

Here we go... there is always a renaissance



What will the new normal look like? Laurence Lewis takes a look at what Captains think the second half of 2020 will look like and reminds us that there is always a renaissance around the corner

June is my favourite month; we enjoy beautiful weather in the south of France with the bluest of skies, the temperatures are perfect and spring is slowly giving way to summer. Most crew are by now employed, the peak of the recruitment season is behind us and the tension can ease a bit, or can it? Let's take stock of what has happened in the past three or four months in the world of recruitment and see how the covid-19 pandemic has changed the recruitment industry.

It all started with a couple of weeks of social distancing in the office followed by a brutal, almost overnight drop in the yacht recruitment activity as uncertainty, lockdown, isolation policies and travel bans gripped the world.

The number of permanent and temporary placements had, over the past 18 years, been rising steadily in the company so to record an 80% decline of activity over the month of April 2020 was shocking. Not only did the yachts, for the most part, freeze their recruitment drive, we also witnessed evidence of knee-jerk reactions probably fuelled by uncertainty when, as early as mid-March, some crew were asked to take pay cuts whilst some were simply laid off, mostly on charter yachts whose season was deemed compromised. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most resilient segment of the job market was engineering, witnessing some recruitment activity even during the height of the crisis, albeit at a much reduced level.

At the end of April we carried out a survey with over 300 captains who had engaged our services over the past year to assess what had really happened on board their yachts. It emerges that 77% of those who responded did not have to agree to modify their season further to the covid-19 pandemic, so only a minority were negatively impacted. A reduction of salary for them

or their crew is the most common change recorded for those whose conditions evolved, followed by taking paid leave and in third position having an employment terminated.

For those who recorded a reduction in salary, 55% took a cut between 26% and 50% of their monthly wage and 40% took a cut of 25% or below. As far as outlook for the future was concerned, a majority of captains felt confident that recruitment would resume in June. Having said that, 25% also cited winter 2020/2021 and beyond as their next recruitment campaign.

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As the lockdown in France started to ease on the 11th May 2020, the job market recovered somehow with jobs that had been on hold for a month and half being activated again. Slowly the yachting ecosystem came back to life with a larger than usual number of crew on the market looking for employment. Salaries are however not dropping due to a lower level of international travel compared to pre covid-19 times with, as a consequence, a more limited pool of candidates actually able to join yachts in Europe. We are even seeing a slight inflation with Chefs' salaries as guests eating ashore is not part of the normal owner or charter routine. More is expected of chefs which has a direct impact on salaries as clients compete for the best talent.

Virtual methods of assessment and selection have been common in yachting for years; a recruiter in France, a candidate in Australia and a client/yacht in Germany is a typical scenario so a mix of telephone and video interview is nothing new. With the lock down this process has just become more fluid, wide spread, and indeed, second nature.

We are all clearly at a cross roads, transitioning towards a new way of interacting. But if history has taught us anything, it's that there is always a Renaissance just around the corner.