

Strategies at Sea

Uni-Tankers has experienced significant growth in recent years, keeping afloat despite a difficult market.

Images by Jerry Nielsen

CEO Torben Andersen has been with Uni-Tankers for most of his life. He started his career as an apprentice before working up through the ranks as the business experienced growth. In 2012, Uni-Tankers Shipowning Company was a small organisation with a staff of 10. Now there are about 70 people in its offices and almost 600 seafarers.

Over a 20-year period, the business has been built up to have a high level of expertise, knowledge, and experience in management, safety at sea, technical know-how, manning, sales, purchasing, vetting, logistics, and chartering. *The CEO Magazine* spoke to Torben about his commitment to the organisation and the strategies he is implementing to ensure its continued success.

The CEO Magazine: How has your long career with Uni-Tankers and ample experience helped to shape your leadership today?

Torben: I think one of the biggest advantages has been that I have actually done, more or less, everything that we do within the company. I have been in the position of a crew manager, working in spare parts, in accounting—you could say that I know the company from the inside.

A profound understanding of our business and core values clearly supports my ability—and confidence—in terms of making the right decisions. At the same

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time, it helps me retain a holistic perspective in my actions as I prioritise to keep the balance across the organisation.

Over time, this has also given me the necessary energy to focus on my personal development in my attempt to move from management to leadership. I truly respect the management discipline and I make a consistent effort to continuously acquire the necessary skills for the benefit of both business and people.

How have fluctuations in the market influenced your business strategies over the past few years?

In a constantly changing sector we can make a strategy but we never know what tomorrow brings. We have had a very bad market for a long time. It started back in 2008 and had been going a little bit better but then it went worse again. The market is fragile so you don't want to do any big investments.

Unlike many of our competitors, we have, however, gone against the tide. Because we firmly believe that our presence in the market is relevant, we choose to constantly invest, but we do it at a moderate level, and, of course, we thoroughly analyse before making a decision.

How has Uni-Tankers been working to reduce expenses and increase the efficiency within its business operations?

We have strong focus on optimisation, trimming, and

developing our business. Things we can actually control. We make a big effort in order to have the right people out in our vessels. You can teach them to look at this as their housekeeping and get a good management system going so they're not buying more than they need. That can be very cost-efficient. We have executed several energy-saving activities to become more efficient on our fleet.

How does the business collaborate with key suppliers and charter partners to deliver high-quality transportation for its customers all around the world?

We have always had long-term relationships with our suppliers. We don't change our suppliers on a daily basis; we really believe in long-term relationships. I think it's fair to say that we don't have that many customers, but the ones we have are worldwide major players, and they want to make sure we are a reliable ship provider. That means we have to be able to provide the services that we promise. We can do that now because we have about 40 ships, and for customers it's very much about flexibility.

When we were a smaller company just a few years ago that was our biggest challenge. Many customers would have liked to do business with us because they could see that we were a serious company, but the problem was that we didn't have the flexibility with regard to our ships. We have that today, which has helped us a lot. >



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In this industry, safety is paramount and a big priority. What measures does Uni-Tankers take to minimise the risk of any accidents or damage caused to the environment?

We do whatever we can in order to minimise that, of course. If you go five years back that was not such a big issue but today you cannot, as a company, survive if you have any of these types of incidents. Our people are trained thoroughly and we teach them what they should be prioritising. The contractors we have—be it Shell or Exxon or anybody else—they do audits of our vessels and of our company. We have very high standards to comply with and that in itself keeps everything running smoothly.

What are the core values of the business and how do you instil these into your rapidly growing number of staff?

Our overall core values are that we provide safe, efficient, and

high-quality transportation solutions. Also that we are dedicated, trustworthy, and open-minded regarding people and business opportunities.

How do you engage with your staff and instil those core values into the workplace?

We are doing a lot of different things. We are in a program called 'Great Place to Work', in which we are working towards being the best workplace in Denmark in three years' time. We work a lot with our employees to implement our values—on a department level, a management level, and on a social level. We have offices in Turkey, France, and in the US, and we meet once every second year in a different place. We have four days together for everybody to meet and make sure we're all going in the same direction. We also have video conferences and board meetings where we gather all our employees and give them feedback on what is happening

within the group. A well-known quote by Peter Drucker says that "Culture eats strategy for breakfast", and we agree. This is also why we invest a lot to nurture a dedicated 'face2face engagement culture' across the organisation, and it is our experience that we differ significantly from our competitors in this way.

Uni-Tankers has implemented a new strategy to take it to 2017. What are the key elements of this strategy, and where do you see the business heading in the future?

We want to grow the number of ships we have and look at our market focus. Our market is more or less Europe and is really 50 per cent in the north; the Caribbean is about 25 per cent; and Africa and the Middle East is 25 per cent. We want to grow further out to Asia in the future. Another part of the strategy is to work very hard to keep our operations at zero spills and zero accidents. Furthermore,

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we want to teach people how to do good business.

I believe there are a lot of things going on within the industry. All of the smaller tankers are actually disappearing from the surface. Fortunately we have been able to attract some very skilled people with a lot of experience from other companies within the same segment. I think we have a very good position to be a leader in this segment. ●

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