July 2026

Authored by The Maritime Professional Council of the UK

Kind Leadership

The Principles



What we mean by Kind Leadership

Maritime operations take place in environments that are often complex, demanding, and uncertain. In these conditions, safety, performance, and organisational resilience depend not only on systems and procedures, but on how people lead, communicate, and respond to one another every day.

Kind Leadership provides a practical, evidence-informed approach that promotes **trust, respect, fairness, and understanding**. By strengthening relationships and encouraging positive leadership behaviours, the principles set out in this booklet provide a shared foundation for building safer, healthier, and more effective maritime organisations, both at sea and ashore.

Trust

Trust is fundamental to effective leadership and safety. It influences whether people speak up about risks and mistakes, report concerns early, learn from experience, and support one another under pressure. In a culture of trust, people feel psychologically safe and are more willing to suggest new ideas, admit mistakes, and raise concerns before they become more serious.

Consistent, fair and purposeful

Kind Leadership is characterised by compassion, empathy, and the ability to create inclusive organisations. It focuses on how decisions are made, how authority is exercised, and how people are treated every day, particularly when conditions are demanding or decisions are difficult.

Kind Leadership recognises that safety and performance depend not only on what is done, but also on how people are led. It is demonstrated through consistent actions, clear communication, fair decisions, and leaders who remain engaged and purposeful under pressure.

By exercising authority with empathy and purpose, Kind Leaders create the conditions for people to perform at their best while maintaining high standards, accountability, and resilience. This approach can also improve efficiency, strengthen safety, and support more resilient organisations.

Kind Leadership supports and strengthens existing regulations and management systems. It does not replace rules, procedures, or accountability; it influences how they are applied, communicated, and lived day to day.

Regardless of system or process, the common denominator is always people.



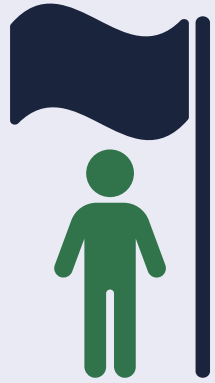
What Kind Leadership delivers

Over time, Kind Leadership supports:



- Improved crew welfare and well-being
- Greater trust between ship and shore
- Increased reporting and earlier identification of risk
- Fewer incidents and near misses
- Stronger learning culture on board and ashore
- Better retention and engagement
- Clearer development pathways
- Stronger operational performance
- A more resilient and sustainable organisation
- Long-term return on investment through safer, more effective operations

Kind Leaders:



- Lead by example
- Think, speak and act kindly
- Consider others first
- Reflect on their practice
- Focus on the means, not the ends
- Look actively for unkindness and solve it
- Assume positive intent
- Check in with people
- Actively listen
- Keep open eyes, open ears, open mind
- Help others to be kinder

The nine principles of Kind Leadership



Respect
Treat everyone with professional dignity, regardless of rank, nationality, or role.



Listening
Take concerns seriously. Give people time to speak. Check understanding.



Accountability
Hold standards. Address problems clearly. Do not use blame to protect others or avoid action.



Fairness
Apply rules consistently. Explain decisions where appropriate.



Inclusion
Use the knowledge of others. Good ideas can come from any level.



Learning
Use mistakes, near misses, and feedback to improve systems and practice.



Consistency
Remain steady and professional, especially under pressure.



Care for People and Operations
Protect well-being while meeting operational needs.



Improvement
Act on feedback. Make visible changes where possible.

Living the principles

Kind Leadership is a living concept – a set of values. Changing company / organisational culture to adopt Kind Leadership takes time, consistency, and patience. It may take several years to become fully embedded. Sustaining it requires visible commitment, positive reinforcement, and continuity at every level of the organisation. It continually evolves through open dialogue between ship and shore, informed by operational experience, feedback, and learning.

For Kind Leadership to remain meaningful, the principles must be visible and accessible throughout the organisation. They should be discussed regularly, embedded in onboarding, training and everyday work, and reviewed periodically as operational conditions, risks, and understanding evolve. Kind Leadership is a commitment to action, reflection, and continual improvement, not simply words on a page.

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Owning Kind Leadership

Kind Leadership is not rank-dependent. It applies to everyone involved in maritime operations, including:

- Executive leaders
- Masters and Chief Engineers
- Officers and supervisors
- Crew members
- Cadets, trainees and apprentices
- Shore-based management

Everyone has a role to play. Safety and performance improve when leadership is shared, and collaboration is valued across ship and shore. Everyone has a responsibility to treat others with respect, regardless of rank or background.

