

## Crew Retention Chapter 3 part 2

### Once new crew are onboard: ...

#### Keep your crew motivated, inspired, and educated.

How you go about doing this will largely depend on the yacht, its location, and how busy your schedule is. It will also depend very much on the attitude of each individual crew member, as well as your own as a Captain

The more knowledge and experience that each crew member collects along the way, the more there are likely to progress more in their own careers. If you are able to actively contribute to this then many will see this as inspiration / motivation on it's own.

Most crew will want to learn more and become more experienced, so if you take the time to educate them, they will generally respond well to it. After all they will be the biggest winners in the long run.

Training your own people is a great opportunity to get them to do things the way you like them to be done. Even if you feel you have hired the best available candidates for your role, they may well still have little quirks that can be problematic. Guiding your crew into your own way of doing things can lead to much more harmony onboard if everyone follows the pattern.

Life is a constant learning process and yachting is no different. There is always more to learn. One of the areas that I find to be most lacking onboard is in the Bridge department.

When I first join a boat, before I start to get the rest of the crew that have to stand navigational watches onboard is to just let them get on with it as they always have and observe. The results are sometimes quite worrying to say the least.

As an example, I have seen crew that have either had an MCA OOW, or even a Master's CoC that have a very entertaining perspective of how you should be setting up two RADAR sets within coastal waters. Take this as an opportunity to take these crew under your wing and improve their skills and nurture them.

I should also point out that you have a seriously vested interest in doing this as in the event of an incident if a crew member regardless of the CoC they hold has contributed to a navigational incident, you can be sure that the MCA or whoever the relevant authority is according to flag state or that which issued your CoC will be knocking on your door very soon after wanting to know why you did not ensure that things were not done in a manner more closely aligned with how they feel they should have been done on your Bridge.

You have a duty to correct the error of the ways of your crew if they do not marry up with standards / procedures laid down by competent authorities. You will be in the firing line of you do not. You may well get the old "But we did it like this on my last boat." This really irritates me. I am always open to sensible comment and criticism. If I am steering the ship towards the rocks and the first officer is on the bridge I expect him to question my actions before it is too late, and he has a responsibility to do so. However the above statement most commonly stems from sheer ignorance and complacent familiarity.

I do not profess to be the best at any given subject and admit to fallibility as all humans should, but when I tutor crew in the same example, how to set up a RADAR, I will fully explain to them and demonstrate the reasons why it should be done thus. A classic example is Relative vs True vectors for collision avoidance, anyway without getting off point too much, you as a Captain have the prerogative to do things the way you want them done onboard, but be sure that you are doing them correctly, or there may be a heavy price to pay.

When the penny drops with your newly inherited crew, that you do actually know what you are about and are willing to invest your precious precious time in improving their own knowledge which may at times resemble the proverbial Swiss cheese, they will most often respond very well to it, once they realise how limited the knowledge of their previous Captain may have been.

My experience of this is that they will soak it all up and come back for more as they see you as part of their ticket to better things in the future. A good Captain that is willing to put in the time and effort becomes a one to one tutor of the kind many aspiring crew would love to have. A crew member may have done all his pre OOW qualifying time on a yacht or yachts that did not have very pro active Captains, in terms of training. They will then have done their RADAR and NAV course which I am sure most people will agree is pretty crammed, and with nowhere enough actual simulator time or little or no one to one tuition.

If you make the time to further teach them the skills they need this is going to be very valuable to them, and most will never have had such dedicated tuition before. This has been greatly appreciated by every single person I have done this with. It makes a big difference to them and you are also investing time in getting your Bridge and your Bridge team, running the way you want, and expect it to be.

If education in other departments is a bit more off your subject then for starters you can educate your crew on matters that are relevant to all. Safety is at the top of the list and affects everyone, in that they all need to play their own part in the safety of themselves and other crew as well as the ship.

I ensure that ALL crew have detailed knowledge of all safety equipment onboard. It always shocks me how little is known about basic safety kit outside of the deck and sometime engineering departments. Every crew member on board should know what every bit of safety equipment is and how to properly use it. Bilge and Fire pumps, fire fighting systems. Special attention should be paid to all Abandon Ship Equipment. Surviving crew members in a major incident could be for example, only the interior crew of two with all other more ranks that are generally more knowledgeable in terms of safety equipment currently missing. They have their life jackets, immersion suits a grab bag and life raft. They should know exactly what to do with all of these items especially the EPIRB & SART, GMDSS HH VHF etc. I go into intricate detail with these training sessions as to how these critical LSAs actually work, battery life etc. so that they really understand them and their limitations as well.

