



# Executive Spotlight by Stewart Mandy

## Pamela Conover

Cunard Line Limited has been in the spotlight recently, thanks to the introduction of the Queen Mary 2, featured in our last edition. Our interest in Cunard suitably piqued, we decided to learn more about the company and the people on the inside. Where better to start than at the top? That's exactly what we did when RPC Chief editor Stewart Mandy met Pamela Conover, president and COO in her Miami office earlier this year.



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Pamela Conover is the highest-ranking female executive in the international cruise industry, and as such is something of a legend. Her responsibilities encompass strategic planning as well as day-to-day operations and activities of Cunard Line and The Yachts of Seabourn. Her route to the top of the cruise industry was an interesting one, from being vice president of the ship finance department at Citicorp and later managing director in charge of Citibank's North American ship financing business where Carnival was a top client. This involvement with Carnival eventually led her to Epirotiki Cruise Line, when Carnival made an investment in that company in 1994, and Pam spent an interesting year in Piraeus as president and CEO. When Carnival divested itself of its Epirotiki holdings, Pam was asked to join the corporate parent, which she did, as vice president of strategic planning. In 1998, Carnival Corporation acquired Cunard Line, and merged it with Seabourn Cruise Line to form Cunard Line Limited. Pam was selected as chief operating officer, and in 2001 was promoted to president.

That is the history, but what of the present, and the philosophies with which Pam leads Cunard? I asked her how she motivates her crew to be the best. "We view our people as our number one asset, much more important than the hardware, since they are the ones who actually deliver the product" she told me. "We continually try to reinforce that in our actions, our communications. It's really about having a sense of pride in the product and giving the crew ownership of the product. This is something that Cunard has had for a long time with the QE2, with many very long serving crew. The crewmembers of QE2 have a long

sense of history, of family, and of 'belonging' to the product as well as pride and love for the product. Our challenge has been to create that feeling with new crewmembers and on the new ship." Pam personally involved herself as much as possible in this aspect of the QM2, conducting informational sessions for the crew at the shipyard in France, and endeavoring to convey the sense of pride and history that is Cunard.

Pam is especially proud of the Personnel Managers that Cunard has on the ships, and feels that this is a vital communications bridge between the crew and the company and that the position greatly assists the crew in adapting to their new vessel. Many brand new crew came to the QM2, as well as from the other ships in the fleet, particularly QE2, and in smaller numbers from The Yachts of Seabourn. As Pam pointed out, "We could not afford to take large numbers of crew from the Seabourn ships, which only have 115 crew, since this would have greatly impacted the product on those ships, however we did invite anyone from anywhere in the fleet to apply for positions on the QM2." In the event, QM2 had 70% new crew, with 30% coming from other ships in the fleet.

What is Pam's philosophy for attracting and keeping the best crew? "Attracting people to the Queen Mary 2 was not a problem, we had a huge amount of interest, and people were very excited by the opportunity of working on this historic ship. We try to create a sense of community onboard through orientation and training on a continuing basis, trying to get the crew to interact and socialize with one another. We set clear goals, and explain what is expected of our crew. We are getting better and better at this as each day passes."

The QM2 has good facilities for the crew, including a gym, Internet access, a movie area, and a huge crew bar, as well as onboard training facilities. Cabins with no more than 2 occupants each with private bathroom provide extra comfort.

Pam is impressed by the generosity of the crew. "There are various crew charitable activities, in which they participate, and I

have also noticed they are always very supportive of each other when they have problems. From a crew welfare point of view, once again, our Personnel Managers are a huge benefit, and this position does not report within the ship, but directly back to the office, which means that he or she is really there for the crew and with a specific focus on crew well-being and morale."

I asked Pam if she has ever been inspired by one particular crewmember? "It's hard to single out one person, but I am continually impressed by so many of our crew. They impress me with their attitude, positive service philosophies, and I really have to take my hat off to all of them." *[Editors note 'Taking your hat off' being a mark of respect].*

As a woman who has made it to the top in the industry, what would Pam say to other women, particularly those in the crew, who must look at her with awe and dream of making it themselves? "It's a difficult question, you have to be very passionate about your job and what you do, as well as being committed to success. It takes great integrity and a sense of fairness, but really, without the passion and the drive to work hard, then it is very difficult to progress. Regrettably, there is also the need to be in the right place at the right time, and that is luck. But, if you don't have the commitment and you don't have the passion, somehow the luck doesn't seem to find you. As I said, being lucky is being in the right place at the right time, but if you don't have the other things, the chances are you won't be noticed, even if you are there!"

What does Pam hope that the crewmembers on her ships think about her? "I would hope they think that I am completely committed to the success of the brand, that I care about them, and that I don't expect any more from them than I expect from myself. I'm a pretty



hard taskmaster to myself, and I hope they can see that."

I asked Pam how she sees the industry developing in the future. "We've come down the road of consolidation, and clearly there is now focus on the three major companies. I think that will continue. I don't think it's an easy industry for new players to enter, although I think there are opportunities for people to be involved in the niche aspects. The last few months have shown us the problems the industry can face. This is an industry that requires an incredible amount of cash to enter, and of course it is also driven by economies of scale. Unfortunately we have seen what has happened with Festival and Royal Olympic, and these are classic cases of lack of economies of scale and lack of balance sheet strength. I see more of the same continuing, with the power staying in the big companies."

We'd like to thank Pam Conover for taking the time to talk to us, and we wish all of her staff and crew at Cunard an exciting and successful future on the Queens of the oceans.

**"I don't expect any more from my crew than I expect from myself"**