Executive leaders

- Modelling company culture through decisions, policies, and communication
- Supporting Masters and all company staff in practising Kind Leadership



Masters and Chief Engineers

- Setting the tone for leadership behaviour through personal example
- Creating an environment where concerns can be raised without fear
- Ensuring fair and consistent treatment across ranks and departments
- Explaining decisions that affect people and operations
- Intervening early in conflict and unsafe practices
- Promoting continual improvement in safety practices
- Being open to learning from crew experience

Officers and supervisors

- Managing work fairly and consistently
- Giving honest, respectful feedback and addressing issues early
- Listening to concerns and escalating them when required
- Modelling calm, professional behaviour under pressure
- Supporting learning, safety, and team cohesion
- Developing their people skills
- Engaging with training to improve competence, not just to meet requirements

Crew members

- Speaking up about safety concerns, risks, and errors
- Supporting colleagues and contributing to a cooperative working environment
- Taking responsibility for their own behaviour and performance
- Taking ownership of their personal development



Cadets, trainees and apprentices

- Actively engaging in learning and asking questions when unsure
- Speaking up about safety concerns
- Showing respect and professional conduct at all times
- Seeking feedback and applying it to improve
- Contributing positively within their learning role



Shore-based managers and staff

- Ensuring commercial and operational pressures do not undermine safety
- Ensuring recruitment and selection practices reflect Kind Leadership principles.
- Providing training, resources, and time for leadership development
- Maintaining safe, confidential reporting and escalation pathways
- Addressing structural issues that affect wellbeing, retention, and safety
- Reviewing procedures and acting when they are not workable in practice



From Principles to Practice

These principles describe what Kind Leadership is and why it matters. The accompanying *Kind Leadership: In Practice* sets out how to apply these principles in everyday maritime operations, providing practical guidance to help leaders adopt a shared and consistent approach. Embedding Kind Leadership requires both clear principles and deliberate action, and the Guide supports organisations in making that transition.

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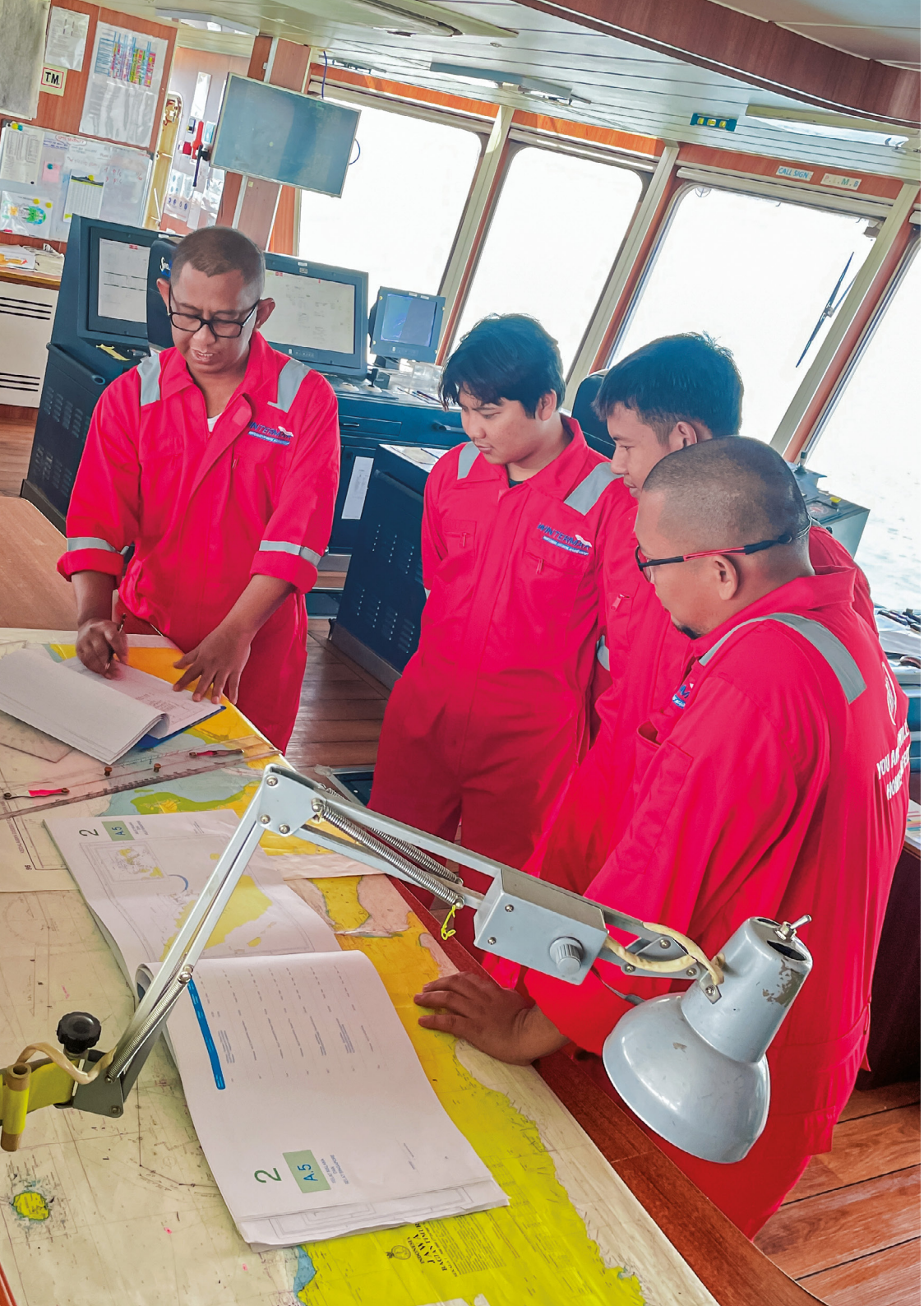
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Kind Leadership in Practice





