A Thirst for Knowledge

Putting education and experience to work

Vanessa DiDomenico '12 finds herself in demand lately as she gains the experience and knowledge needed to inform those in her profession and throughout the industry on emerging topics. After leaving the Academy with a degree in International Maritime Business, she headed for China with Canada Steamship Lines, where she held various technical project management roles, as well as Carnival Corporation in the Corporate Ship Refit Group.

Since then, DiDomenico has added a master's degree from the State University of New York, attended the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts, and received her JD from Tulane University School of Law. She is currently based in Washington, D.C., working as an associate with Blank Rome LLP. There, she is diving into various aspects of maritime law while also writing articles on cyber issues — an area that is fairly new to her. "It's funny," she laughs, "while I never really studied it in school, people think that because you're young you must know what cyber topics are all about!"

Cyber security preparedness, detection, and response and supply chain contingencies will become more important over time. To that end, company mindsets will shift from lowering cost to lessening risk and remaining agile. "Prior to the Colonial Pipeline [ransomware attack] or *Ever Given* [the grounded container ship that blocked the Suez Canal for six days] incidents, people might not have realized just how fragile the shipping/supply chain actually is across all sectors," DiDomenico says. Now, the industry is seeing in real time a myriad of things that can actually cripple the ability to bring goods to market. Factors companies must be aware of include the lack of shipping containers, decreased data visibility into lower levels of supply chains, and increased freight rates coupled with difficulty in predicting what [consumer] demand will be in the next quarter. "Fragile supply chains can also lead to elevated risks from a legal and insurance perspective, including crew fatigue due to pandemic-inflicted crew change hindrances and demurrage claims, spoilage of cargo, and hull and machinery claims due to delays in obtaining spare parts due to delays or port congestion," DiDomenico adds.

While many industry pinch points are directly related to ongoing operational needs and effectiveness, a subject such as artificial intelligence is difficult to consider because of what it actually means in terms of future personnel needs. "Some tech advances are way out ahead of real-world scenarios and regulatory updates need to follow, but it's a process," DiDomenico explains, adding, "In other cases, new regulations can spark technological solutions or operational shifts, requiring the industry to respond."

Convinced of the need for the practical training that the Academy provides — a solid base from which many avenues can be explored — DiDomenico is a proponent of continuous improvement. She strives to keep reading, learning, and being a part of discussions regarding industry advancement. She also started a nonprofit, Maritime Coordinates, which seeks to engage the next generation of maritime leaders by working with the various maritime academies around the globe through regional chapters and annual conferences with industry professionals, international organizations, and regulatory bodies. "I envision this as a way to encourage honest, open discourse about current issues so we get fresh, creative perspectives into these conversations and do so from the outset," she says.

But for now, she is primarily focused on her work as a maritime lawyer, providing insight on domestic and international challenges through a saltwater lens. It's been a busy decade since DiDomenico left Taylor's Point, and there's no sign she or these important issues will be slowing down anytime soon … they're actually just getting started.

From business positions within the shipping industry to maritime law, Vanessa DiDomenico '12 has built a career on the foundation of her Academy education.