Your own survival could very much depend on theirs.

Make sure they know all this stuff and they will have more trust in you as a Captain and most likely more respect for you. All of this helps to keep crew onboard.

I often find that education is easier to achieve than general motivation in many cases, but it is very dependent on circumstances and the many variables, however the later frequently follows the first. Start with education and this should occupy their minds for a time, some will be inspired and motivated by this alone. Remember that long term they are the largest beneficiaries of this valuable education and they should absolutely be wanting to participate fully.

It's true that education never ends but there is a limit to what you can do as a Captain especially outside of your main department. There is however still plenty of scope for ongoing education. Get your head stew / purser involved in taking the lead for their own department and keeping the crew engaged as time allows. If you are on a vessel with more than one engineer he should be acting in the same way as the Captain in terms of nurturing his 2<sup>nd</sup>, or more engineers especially the younger they are. Take pride in helping them be great at their jobs in the long term.

### **If your vessel happens to spend extended periods with little or no activity.**

Too much time on the hands of crew is well known to be a catalyst for the rot starting to set in. Do not let this happen. I have had my fair share of this type of scenario. Be proactive in preventing it from becoming a disaster.

Maintain a solid routine regardless of when your next encounter with your boss might be. I worked for over four years in a position when we were on constant 24/7 standby and I really mean constant standby. If I was on leave and the boss wanted to use his boat for 2 hours I would be flown half way round the world to come back to facilitate it. It's actually not as bad as you might imagine. You get used to it quite quickly and it becomes routine in itself.

Having this imposed on you by an owner is a very good way of keeping standards up by default and operating as much as possible under normal conditions, only you don't see much of your owner. Which in some cases meets with the crew's approval.

One thing that we did on a regular basis was to do extensive safety drills. We would take the boat out to sea and execute drills frequently. Everything was a work in progress so safety and operational procedures developed and improved almost with every set of drills. We were very well drilled (always a good thing), but we almost make what in shore based business is referred to as an "Away day" of it. It became an event in itself and helped alleviate some of the boredom of being where we were for such extended periods.

We were also used these extended drills to help maintain our sea time in that we would actually go out and have the vessel underway (at a very slow speed) such that we legitimately met the required hours of watchkeeping to maintain our CoCs, so long as we did these exercises often enough which we did. Additionally it gave all the ship's equipment a good run on a regular basis, which can often be a problem for very stationary yachts. Equipment needs to be run regularly so it helped keep the engineer on his toes as well.

This is a good solution for any boat that is mostly tied to its berth most of the year. Lack of sea time can be a big factor in the decision making process for many crew. Not only the lack of sea time but just lack of being at sea at all. Most seafarers embark on their careers as they actually enjoy to a greater or lesser degree being at, on, or around the sea.

Other skills that deck officers may complain that they never get time to learn or do properly such as chart corrections, can be carried out with no pressure of time if your vessel spends a lot of time in port. It may not be the most interesting job for a deck officer but if you have the time to learn how to do it properly, become very proficient in it, and do all your corrections every week you will probably find yourself with a skill that most never get the time to develop. Like I said it's the most exciting job in the world but a skill nowhere near enough people in yachting have, and it could be that skill alone that tips the balance a few years down the line when you apply for a job on a proper expedition vessel that travels the globe extensively and has many chart folios.

Staying with deck, passage planning is another area of neglect because "We never get time to do it".

I worked on a vessel in a relief capacity where we were to make passage from the Arabian Gulf to Thailand and we had plenty of time to do the passage planning. The other deck crew found it fascinating because I did it in intricate detail and also utilised unconventional resources like Google Earth for quick and general research, as well as all the official ones of course right down to US pilot charts which are absolutely amazing for planning ocean passages. Every single thing relating to the passage, every possible port of refuge, all radio stations SAR, MARPOL contacts etc. (all programmed into the Sat phone on short dial codes), relevant to the passage were carefully printed out and laminated into a ring binder that you could open and someone with virtually no maritime knowledge what so ever could have followed the passage fairly safely. MRCC sheets were also printed, laminated and hung in order on a lanyard at the GMDSS station. Examples below of Ports of refuge, MRCC contact info etc, shown just to illustrate that if your Bridge crew have never seen this done before, they will probably be inspired by it, it earns you more respect and trust as a Captain they may want to stick with.