What is Kind Leadership?

Kind Leadership exists to improve safety, performance, and employee retention, by making it easier for people to speak up early – especially when they are under pressure.

Leadership in maritime operations can feel calm and controlled at times, and at others uncertain, pressured, and complex. These shifting conditions shape how people engage with one another and how confidently they speak up. Day-to-day performance does not rely on procedures alone, but on the quality of interaction between those in authority and those carrying out the work.

Kind Leadership is a practical, relational way of working grounded in this reality. It starts with a simple principle. When leaders show care, clarity and curiosity, while listening actively, people feel able to speak up sooner, share concerns more willingly, and take ownership. This is not about style or personality, but about consistent behaviour that creates the conditions for openness, trust, and professional dialogue. Effective supervision in maritime operations depends on this consistency.

No single role can implement Kind Leadership alone. It is sustained through aligned expectations, visible behaviour, and mutual accountability over time.

Why does it matter?

Masters, officers, superintendents and managers influence operational outcomes through how they respond to concerns, explain decisions, apply standards, and follow through on commitments. When these behaviours are clear and reliable, they build trust. When they are inconsistent, unclear, or reactive under pressure, people are less likely to report issues early or raise uncertainty.

Kind Leadership recognises that people naturally vary in energy, focus, and perspective from day to day. It does not demand perfection. Instead, it focuses on small, practical, repeatable behaviours that help leaders maintain clarity, remain approachable, and respond constructively in real-world conditions. These include setting clear expectations, upholding consistent standards, conducting effective two-way safety conversations, and managing incidents in ways that balance accountability with learning.

The aim is not to add work, but to strengthen the quality of day-to-day supervision. By doing so, it supports earlier reporting, stronger working relationships, improved employee retention, and more reliable operational performance.

The nine principles of Kind Leadership



Respect
Treat everyone with professional dignity, regardless of rank, nationality, or role.



Listening
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Accountability
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Learning
Use mistakes, near misses, and feedback to improve systems and practice.



Consistency
Remain steady and professional, especially under pressure.



Care for People and Operations
Protect well-being while meeting operational needs.



Improvement
Act on feedback. Make visible changes where possible.

Kind Leadership is a practical approach to leading people in maritime operations. It supports safe performance, trust, learning, and retention across ship and shore by

- setting clear expectations
- treating people professionally
- listening to concerns
- dealing with problems fairly and consistently

In shipping, where people work under pressure across cultures, hierarchies, and long rotations, leadership behaviour directly affects safety, reliability, and cost. Effective leadership increases psychological safety, giving people the confidence to speak up early about risks, mistakes, or uncertainty without fear of blame or humiliation. The outcomes speak for themselves:

Effective leadership behaviour	Poor leadership
Open reporting	Weak reporting
Improved safety culture	Silence about risk
Stronger teamwork	Avoidable conflict
Better decisions	Repeated mistakes
Higher engagement	Low morale
Better retention	Poor retention
More reliable operations	Loss of trust between ship and shore

What Kind Leadership looks like in practice

Leaders who apply the principles of Kind Leadership typically:

- give clear instructions and priorities
- ask for concerns before work starts
- challenge poor behaviour without humiliation
- thank people for speaking up
- explain decisions honestly
- follow up on agreed actions
- remain calm under pressure
- learn from incidents rather than focusing only on blame

Authority, hierarchy and command

Kind Leadership operates within the maritime hierarchy. Rank, authority, and accountability remain clear and intact. This approach does not flatten hierarchy or dilute command. It strengthens leadership by improving the quality, timing, and accuracy of information available to decision-makers.

