



## Catherine Lapointe



Let's get to know these women who've had the courage and desire to take a different path by choosing a non-traditional marine career... women who dove headfirst into a world traditionally reserved for men and who, today, are our industry's pride and joy.

**Make way for our female ambassadors!**

*“ Marine careers are extremely enriching. If you're considering this path, go for it. Don't limit yourself. Times have changed, women definitely have a place aboard ships!”*

▶ At age 33, Catherine Lapointe already has almost 10 years' experience in the marine industry, with nearly 7 years at sea. Hers is, without a doubt, a success story bound to inspire young would-be marine-sector workers. With a college degree in navigation from the *Institut maritime du Québec* and the highest possible navigation certificate—Master Mariner—Catherine's career path commands respect and admiration.

At home both on land and at sea, Catherine is extremely versatile. Her career path clearly reflects her incredible talent, steadfast determination and boundless passion. With success now well within her reach and boasting these valuable assets, Catherine was predestined for a brilliant career in the marine industry and has no intention of slowing down her climb within this sector...

Currently Senior Manager, Transportation Services with Canada Steamship Lines (CSL), Catherine heads a department that manages a 20-vessel fleet that will soon be growing. With the constructions of six new ships scheduled for 2013-2014, CSL is gradually renewing its fleet with state-of-the-art vessels. Given this expansion, Catherine's major responsibilities will grow but she seems to be well in control of the demands of her job.

She loves her work and brilliantly meets the many challenges it offers. “CSL is an exciting, innovative company. I hope to rise within it and meet new challenges head on. I'm very determined”, she adds with conviction.

Catherine is in charge of scheduling Canadian ships and ensuring that her clients' product delivery needs are met. She also makes sure that everything runs safely, smoothly and in an environment-friendly manner.

Her daily duties focus on all things related to managing vessel voyages, analyzing fleet performance, optimizing scheduling, communicating with stakeholders and overseeing marine traffic. These operations hold no secrets for her.

There's no such thing as a “typical day” for Catherine. Each day has its own unique challenges and she runs her department skilfully, taking surprises and unforeseen situations in stride.

Before getting this key job with CSL, Catherine worked for V. Ships Canada as Marine Safety & Quality Superintendent. As the initial contact between the company and its ships, Catherine's main duties were to coordinate operations, ensuring that they were carried out safely.

Catherine's all-round experience includes navigation, a field she has been interested in since childhood. Coming from a family of sailors, she has always been fascinated by the marine sector and everything related to it.

Her father, who sailed as Chief Engineer and taught at the *Institut maritime du Québec*, introduced her to the sea and shared his love for it. “I couldn't imagine not working in the marine industry. I can't see myself doing anything else!”, she confides.

Having navigated for many years, she is well aware of the realities of work at sea. Between 2003 and 2009, she worked aboard various vessels for Algoma Central Marine, Canada Steamship Lines, private yachts and cruise ships of the Royal Caribbean Cruise Line.

While it hasn't always been easy for Catherine to leave her friends and family to head out to sea, she has never lost sight of her career goals to carve out a place for herself within the industry.



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► Her love for the sea has helped her overcome even the toughest challenges and remain passionate about her profession and the unforgettable memories attached to it.



“There’s nothing as beautiful as a starry night at sea. You can’t see a sky like that anywhere else. A calm ocean and starlit sky are magical, creating a breathtaking landscape... it’s just spectacular!”, she says dreamily.

Now that she’s working on land, Catherine hopes her life will be a little more stable and that she might even have a family some day.

One thing is sure: she has no regrets about the terrific years she spent sailing...

### OPINIONS

#### Women marine workers and you

Within its mandate, the Human Resources Sectorial Committee of the Maritime Industry (CSMOIM) accords particular importance to planning for the new generation of workers. The current labour situation in Québec’s marine sector shows that women are under-represented in non-traditional job categories, more specifically navigating. We wanted to get Catherine Lapointe’s views on this major challenge to debunk any myths surrounding the phenomenon...

► **CSMOIM: In your opinion, what are the main choices and challenges associated with planning for the new generation of women workers?**

CL: I feel that the new generation of workers—both men and women—is a problem for the marine industry. We are seeing a significant human resources shortage, even more so where women are concerned. One of the main factors responsible for this is poor knowledge of the sector.

Another important factor is related to the nature of the job. Navigating positions are non-traditional. Sailing is

a calling...something you have to live and breathe and be prepared to make sacrifices for. It’s not for everyone.

Finally, I think the work cycles involved constitute a major challenge and should perhaps be rethought. For many reasons, young people are reluctant to go to sea for months at a time. To attract more workers, work schedules may have to be adapted.

► **CSMOIM: Do you believe there are biases against women navigators? If so, what are they and how can they be eliminated?**

CL: Yes, I think there are. Personally, I have not had any negative experiences as a resulting from preconceived notions about women workers. In all the years I sailed, I never had any problems. My crews, which were mainly men, were always respectful even when I was the only woman aboard.

At the same time, being the only woman on a ship can sometimes give us the mistaken impression that we have something to prove... that we are less skilled or not strong enough. These are unfounded biases which, today, are disappearing. In reality, if something is too heavy for a woman, it’s probably too heavy for a man too. Our work techniques need to reflect industrial health and safety standards.



The best way to dispel biases against women in the marine industry is for there to be more of us. Greater numbers will help us remove such obstacles both at sea and on land. Past attitudes are no longer relevant and I think that the new generation of workers no longer reflects this reality.

By **Dominique Labbé**  
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