The Pilot Ship Acme: An Aesopian Tale

The pilot ship, Acme, was outfitted to go from port to port, and this was an important part of its purpose. In this, it appeared to be similar to many other ships. It hauled a heavy payload part of the time, but on many of its trips the ship lightened its payload so it could do other things. There were times when it needed to explore new waters, and the crew needed extra provisions for these longer trips, not only to sustain them, but also to support their untested ventures. The pilot ship owners, who were the people, knew that it cost a great deal to chart a new route and to open new opportunities. Some journeys required crew members to do extraordinary things which required supporting services. The people charged their pilot ship with the responsibility to develop new ways. They understood that although some of the functions of their pilot ship were similar to those of other ships, it also had very special functions. The people recognized that these extraordinary functions required extraordinary resources. So the pilot ship, Acme, performed many functions: charting new routes, finding better ways, creating the critical mass of talent needed to serve the people, being the repository for available knowledge, and training and retraining people to use knowledge.

Representing the people, overseers made decisions about the pilot ship, Acme. They were entrusted by the people to take care of their pilot ship and to keep it sound. This was simpler when there were only a few ships, but it became more complex. The pilot ship, Acme, was different, although it appeared to be only one of several ships in the harbor.

In many ways, the pilot ship was somewhat battered and patched, compared to newer ships. The newer ships were going to and returning from the same charted courses to which the pilot ship had first found
the way. To find its way initially, the Acme had traveled farther and it had taken more risks.

The Acme guided the fleet for several generations and had great success. Its success was so great that many other ships were added to the fleet. The needs of the people for the fleet became greater and greater, and the lot of the people became better as a result of the success of all of the fleet. As the benefits of civilization became more generally available, the need for the pilot ship became greater. New ports needed to be found, the need for energy became greater as the supply became more limited, people had to be trained at a higher level not only to operate the ships, but also to reap the benefits and to utilize their energies and talents. All of these new demands required new knowledge, new approaches, new fields of analysis and projection, and new ways to use resources better. Everyone benefitted from this arrangement, and the people were surely better off as each year passed.

The pilot ship, Acme, was very successful. As it created new knowledge, it also interpreted this knowledge and made it meaningful to the benefit of the people. Many people were trained and became captains and crews in other ships in the fleet. The Acme accumulated much in resources and tradition, as it should, to reflect the great investment and trust placed in it by the people. By charting new courses and braving new waters, the pilot ship experienced many batterings, and on some particularly elusive journeys, it creaked and groaned a little. It was always sustained, however, and remained seaworthy. The more uncharted water it sailed, the higher the cost of its sustenance. The more complex its mission became, the greater the need it had for highly trained personnel.

The Acme, during its one hundred and fifty years, was not functionally the same ship that had been christened, but its mission remained constant. It changed from sail to steam to oil in a normal progression. When it was time for it to move toward the next level of energy supply, it hit a shoal. It was unfortunate that it didn’t hit an iceberg or a reef. The shoal, being sandy and smooth at six fathoms, stuck the pilot ship and slowed it down; a more dramatic injury would have been more noticeable. Sliding around, it appeared to be what it had been on the one hand and appeared to be headed where it was going on the other. In reality, it was becoming waterlogged at one level and in danger of dry rot at another level. Since both of these were gradual wounds, the people saw only what they heard—that the pilot ship was afloat.

This circumstance first developed when the pilot ship, Acme, was lined up with all other ships in the fleet and the overseers walked up and down the dock and saw little difference in the ships. One captain