

Moving Up: Junior to Lead Deckhand

What does it take to become a lead deckhand? Joey Meen (right) looks at the certificates and qualifications and Laurence Reymann (left) addresses the soft issues related to taking the next step.



Are you ready for this promotion? By now you have probably worked on yachts for several years, experiencing various situations, shipyards, refits, crossings and busy summer/winter seasons. You are a competent and confident tender and jetski driver. You are beginning to understand what guest service on a yacht means and have a good grasp of what being a deckhand encompasses ... so, where do you go from here?

The General Skills & Attitude

Whether you are being considered for a promotion or you are applying to another yacht, the captain will need to be satisfied that you have the required maturity, you have demonstrated a keenness to learn new skills as a deckhand, and you took an interest in your colleagues' work. By now you will understand shipboard terms and definitions, you understand common orders and appropriate responses, you understand safe working practice. You know how to keep a proper lookout, have taken part in regular drills and know what actions to take when hearing an alarm. How keen were you in this learning process? Have you been the one asking for advice, assistance? Have you been practicing rope splicing and knots for hours, for instance? How well do you know your cleaning and maintenance products? Have you shown drive and commitment? A proactive attitude, global vision and ability to fit in and be a team player will determine if you are ready for the next step.

A captain will also look at your leadership skills and, whilst you are still at the bottom of the ladder, he or she will want to know that you are capable of organising day workers and are confident with guests during tender runs, jetskiing or diving. The captain will want to know that you are a confident communicator at all levels and that you generally represent the yacht in an intelligent way.

A captain needs reassurance that you are not a yacht-hopper and can give commitment to your employer. Having said that, a captain will want to see that you have experienced yachts of different sizes as a deckhand before moving up to a lead deckhand position. Realistically, without large yacht experience as deckhand, you will not obtain a position of lead deckhand on a large yacht.

The Paperwork

The learning curve from a junior deckhand to a competent lead deckhand is based on experience, training, education and a willingness to learn. The four Basic STCW 95 Code A-4/1 modules are the essential qualifications required for a junior deckhand position on a large yacht. Providing a good understanding and knowledge of basic personal safety at sea these include the Personal Survival Techniques, Fire Fighting and Fire Prevention, Elementary First Aid and Personal Safety and Social Responsibilities. These courses outline the foundation for your future advanced safety training courses and onboard drills.

While working your way up to becoming a lead deckhand, I recommend the two-day Powerboat Level 2 tender driving course – a great CV add-on that offers an introduction to boat handling and navigation. For those on the larger boats, and without the opportunity to drive the smaller vessels, try to maximise your tender driving skills and boat handling experience.

It is beneficial for those with a minimal level of seamanship knowledge and practical skills to complete the training up to Day Skipper or Efficient Deckhand level. These courses offer the fundamental introduction training for navigation, seamanship and meteorology. It is essential to learn, experience and master the basics prior to undertaking advanced training. Many seafarers who jump straight to the

Yachtmaster® study programme too early struggle if they do not have a good foundation.

The MCA Yacht training record book (TRB) is your passport to the MCA Officer of the Watch 3,000GT (Y) certificate of competence and starting the TRB at an early stage is recommended. It is your quintessential training guide, designed as a three-year training programme (more experienced crew can complete the book in a reduced timeframe). The tasks and assessments are relevant to onboard drills and safety procedures; it needs to be completed as part of an "onboard training" programme and signed off by an appropriate officer or your captain.

Also, remember that from the start of your career (in any discipline) it is essential you have a formal record of your yacht service. All your yacht service and sea service must be logged in an officially recognised logbook or discharge book, backed up with testimonials.

Once you have the basic skills and a record of your yacht service, you can look at completing the Yachtmaster® Offshore qualification. The syllabus covers an advanced level of navigation, meteorology and seamanship; the examiner will verify your prerequisite sea time requirements plus a required medical fitness certificate, a radio licence and STCW basic modules.

To summarise: a good foundation of skills, knowledge and experience are the vital ingredients to achieving further qualifications and climbing the career ladder.

As they say: "Be prepared!" ■

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