There were three completely different types of chart plotter onboard with no common interface, two of which were very outdated and the other not really suitable for the size of vessel it was on. I had to plot the exact same route onto each of them on top of the usual fully detailed plotting on paper charts. Everything was done with an incredible amount of detail. The point is, the crew had never seen this

done before so they get really into it as they saw it as an opportunity to learn a great deal. It also elevated much of the boredom for a period of time stuck in a place they were not at all happy in.

I have created and given detailed presentations to all crew onboard in relation to Collision Regulations and Navigational aids. Why? Well if you are on a smaller yacht that has to make long passages or overnight passages then I always have a second person on the Bridge with the qualified crew just to help keep them awake, make them a snack or a coffee etc. The watchkeeper may inevitably need to make for the closest day head during their watch, so (hopefully they will do this at a time when there is no traffic or any other dangers in sight) but it does not harm for the chef or stew that's there to assist having at least a basic knowledge of the most critical rules.

I've had two very good stews change role to deck on previous vessels and this has helped them make their move when they find out that Deck can be a far more interesting department to work in.

There is generally less that I think you can do to keep interior interested and motivated but you can still find things to do to help educate motivate. Even if you are out on a limb somewhere, it has never been easier for us to educate ourselves or to finding good resources to employ in training others thanks to Tim Berners Lee and his selfless gift to the world circa 1990.

Use it to your benefit. Troll the web and use it to find resources that can be used for training. Whatever might float the boat of your interior department and is relevant to their job. An older Captain, chef (or some other person onboard) may for example have a much greater understanding of wine than all his interior crew. Prepare a training course for them, make a presentation that will help keep them engaged, especially if funding is not available for more conventional formal training.

There is so much good stuff out there it is very easy to do nowadays. Do however be careful with the material you choose to use as a basis for building your training, as much as there is lots of good recourses out there, there is a great deal of utter tosh as well. You need to be selective and ensure that whatever you use to build training sessions is solid information.

Another presentation I do is using on AED and keeping up to date with the CPR guidelines as they do seem to change from time to time. Obviously type specific to whatever you carry onboard, as well as all the generic stuff relating to AEDs in general.

Some AEDs are supplied with a training video, use that as a basis to build a detailed presentation and deliver it to the crew. Every crew I have done his with have appreciated it, as their knowledge of what an AED is and what it can and cannot actually do was very limited. Same for CPR, keep these skills up to date. All the information you need is out there just take it from reliable sources, The British Heart Foundation for example as opposed to Dr. Jeff's A&E channel on You Tube !!! I made that up so hope no such thing exists.

Many Captain's complain that they simply do not have the time to do such things. I have worked on some very challenging vessels with equally challenging owners. You can always find time if you try hard enough. When we have no guests onboard and things are quiet relaxed your crew will probably be knocking off at 17:00 or 18:00 leaving the vessel and doing whatever they do. I will frequently work on till midnight. Not because I am disorganised and need to do so to keep up with my work load, but because much of my workload is self inflicted by which I mean, I CHOOSE to work long hours to make sure that my procedures are up to date, presentations, and training sessions are prepared to take extra time to nurture and mentor other crew. Whatever needs to be done to keep things moving forward. I do incidentally find it the best time to do this kind of work, as you generally get the peace and quiet that is most conducive to get on with these tasks with little or no interruption.

I have had no formal training what so ever in any type of computer application save for a one day course back in the early nineties on Aldus Page maker, now Adobe "In Design". I am however adept at using many software applications. I make customised forms for all possible tasks onboard, Risk Assessments, PTW, pre departure / arrival and all other check lists etc. I then digitise them so they become editable PDFs that make it simple and convenient for the crew to fill in as required.

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This is how I learn new skills. I teach myself and then teach others. I could stop working at the same time as the rest of the crew during these quiet periods, but I don't, I continue to learn and pass on what I learn. I choose to do this for my own reasons. It also sets a very good example for the rest of the crew in terms of them seeing a strong work ethic from the top.

I have spent a lot of time in the middle east and when I first went there knew little about their culture. You absolutely need to know about this if you work out there so research, and make sure that you train your crew everything that they need to know about cultural issues that will affect your crew, and believe me there are plenty of things that can inadvertently get you on the first flight back home in some countries.

If you want your crew to perform to your own high standards, you need to assist them, especially if they spend a lot of time tied to the quay. Take the time, you will have plenty of it in such circumstances and use it wisely.

All of these things will help to earn increasing trust and respect from your crew which will stand you in good stead from a retention point of view.

To be continued:



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