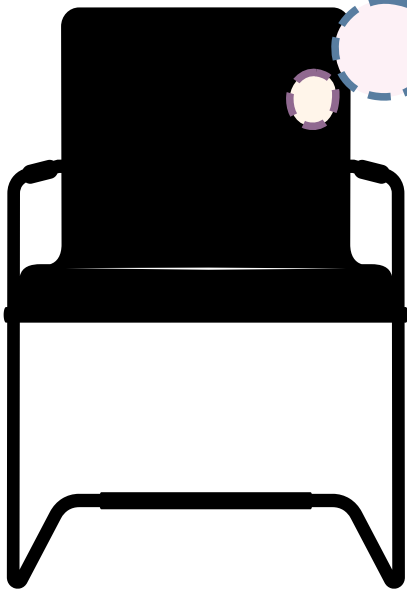


CONQUERING CAPTAIN INTERVIEWS

WORDS LAURENCE REYMANN



CAPTAINS WILL SOMETIMES FIND THEMSELVES IN THE INTERVIEWEE SEAT AND UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT. SPECIALISING IN CAPTAIN PLACEMENT, A RECRUITMENT EXPERT SHARES HER THOUGHTS ON INTERVIEWING FOR THE TOP JOB.

At times when captain jobs are scarce, it is more important than ever to ensure you market yourself >

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efficiently so that you stand out from the crowd.

The competition can be fierce, so put yourself in the driving seat during the interview.

First of all, you need to approach the interview with the appropriate frame of mind. All too often I hear: "Ok, yes, I will go and meet the owner/manager/owner's representative for a chat." Whilst an interview may be disguised as a chat, it is neither a chat nor a conversation.

This may come as a surprise but, like it or not, there is a clear balance of power. Someone has something to give (a job) - this is the yacht owner or yacht manager - and someone is asking for something - this is you, the captain going for an interview, in effect asking for a job. Understanding this balance of power is the key element to success at interviews. Of course, there are a few exceptions where the balance of power can be reversed but in most cases

the above applies. You need to put yourself in the shoes of the interviewer and focus on his or her needs (yes, not yours) and you need to tick some of the boxes and reassure him or her that you are the best captain for the job. Note the word reassure: hiring someone is always risky, all employers worry about making the wrong decision, so you need to address this hidden fear by selling yourself and sharing how you best meet the job requirements.

Indeed, as our industry is becoming more corporate you need to sell yourself and set yourself a goal for the interview in order to succeed. The only goal is to be offered the job for which you are being interviewed. Whether you accept the offer or not is a different matter but at least you will make the decision to accept or turn the offer down. This is not about bragging, it is about being confident with what you have achieved to

date. Have a "mission statement", a few sentences highlighting what you feel you can offer the yacht owner or management company. Practice delivering this mission statement with confidence and ease, practice with your partner or trusted friend and ask them to play the interviewer. The more you will be at ease, the better.

In addition, take an inventory of your strengths and be specific, be precise and use real examples that illustrate why you are the best option. For example, describe how you and your crew went the extra mile to make a charter spectacular, how you saved money in a refit or how you managed to maintain crew morale in a period of intense operation. Be tough on yourself and



“LIKE IT OR NOT, THERE IS A CLEAR BALANCE OF POWER.”

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“IT IS ALL ABOUT
STATING WHAT YOU CAN
DO FOR THE OWNER.”

ask yourself: What are your weaknesses, in general? What could be your weaknesses for this specific job? How can you overcome them and how to turn them into strengths, if possible?

For instance, if you are looking for your first captain job, you will inevitably compete against established, experienced captains. At first this can be perceived as a weakness: why should an owner take the risk of hiring someone who is not “proven and tested”? Well, as stated above, address the owner’s needs, as he or she will be worried, even though they will not say so. A good approach is to tackle the situation head-on and volunteer the information, which shows you are confident:

“I realise that you are interviewing experienced captains with proven track records. However, I feel that I have a lot offer. I have been chief officer for X years and have acquired solid driving experience, having worked with highly respected captains. My last captain really supports me and feels I am ready for my first command. I have been managing crew and have been in charge of hiring and disciplining the deck crew.” Make it realistic; it is all about stating what you can do for the owner.

A few words about the ever-so dangerous “tell me about yourself” question: You should be prepared to

answer this (and be happy if no one asks it). Here, the interviewer is not asking for a long (and please forgive me) boring description of your career. They will want a snapshot of your strengths, experiences, what you can offer and why you are interested in the job on offer. Do not ramble or go into long explanations of why you left a job or why you did not get on with some of the crew. Be short, precise and confident.

I used to have a boss in the UK, a big figure in his field, who told me: “Laurence: facts and figures; all the rest is *blah blah*.” What a good advice this was and, of course, it can be applied to any scenario – in yachting, too.

At the end of the interview, if you are truly interested in a job, say so. This is very important. If an owner or manager likes a few candidates and is undecided, he or she will naturally be inclined to offer the job to the person who expressed an interest, as they will stand out from the crowd. Yet, most of the time, this part is forgotten and many candidate captains leave the interview without saying how much they are interested. Put to use all ammunition on your side. And remember, a brief thank you note can go a long way.

TCR

Laurence Reymann is director of YPI Crew.
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