



Captain Confident

Laurence Lewis discusses why entering an interview in the right frame of mind is paramount

It's summer time in the Mediterranean, the yachting season is well under way and captains' jobs are far and few between. Yet, bingo, you have secured an interview with a yacht owner. How do you best approach this meeting to ace the interview and get a job offer? How do you beat the competition? More than ever, marketing yourself efficiently is key in order to stand out from the crowd. The competition is 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 go and meet the owner/manager/ XXX for a chat". Whilst an interview may be disguised as a chat, it is never a chat nor a conversation.

This may come as a surprise, but there is a clear balance of power. Someone has something to give, a job, this is the yacht owner / yacht manager and someone is asking for something, and 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 succeed at interviews. Put yourself in the shoes of the interviewer and focus on his needs (yes his and not yours) as you need to tick some of his boxes and reassure him that you are the best captain for the job. Note the choice of 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. Take inventory of your strengths and be specific, be precise and use real example which illustrate why you are the best option. Describe how you and your crew went the extra length to make a charter spectacular, how you saved money in a refit, how you managed to maintain crew morale in a period of intense operation etc etc.

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 to set yourself is: to be offered the job you are being interviewed for, 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. Have a 'mission statement',

a few sentences highlighting your strengths, experiences and what you feel you can offer the yacht owner/management company. Practice delivering this mission statement with confidence and ease.

Be tough on yourself and ask yourself about your potential weak points vis à vis the specific job you are applying for and ask yourself how you can overcome them and, even better, how to turn them into strengths. For instance, if you are looking for your first captain job, you will inevitably compete against established, experienced captains. This at first can be perceived as a weakness: why should an owner take the risk of hiring someone who is not proven and tested?

A good approach is to tackle the situation head on and volunteer the information, it shows you are confident: "I do 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 XXX 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/managing the deck crew. Etc etc... make it real... 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. Here, the interviewer is not asking for a long and boring description of your career; he 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 a long explanation, be short, precise and confident.

At the end of the interview, if you are truly interested in a job, say so! This is very important. If an owner/manager likes a few candidates and is undecided, he will naturally be inclined to offer the job to the person who expressed an interest. Yet, most of the time this part gets forgotten and many captains leave the interview without saying how interested they are.