

**Captain Michael Reagoso**  
**McAllister Towing**  
**(Tug Boat Operator)**

*Meet Michael Reagoso*

Hi, I'm Mike Reagoso, Vice President of McAllister Towing of Baltimore. McAllister Towing is a large company that operates tug boats up and down the East Coast from Maine to Puerto Rico and they've tasked me with running the Port of Baltimore for them -- everything from crewing the tugs, supplying the tugs with their fuel and their oil and their other supplies, as well as maintaining the customer base and their relationship in the community through public outreach and teaching and so forth.

I think I'm very fortunate, first of all, because, for me, being happy in what I do is number one and I've been very fortunate, I think, to be able to find a career and a position that I really love to do. I like coming to work everyday. It's not like work really. And I feel very lucky that I'm able to ... growing up on boats and thinking, "Hey, this is really cool. I can do this all the time." Well, I kind of can. I'm not hanging out in my beach towel with my suntan lotion, but at the same time, I'm not in an office either where I may have no windows or one window. It's kind of a neat, a neat place to be.

*Explain what you do. Talk about an average day at work for you.*

Tug boats are important part of a port, because, as you may have been out on your boat fishing or sailing or something, you can maneuver pretty well around the docks. But the ships that come into the ports, especially the Port of Baltimore, are very large and they're really used to ... they're very maneuverable at greater speed, but when they slow down around the harbor, it's harder for them to maneuver safely so they need the use of a tug boat to help them safely transit up the river and into the berths and off of the berths so they can deliver their cargos and do what they need to do. Other tug boats are used for hauling and transportation of barges of, say, oil or grain or stone or containers, but our focus here is ship docking.

You know the beauty of my everyday tasks in this job are that there are no set things that I do everyday. I come in the office generally, ... come in and see the tugs, make sure that everything is in order, they're looking well, they're well maintained, the crews are doing well, how were the jobs last night, check in the shop, make sure the projects that we have going there are going well, check in with our dispatcher who keeps things running, who keeps the crew and the boats where they need to be so that we are servicing our customers, which is, of course, the most important thing. I'm also calling customers making sure they're okay. I deal with the port community, talking to schools, talking to legislators to make everyone more aware of how great an industry we have here. It's nice, because I can't, I'm not the type of person who can sit at a desk all day and it's nice that I have a meeting downtown or I may have to go to lunch with a customer or go on a tug to ... just for the fun of it or to keep myself in practice but, either way, there's a lot of exciting things ... I view very exciting that I do everyday and it's different.

***Why did you choose this career? What about it appealed to you?***

As a kid, I didn't live on the water. I grew up on the water in the summers and so forth and I really loved being on the water. Just ... still it's a big part of my life and I was a food broker, actually, in Washington, D. C. I loved it; it was a great town. It was a neat job but it really wasn't satisfying. It really wasn't what I really wanted to do and that point, I've been out of high school and taking some college for years, and really didn't know what I wanted to do. And I figured, "What are my roots? What's my real passion?" I like working with people, I like business, and I love the water. So how could I make a career out of this? I discovered through some friends that there are several maritime academies where you can actually go and get trained, you can earn your college degree, and you can get trained in the business of shipping and the maritime industry and also get a license, which kind of fulfilled all of my goals at the time was to complete my college education and to get close to my maritime roots or passion so to speak. It really, it really seemed to suit me at the time.

***What personality traits or interests can be a good match for this career?***

There's a lot of different skills that the captains use more different skills, hand-eye coordination and so forth and running the vessels and judging distances and having more technical knowledge in some aspects. But it's neat because there's a range of skill sets and abilities that you can and would use in a maritime industry. Whether you like working with your hands or whether you like doing more administrative things, whether you like different things all the time or the same thing all the time. I think there's certainly just a multitude of different opportunities in the business that run the gamut of different skill sets and different things that people like and don't like to do.

***What parts of your education do you use most often in this career?***

It's kind of ironic. I talk about education, and you're in school, I was one, not one who always knew what I wanted to do, so I kind of went where I was supposed to go and followed the education path that you're supposed to go, and often times I would think, "What do I need algebra for? What do I need this geometry for? Or history or something" ... And, ironically, navigation, in this case, has a lot to do with geometry and algebra and math skills and so forth. And then, when I write a letter to a customer, certainly they want to make sure that I can punctuate properly and sound intelligent and communicate effectively.

***What has been the career track that's gotten you from your first job to where you are now? What special degrees or licenses did you need to get along the way?***

When I got out of Newark Maritime, I worked on tugboats from Philadelphia for a small company and it was great because I was able to do everything. I was in the engine room, starting the engine, working on deck handling lines; I was in the wheel house driving the

vessel, pulling up to barges and ships. It was just a great time, it was a great time. I moved to a different sector and I got into a ship repair, and ship building, still kind of similar to my roots but a different part now, you know., I'm building and fixing and working on ships and doing project management and that was very exciting. But I guess, unfortunately, that particular business went away. At this time I had found a home in Baltimore. I really love Baltimore and I really wanted to stay here in Baltimore and I looked at the industry and said, "I really want to continue in the maritime industry. How do I do this and still have a good career, a sustainable career, and support a family and everything else?"