Kind Leadership does not mean avoiding difficult conversations, accepting poor performance, removing discipline, delaying decisions, pleasing everyone or lowering standards. It is not an alternative to authority or accountability. It is a way of exercising them more effectively.

In time-critical or emergency situations, command authority and clarity of instruction remain essential. At the same time, Kind Leadership helps create an environment in which people feel able to raise concerns where safety may be at risk, and to speak up at the earliest appropriate opportunity.

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Leadership commitment and ownership

This Guide outlines a way of working that depends on consistent leadership behaviour across the whole system—from ship to shore, and across operational and managerial roles. The practices that follow are deliberately practical, but their effectiveness relies on shared ownership.

Kind Leadership must be visible in daily behaviour, not in posters, slogans, or campaigns. It is expressed through how people communicate, make decisions, and respond to one another in real situations.

Responsibility sits at every level. Senior leaders set standards, expectations, and tone through the priorities they establish and the decisions they make, especially under pressure.

Operational leaders, including Masters and officers, are responsible for the daily application through supervision, adherence to standards, conducting safety conversations, and responding to concerns and incidents.

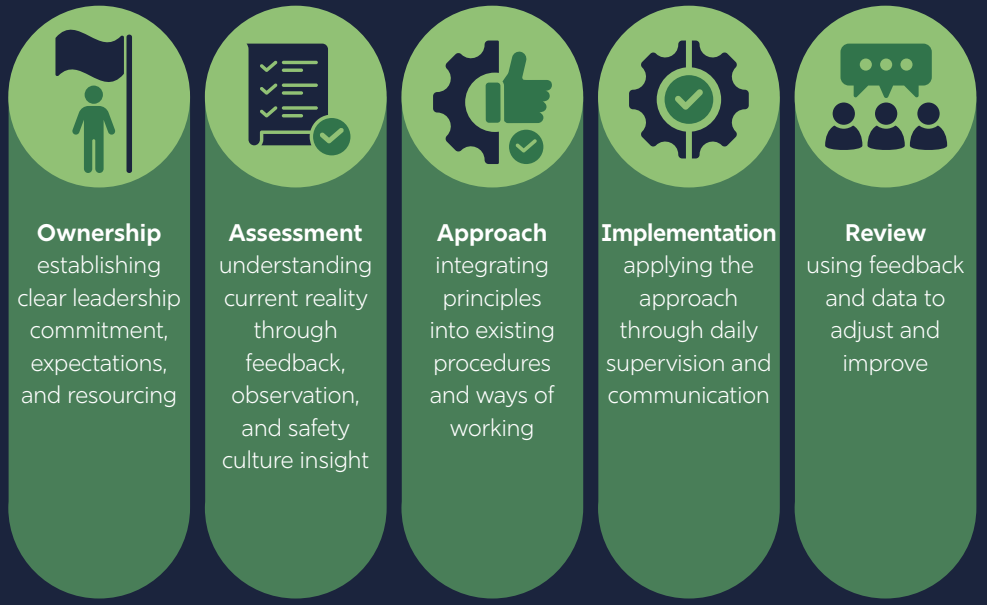
Shore-based teams shape the operating environment through planning, communication, and decision-making. Functions such as HR and training reinforce expectations through recruitment, development, and appraisal.

At every level, individuals contribute through clear communication, respectful behaviour, and a willingness to raise concerns and share observations.

Implementation

Implementing Kind Leadership is a leadership responsibility, not a programme delivery task. It depends on consistent behaviour, aligned decisions, and visible follow-through in day-to-day operations.

Implementation typically develops through five overlapping stages



There is no single mandated model
What matters is consistency over time

Where to start

Begin by collaboratively identifying where Kind Leadership will have the greatest immediate operational impact. Prioritise practical realities over policy aspirations. Do not attempt to change everything at once; focus on a small number of high-impact areas, build momentum through application, and expand consistently.

Start where behaviours are most visible and outcomes matter most, such as incident reviews, ship–shore communication, or safety meetings. Use these settings to apply, test, and refine Kind Leadership principles in real operational contexts.

Where capacity allows, this work can be supported by a broader review of policies, procedures, and supervision practices. However, progress should not be delayed in order to complete comprehensive reform. Select an approach that aligns with organisational readiness and available resources, but prioritise action over perfection.

