

# Maritime Wellbeing

## Championing Mental Health

Guidance for Ship Managers: Developing  
a network to champion mental health



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# Introduction

## Having champions or ambassadors for mental wellbeing in your company can be an effective and sustainable way to drive improvements to mental health onboard.

Your champions can play a pivotal role in introducing mental wellbeing as an important topic onboard your ships, helping to create a positive environment and reduce stigma around the subject.

Champions will share your vision for creating lasting positive changes to improve mental wellbeing onboard and will take responsibility for making it happen.

Building an effective network of champions helps ensure mental health initiatives are shared and activated across all levels of your organisation.

Here are some of the key steps to setting up a successful network of champions onboard your vessels:

1. Define roles and responsibilities of the champion
2. Recruit your champions
3. Prepare your champions
4. Decide how the network will stay connected
5. Launch the champions' network
6. Sustain your network



# Setting up a Network of Champions

## 1. Define roles and responsibilities for your champion:

- **Before setting up a network:**

- Work with the on-shore management team and shipboard management teams to outline company expectations
- Decide how the extra responsibilities of the champions will be built into life onboard

- **Explain clearly to champions:**

- What is expected of them within the role e.g. what they should be saying/ doing
- How long the role will last for
- How they should prioritise the work around normal duties

## 2. Recruit your champions:

- **Make a plan to recruit your champions, including a combination of:**

- Nominations from ship management and peers
- Requests for volunteers\*

\*This is an important way to recruit seafarers who may be new to a vessel and/ or identifying people who have an interest in mental health

- **Set a list of criteria for selecting mental health champions:**

- This should be used by the ship management team to decide which of their crew to nominate
- Make the list publicly available for people to nominate themselves or their colleagues

- **Give a clear deadline for crew to submit their nominees/ volunteer themselves:**

- This should be done after you have communicated the roles and responsibilities

- **Start small:**

- You don't need to worry about having a big network of champions immediately
- Aim to recruit at least one champion per vessel and then expand - even a small team can have a big influence on making changes onboard

# Setting up a Network of Champions

## 3. Prepare your champions:

- **Engage them:**
  - Get your champions engaged with the role by providing them the necessary skills and information
  - Make it clear that there is **NO** expectation for them to be experts in mental health
- **Empower them:**
  - Provide champions with the skills they need to be active and dedicated advocates of mental health, such as:
    - **Confidence** to ask for time in the agenda to talk about mental health during safety meetings
    - **Ability to facilitate** conversations about difficult subjects
    - **People skills** such as listening, communicating, coaching to support the programme effectively
  - Encourage them to start conversations about mental health and be confident guiding their colleagues onboard to seek professional help when required
  - Make champions clear about the boundaries of their role i.e. to what extent they can provide guidance and support, before advising colleagues to seek professional help to seek professional help



# Setting up a Network of Champions

## 4. Decide how the network will stay connected:

- **Work together:** In order to keep champions fresh and engaged, liaise with the shore-side management team to facilitate ways for champions to feel valued and collaborate with each other, such as:
  - Create a specific workspace for champions to share experiences / learning
  - Give feedback and download useful information in support of their activities
  - Encourage them to think of how to adapt mental health initiatives to fit your company culture
- **Trust and equip:**
  - Engage champions with the information about mental health plans before other seafarers - the champions should always be one step ahead of their colleagues, so they are prepared to respond to questions
  - Give them the opportunity to ask questions to ensure they are clear on key messages / what they are being asked to deliver
- **Get champions to support each other:**
  - Encourage champions to stay in touch with one another (e.g. via an online community, meetings, etc.) so they can collaborate, share ideas and overcome challenges
- **Build relationships:**
  - Take time to check in regularly with your network (you may wish to assign a shore-side champion coordinator)
  - Provide champions with focused support for key subject areas
  - Make sure questions/ challenges are acknowledged and resolved quickly

# Setting up a Network of Champions

## 5. Launch the champions' network:

- **Make the company aware** of the mental health programme and supporting champion network
- **Identify your champions** to their colleagues and encourage champions to raise their profile onboard
- **Explain how the mental health champions will support** the shipboard community – this message should come from shore-side leadership, reinforced by ship management teams, to highlight their crucial support towards the initiatives

## 6. Sustain your network:

- **Plan regular engagement activities** with your champion network
- **Create a robust feedback system** with champions to understand how initiatives and materials are being received onboard
- **Develop ways to obtain feedback from shipboard management teams** on the effectiveness of the champion network
- **Regularly track progress of activities**
- **Ensure you have a programme** to sustain your champion network - recruitment, replacement, training and development
- **Remember to show recognition** and reward for this role, to ensure it continues and expands

The ultimate goal is for every individual to understand the maritime wellbeing programme available in your company and develop a thriving culture of care, to make lasting and meaningful changes that will improve mental health onboard.



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*This guidance for ship managers has been based on a combination of sources, such as Shell Health experiences setting up champion networks elsewhere and online sources including:*

<https://iabcemena.com/uk/10-steps-to-building-an-employee-champions-network/>

<https://www.generator.talent.com/who-are-change-champions-and-how-can-you-spot-them/>

<https://www.slideshare.net/thechangesource/how-to-establish-a-network-of-change-champions>

<https://thechangesource.wordpress.com/2013/04/14/how-to-launch-a-network-of-change-champions-in-7-steps/>