Then I looked I said," Transportation is ... regardless what happens in the economy and so forth, things have to be transported. Goods have to come in and 95 per cent of the goods that come in, come in by water." So I got more on transportation side. I worked with a RO/RO Company, which is Roll on, Roll off and I was a port captain. And I would travel up and down the coast and load and unload the ships and bring on 800 Mercedes and 400 Chryslers and 800 Caterpillar tractors and John Deere tractors and Stingray boats and everything else. It was just very interesting. But at that point, I had three small children. It was just that...I was traveling a lot and that really didn't, it was kind of tough at the time. So I was very fortunate to find this job at McAllister, where I became Vice President/General Manager and, for the most part, it kept me more local so I could be more with my family.

In order to move up in the maritime industry, it's been a multitude of things I guess. There were some aspects which were more formal, like my maritime schooling and preparation for Coast Guard examinations to obtain and keep my license and upgrade my license. But, in the different industries and just to further advance myself, a lot of ... I would take some courses on negotiation or project management or so forth. But also what was important, what I saw most was on-the-job training, getting to know the culture you're in, getting to know how these people and these businesses work differently than maybe what you're used to or what you've been in before ... being, I guess, adaptable or flexible so to speak.

***What is the best part of your career?***

When I was in sales, let's say the food brokering, if I was a Vice President of Joe Foods or something, would I be having as much fun as I do today? I don't know. I don't think so. I mean, I can jump on a tugboat any day I want. I can go out and see ships come in the harbor. That may not be your thing or it may be, but I think it's pretty cool and I like what I do, but most instances, I guess, I don't know what I'm going to do everyday. I mean I could plan one thing and unexpectedly have to do another thing. The people that I meet, the people that I see, the people that I work with are a pleasure to be with. I enjoy it. It's just that fact of doing something different all the time and having the autonomy to do that and also in something that I like, is something that is very unique and something I'm very happy to have.

***How has your work changed over the years? What role has technology played in those changes?***

Over the last few years, there has been some changes in our industry and I think for the better. One of them is related to the 911 incident, where certainly security is much more on the mind of every American, especially in the ports. I mean the ports (in my opinion) are very safe and we've taken a lot of measures and had to take a lot of measures to make sure that they are. Although it's a good thing, it hasn't been without its growing pain and its challenges.

Another good thing is a lot of technology has advanced. We have now what's called the AIS (Automatic Identification System) for ships, so that you can see ships coming up the river and so forth, kind of like the airlines systems does now. So that's been a good tool for us and the charting and radar technology has come a long way as well. We have new hard technology that's called a Z Drive which makes these boats tractor tugs, that makes them ultra flexible and moveable and powerful. But that's all controlled by computer chips and cards and wires. So really you are controlling this big vessel 105 feet long and 400 tons by wire really, by a little joy stick. But it's interesting that technology has come along and really helped in the business to promote better and improved operations.

***How does your work fit into the larger framework of the work at the Port?***

You know, when you drive across the Key Bridge or into a tunnel or any bridge, you look at a port, you see the ships, you may see them moving, you may see tug boat moving them around. But it's not everyone I think that sees all of the complexities that go with it. It's really like a ballet or orchestrated effort of what goes on. The pilot boards the ship and brings up the bay. The bay pilot gets off and the docking pilot gets on and the tugs help the ship move to the pier, and then the line handlers comes out and the line handlers make sure the ship is firmly secured, fastened to the pier and then the ship agent comes on and makes sure that the customs is cleared and the agriculture is okay, and all the documentation is correct. And, meanwhile, the ship crew is ready for cargo, getting ramps down and hatches open or whatever. The longshoremen are waiting there with their equipment or their cranes or just their bodies, if they're going to drive the cars off or trucks off. It's just a full range of things that happen and they have to happen in an orchestrated way so that everything goes smoothly because it's very big stakes.

When things don't go as they should, it gets very expensive and none of our customers-- whether you're in my business or line handler or longshoremen -- none of our customers want delays and certainly it's not good for any of us and for the port. So we do have, we generally all do work together, all the different players in the port, all the different organizations, they work together in order to serve the customer so that the port does well and all the people who work in the port do well, and it's that tight-knit community really gets it done when it counts.

***What advice would you have for anyone who wants to have the kind of career you have?***

There's plenty of opportunity, say, after you get out of high school, you can go right on the tug if you want. And there's different education programs where you can kind of work your way up and get educated at the same time and companies will pay for it. There's four- years academies where you can go and get a maritime-related college degree and also a license. But there's just a myriad of opportunities. Or you can just go and work, go straight and work in the industry, but there's plenty of opportunities. I think regardless of what path you take, whether what level of education – (I think education is very important no matter what route you take, whether it's formal, and you're getting your PhD or whether you're just taking a class, a life boat class or radar class) either way it's very important. In any industry -- even if it's not the maritime or tug boat industry-- being someone who is dependable and reliable and honest is an attribute that goes to any industry, something that the industry is ... really, really needs, (any industry) really, really needs.