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Trevor Nikanor

## Deck Officer

### Making A Good Living at Sea

Rendering support in the navigation, manoeuvring and safe handling of the ship; communications between ship and shore; the handling of cargo; and the operation of all lifesaving devices, the role of a Deck Officer is vital on board a seagoing vessel. Meet 37-year old Trevor Nikanor, who started his career as a Deck Officer and today is a seasoned and experienced Skipper. This is his story.

### Harbour Boy

Trevor hails from the harbour town of Walvis Bay, where his single mother raised him and two siblings. He attended school at Tamariskia Primary at Swakopmund, from where he went on to the SOS Herman Gmeiner Technical High

School at the coastal town, excelling in Diesel Mechanics as a subject.

His mother, a businesswoman trading in the informal sector, taught Trevor and his siblings from an early age that success come with hard work and dedication. Financial constraints, however, prevented Trevor from enrolling for tertiary studies upon completing Grade 12. When his girlfriend also fell pregnant at the time, his aunt stepped in and enrolled Trevor at the Namibia Marine and Fisheries Institute (NAMFI) at Walvis Bay. "I was to become a father that year and my aunt felt that I had to secure a future for myself and be able to take care of my child. It was a relatively easy decision. I grew up at Walvis Bay and knew many people who worked at sea and earned good money", he explains.



## Exciting Training

Confronted with a choice to either become a Deck Officer or an Engineering Officer, Trevor opted for the former. He took to this training at NAMFI like a fish to water. "I didn't really understand the difference between the two, but today I can safely say that I made the right choice. I excelled in the Natutical Science training, which consists of three main elements namely, navigation and ship handling, safe operation of a ship, and handling cargo from the onset. I just had a 'natural feel' for the field. It was a match made in heaven", he recalls.

Deck Officer graduates start off as cadets and on completing requisite sea-time and examination, go on to become a third officer, then a second officer, a chief officer, and then captain. Trevor has worked his way up through the ranks. Hangana Seafood, a subsidiary of the Ohlthaver & List Group has employed him as a Skipper on its wet fish stern trawlers. "I started at the bottom, working for about

thirty-six bigger and smaller vessels in Namibian and international waters. But, here I am today. A master of a vessel for the past ten years", he shares.

## Profit & Competition

As a fully Namibian-owned company and one of the leading employers in the Namibian hake fishing industry, Hangana operates its own wetfish fleet. Catches are preserved on ice and transported to the company's harbour-based factories for further processing.

Trevor makes up an important part of this value chain. He is under constant pressure to ensure that the catches he brings in meet production targets and deadlines. "Our work is volume -driven. Bottom line is that if you return to the harbour empty-handed, production and profit margins are compromised. There is a lot of pressure on me to make sure we meet our targets", he notes.

"Our salaries are determined by the gouta volumes we bring in. The competition between the six vessels in the Hangana fleet is strong, but healthy, in an environment of sustainable fishing to ensure we don't deplete our resources. I'm very competitive and I've been a top performer for Hangana", he adds.

## Demanding Work

Sustained growth in the local fisheries, logistics and marine mining sectors is creating more and more employment opportunities for Deck Officers. They are vital members of a ship's management team – responsible for making decisions on steering the ship, controlling navigation and communications.

Deck Officers also assume responsibility for the safety of the vessel and the crew. It is responsible work that requires meticulous planning. "I need to ensure that all safety equipment is

secured and that mechanical and technical hiccups are solved, before we sail. Our success depends ultimately on the quality of our planning. I am also responsible for the wellbeing of my crew whilst at sea. So it's important to be decisive, calm and someone who inspires confidence in others", Trevor says.

## Treacherous Environment

Working at sea is treacherous. As the master of the ship, Trevor places a high premium on safety and emergency preparedness. "I need to lead by example, because the master is always the last person on board. The sea is dangerous. You need to be fearless as this is not work for a mommy's boy. We never compromise on safety and every five years, we are required to attend refresher safety training courses", he explains.

Trevor has experienced the sea's peril first-hand. He lost a close friend when the Namibian-registered fishing vessel, the Meob Bay, sank in 2005. "The sea was very rough and the boat caught the mooring rope of an anchor. My friend and the crew were caught in the vessel when it capsized. I was on another vessel a few miles away, but we couldn't do anything, because the sea was too rough", he recalls.

In spite of the perilous environment, Trevor remains a firm believer in the potential of working on sea and the opportunities on offer for young Namibians wishing to enter the fray. "I always encourage young people to join the marine sector. We need more Namibians skilled in this work to allow us to take charge of our marine resources and to Namibianise this sector. The job pays well and you get to travel to other countries. I can speak six languages, including Russian and Ukrainian, because I travelled there often", he notes.

## Support System

Spending long periods on sea can be physically and psychologically taxing. When on land, Trevor makes sure to make time for his loved ones. "I must admit that being at sea for long periods can get to you

sometimes. My family is my support system and that's why I prioritise spending quality time with them, whenever I'm on land" he stresses.

When not at sea, Trevor also takes care of his private business ventures. "The financial security that comes with my job has also allowed me to invest my savings in a few private ventures, which are starting to pay off. I'm doing well", he notes.

He is also planning to further his studies in Marine Engineering. "I am a very driven and focused individual always on the lookout for opportunities to grow further and learn more. This is just who I am", he concludes.

Trevor Nikanor. Deck Officer, Businessman and Father. His passion for his work and his commitment to his team helps him in dealing with the stress and pressure of a treacherous work environment. He carries on his duties and responsibilities with fortitude and endurance. His story teaches us that it is the strong that survive, but the courageous that triumph. He is a Deck Officer. He is living his passion. And so can you!

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