

# Leadership, Delegation and Responsibility

## An interview with Captain Attilio Guerrini Master of Caribbean Princess

By Richard H. Wagner

**B**orn in Tuscany in Italy, Captain Attilio Guerrini "always liked to travel" but when he was a young boy, his goal was to be an airplane pilot. However, no opportunities to learn that profession emerged so, as a teenager, he tried working in a fishing boat. "I didn't think it was the life for me and so I went back to school" at the Instituto Nautico in Livorno, Italy.

After two years as an officer in the Italian Navy, in 1968 Captain Guerini shifted to the civilian merchant marine working on cargo ships. In 1981, he went to work for Sitmar Cruises as an officer on one of its passenger ships. Six years later, Sitmar was acquired by P&O, which at the time was the parent company of Princess Cruises. P&O merged most of Sitmar's assets into Princess. As a result, Captain Guerrini's career has included commanding several Princess ships including Fair (originally Cunard's Carinthia), Star, Crown (I), Regal, Dawn, Sea, and Sapphire Princess as well as the name ship of Princess affiliate Ocean Village Cruises.

Today, Captain Guerrini is the master of the Caribbean Princess, a 113,000 gross ton mega-cruise ship of the Grand-Princess class. "The captain is the leader but nowadays, he is not the leader as in I do what I please."

Instead, the captain sits atop a sophisticated business organization with the three senior department heads reporting to him: The Passenger Services Director who is in charge of the hotel operation; the Chief Engineer, who is in charge of the engines and other technology on the ship; and the Staff Captain, who is responsible for navigation and the ship's Deck

Department. "The Staff Captain has another job because if I drop dead, he is supposed to do my job," Captain Guerini chuckled.

The Captain does not attempt to micro-manage his senior officers. "It is not that I run the hotel department. [The Passenger Services Director] does his job and I am happy. I am here, if there is something. I am available 24 hours a day."

"I like to know what happens onboard. Sometimes [an officer] comes to me about a problem to discuss it and to propose a solution and I have had to tell them I think you ought to look back at this because I don't think it happened exactly like that because I know this, this and that. When they return, they say you were right, how did you know? People talk. People come and tell me things and when I go around the ship they come and tell me things"

In addition, "as you move up and what you learn is to make sure that you do not make mistakes - - [you learn how to] use common sense, use experience. You become sort of a mentor for the rest of the crew."

"What I have come to enjoy is helping these young kids. I call them kids but they are men coming up, getting their experience. I see a lot of young people who are better than I think we were at that time. I enjoy doing this and I think the people appreciate it. You can do something more often than not by just talking to them [about] the problem or what they think is a problem."

"Another thing that I enjoy is to bring people together. I like to facilitate. Knowing this, knowing that, you get in the middle. It is something I enjoy."

While Captain Guerrini enjoys helping others,

with modern communications technology he is able to call upon Princess' home office and government agencies such as the Weather Bureau and the Coast Guard for information and advice. "You always need help and I welcome the fact that we have the telephone and you can talk, we have the computer, you can ask for help and share with others and that is very good."

Still, "there is responsibility that comes with the job. There are times when you have to make a decision when there is no time to call or when you call and they say do 'the best you can' That is when the experience, the judgment comes in."

"The most important part of the job is to make sure that the ship's operation is done in a safe manner - - that is the main job. The top priority is the safety of the ship. You are here for that. The final responsibility is yours. You have other officers to do the things to do the job but the final responsibility is yours. You can delegate the job but not the responsibility. So, you are responsible for the safe conduction of the expedition."

Another part of the job is public relations - - being the public face of the ship. "It is probably a folkloric thing - - the captain is a [celebrity to his passengers]. I can put on my civilian clothes and go for a walk on the pier and passengers still come up and say 'Hi. Captain.' I like to deal with people. The only thing is [it is difficult] to be personal on a ship when every 10 days it is another 3,000 people. Most of the time, [personal interaction] happens during the day on the pier or on the decks."

Some passengers want to meet the captain not for social purposes but because he is the head of the ship. "We have mostly a good response, a good feeling. The great majority of the people are quite happy." However, "sometimes they have a problem, and say: 'I want to speak with the captain!' If they really want, I always say: 'By all means, we'll sit down and talk.'"

The captain is also at the head of more than 1,100 crew members. "We have more than 40 different nationalities [in the crew] and I enjoy the different cultures, the different people." When a new crew member comes on board, sometimes he or she is "a little bit suspicious or some people have it in their mind that [people of other nationalities are] going to be completely different. But, honestly, we don't have a problem with that. At the end of the day, all the people want to do their jobs, want to progress, want to send the money home so the problem is not a problem. It is all the same - - it doesn't matter where you come from or who you are. You are looking at doing the job the best you can, get some money, send it home, go on vacation. Once you aim for the same thing even if you are different, you end up doing the same thing."



*Above: Captain Attilio Guerrini.*

*Below: The Captain on the bridge.*

