

Team talk

Laurence Lewis looks at what it takes to build a great crew



My deadline to turn in my paper to ONBOARD was looming dangerously close and I was in need of inspiration... Thankfully I got distracted by the opening game of The World Cup, Brazil V Croatia and within minutes the ultimate faux pas of Marcello scoring an own goal. The show must go on and the team must recover, stay focused and regroup. Just like a good yacht crew.

Team spirit is an attribute most captains mention when describing the ideal crew member. It of course makes sense and nobody is going to argue to the contrary. Yet, building a solid team is challenging and, if arguably the natural order of the world is chaos, how does one build such a tight crew? What is the secret?

Trust and believe

As recruiters we speak and interact with a wide range of yacht crew, from the small twenty five meters to the very large yachts with crew of 80 and more. Why do some yachts have a loyal crew and enjoy little turnover when others shed crew at a fast pace? Can the stability of the former only be explained by above average salaries and perhaps inviting rotational packages? These factors undeniably count but are not the grail and in fact, we have witnessed high crew turnover on yachts paying way above market rate.

Teams are built, they do not just happen and clearly, building effective teams emanates from the top, the captain who himself may take his cues from the owner and or the management company. The captain sets the tone of the atmosphere on board, he gives direction and the clearer the communication

on what is expected from the crew, the tighter the team will be. It's that idea of reaching a common goal which obviously is a successful owner or charter trip which will rally the team together. Crew have to buy into the plans and understand that everybody is a part of a big puzzle, it is vital crew understand each other's jobs and the challenges others face in order to be successful. Communication and respect is key.

Credit where credit is due

When objectives and goals are met crew need recognition and if it does not come from the owner, it should at least come from the captain. Recognition is a vital element in building strong teams, as a result, individuals feel valued and motivation increases. Conflicts, as and when they arise, have to be addressed quickly, behaviours have to be corrected as, we all know, it only takes one negative person to bring down a whole team. If a crew member does not fit, alternative choices have to be made, for the sake of the team. Making crew accountable for their actions is important and whilst there is a common goal, it is the accumulation of personal goals at an individual level which will contribute to the overall success.

Camaraderie is vital on a yacht, where crew live and work in a confined environment and here too, it comes from the top. It's a cliché, but the work hard play hard always works and being able to relax together is vital, whether on the slopes, at the beach or the bar. The major difference between a top yacht crew and a dysfunctional one? Communication, communication.

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