Typical starting points include:

- ship–shore communication
- onboard supervision
- safety meetings
- incident and near-miss reviews
- crew welfare discussions
- performance conversations
- management behaviour ashore

> Do not attempt to change everything at once; focus on a small number of high-impact areas, build momentum through application, and expand consistently

Training and development

Training must be practical, role-relevant, and grounded in real work. Its purpose is to strengthen day-to-day supervision and communication, not to deliver abstract leadership theory. Delivery should deliberately create space for voices that might otherwise remain quiet.

Training content and delivery must be adapted to role, responsibility, and operational context. Different roles require different emphasis:

Senior management	Setting direction Handling escalation Making consistent decisions under pressure
Masters and senior officers	Onboard supervision Crew welfare Safety discussions Incident and near-miss reviews
Shore-based managers	Crew welfare Ship-shore coordination Prioritisation Communication tone Decision-making
Officers, supervisors, and crew	Everyday communication Task management Raising concerns early

> Training must be practical, role-relevant, and grounded in real work. Its purpose is to strengthen day-to-day supervision and communication, not to deliver abstract leadership theory

Training must be adapted in language, pace, and examples so that it is understandable and relevant across cultures, ranks, and roles.

Organisations should choose training formats that fit their operational reality, resources, and constraints. A mix of onboard sessions, shore-based workshops, and hybrid learning is often most effective. Real cases, mixed discussion, role-based examples, and clear follow-up actions are usually more effective than classroom-style delivery alone.

Options include:

- Train the Trainer
- Shore-based workshops linked to office meetings or crew conferences
- Online or hybrid learning modules where travel or release from duty is difficult
- Onboard sessions integrated into existing safety or crew meetings
- Mentoring and peer support, where experienced facilitators, senior officers, or designated KL champions guide others through early discussions, case reviews, and practical application onboard and ashore

Most organisations will use a combination of these approaches.

Initial training introduces the Kind Leadership method, but confidence often develops through practice. Mentoring is itself a kind of leadership skill; it develops others through listening, questioning, encouragement and constructive feedback, helping people build confidence and capability rather than simply giving them the answers.

Common mistakes to avoid

- launching with slogans only
- over-training
- making it HR-owned only
- ignoring senior management behaviour
- confusing kindness with weakness
- failing to follow up on feedback

Making the change



Leadership behaviours that can be introduced immediately

These behaviours are the responsibility of anyone who supervises work.

Before work starts
- confirm the plan
- ask what could go wrong
- check resources and workload
- invite concerns

During work
- stay approachable
- correct early
- support people under pressure
- keep communication clear

After work
- ask what went well
- ask what was difficult
- capture lessons learned
- close actions



Running better safety meetings

Safety meetings are a shared leadership space. Chairs and senior attendees must create conditions for open, respectful discussion, with visible follow-up.

Good practice includes:
- inviting ratings as well as officers
- focusing on real risks
- replacing one-way briefings with discussion
- maintaining a respectful tone
- recording and closing actions



Incident and near-miss review

Incident and near-miss reviews balance learning with accountability.

Key questions include:

- What happened?
- What made sense at the time?
- What pressures existed?
- Were procedures workable?
- What should change now?

Where misconduct occurs, it must be addressed appropriately, but learning should not stop at blame.



Ship–shore relationships

Trust is built or lost through daily contact. Leadership responsibility rests on both sides.

Shore teams should:

- reply promptly
- explain decisions
- understand vessel constraints
- avoid unrealistic demands
- thank honest reporting

Ships should:

- escalate early
- provide clear facts
- raise constraints honestly
- support agreed standards



Measuring progress

Measuring progress is not a compliance exercise. Leaders review indicators honestly and respond to what they show.

Useful indicators include:

- Level of workforce involvement and solution implementation
- improved reporting quality
- fewer repeat issues
- stronger retention
- better participation
- quicker escalation
- healthier ship–shore relationships





The Maritime Professional Council of the UK aims to promote professionalism and esteem within the British Merchant Navy and to those organisations directly concerned.

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Kind Leadership offers a structured approach to strengthening supervision across ship and shore operations. It addresses a fundamental challenge: people will only raise concerns, report errors, or escalate problems early if they trust that doing so will be met with a fair, professional response. That trust is built through everyday interactions, particularly when conducted under pressure.

Kind Leadership succeeds when people see it in real decisions, real conversations, and real behaviour and honesty.

Shipping does not need another poster campaign.
It needs leaders whom people trust.

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