qualities and the advantages compared to something else. So we ask them to be sharp, we ask them to be courteous, all these things are expected. But you can be courteous, professional and cold and that does not go too well. It is not a good combination. If you are a regular human being you have these feelings which you can communicate to other people - - it is what they expect."

Thus, while a cruise ship's facilities, the services it offers and its itinerary are important to its success, the human element is vital. It is the thread running through each of the priorities that Captain Fazio listed "I think that is the best thing that we can convey because all the rest, entertainment etc. is there but I think that the warmth with which you approach people can make a huge difference."