



2019-2020
PORTRAIT N° 1

Jérôme Gagnon

Navigation teacher, CFMU



Learn together to recognize the workers who provide us the routing of 80% of our consumer goods, thus supporting our Quebec maritime industry both at sea and ashore!

Tribute for our maritime ambassadors!

Sharing his love of the marine industry with the next generation of workers

► Like the ships that sail around the world, each seafarer's journey is unique. Some know their dream job—working on an ocean liner, for example—when they are children. Others take various different paths and have a range of experiences before finding it. Jérôme Gagnon is one of the latter. After training as a Navigation Officer, he navigated for many years before getting a position as a teaching assistant at the Institut maritime du Québec's Centre de formation aux mesures d'urgence (CFMU) in winter 2018. Since August 2018, he has been a full-time Navigation teacher at the training centre.

Curious to learn more about Jérôme's journey and what led him to teaching, I met with him in January.

A VERY DIVERSE SEAFARING BACKGROUND

Jérôme graduated from the Institut maritime du Québec (IMQ) with a Diploma of College Studies in Navigation in 2006. Although he didn't grow up in a maritime environment as such, he felt drawn to the marine industry through various encounters and, especially, through his father. "My dad studied Naval Architecture at the IMQ and worked as a Naval Engineer until he retired", Jérôme tells me. His father dreamed of navigating but had to reorient his career choice. Following in his footsteps, Jérôme decided to follow this dream.

During his career at sea, Jérôme was able to work on different types of vessels, including a cement carrier, tanker, bulk carrier and cruise ship. He accumulated more than five years of sea time on ships (between 2006 and 2018), working for various shipping companies, both in Québec and abroad. For Jérôme, these years at sea were marked

by teamwork, fascination and, sometimes, feeling a bit overwhelmed! He remembers the very first time he was in mid-Atlantic Ocean: "You know that you're 1000 miles from shore on both sides...think of a helicopter...it's pretty far away!", he says, smiling.

This chapter of Jérôme's life ended when he decided to start a family. He chose to stop navigating and find a land-based job in the marine industry. This is when the opportunity to teach Navigation came up.

A DESIRE TO TRANSMIT KNOWLEDGE AND TO HELP

Jérôme has always liked sharing his knowledge and seeing people further themselves. He clearly had the qualities needed to become a teacher. So, it was natural for him to seize the opportunity to teach when he saw the job opening at the CFMU.

To begin with, Jérôme explains the teaching context at a training centre like the CFMU. For Jérôme, it means teaching various courses, running 2 to 4 consecutive weeks, depending on the training in question: "We have to adapt and stay up to date in each area in order to teach these courses", he points out. The CFMU offers 36 different courses that a Navigation professor with higher certification may be required to give. "Of course, we don't give that many different courses in a given year". Teaching duties involve significant course preparation in addition to actually teaching class.



But that's not all. Being a teacher in the marine industry also means participating in course development. "Regulations are currently changing which means that we have to rework the courses offered to adapt them and ensure that they comply with Transport Canada requirements", explains Jérôme.

Finally, there is also "more general" development, which varies depending on the project. For example, Jérôme tells me that he recently went to Baltimore to see a navigation simulator in order to develop a CFMU project. "This enables us to create ties with other schools and stay up to date in the field", he says.

What aspects of his work does he like most? Transmitting knowledge, seeing people learn, broadening his horizons and continuing to learn himself. "Being in an environment where knowledge is transmitted allows us to stay up to date in our field, even if we no longer work on ships", he says.

One of the challenges of teaching is to be able to help students understand the subject matter. This is also true in the marine industry. According to Jérôme, his wide range of experience on different types of ships is very useful in teaching the navigation simulator: "It helps me link the teaching material to what the person knows and has experienced concretely. My experience helps me get closer to the student and develop a rapport".

And in 10 years? Without hesitating, Jérôme answers that he still sees himself working as a Navigation teacher at the CFMU. He loves being assigned to the navigation simulator and wants to be on hand to work on the training centre's many current and future developments.

WHAT ABOUT FUTURE TEACHERS?

According to Jérôme, the desire to transmit knowledge, the ability to communicate and intellectual curiosity are the essential characteristics of a good teacher. "You have to be interested in learning, in reading books, in understanding how things work", he points out.

Jérôme mentions that there are numerous advantages to teaching in the marine industry. The work schedule is flexible and you work during the day—Monday to Friday—making it much easier to balance work and family. And, there are the summer holidays and the possibility of working at home. Finally, Jérôme indicates that a CFMU teacher gets paid more when he or she has higher certification. There are also employee benefits and a pension fund.

For a while now, the marine industry has faced a shortage of teachers and new teachers are urgently needed. To colleagues who are currently navigating but are interested in teaching, Jérôme would say: "We want to build a place where Québec marine-related knowledge converges. We're a small, dynamic team that is growing quickly". For those who are unsure: "There are teaching assistant positions that allow you to teach from time to time. This gives you a chance to see if teaching is for you". And, if the sea calls, there's nothing to stop you from going back to navigating in the summer or during your annual vacation!

One thing is certain, the Québec marine industry workforce benefits from including motivated, enthusiastic teachers like Jérôme, for whom the desire to train a skilled next generation of workers is an integral part of their everyday concerns.

