

Crew Retention Chapter 3 part 1

Once new crew are onboard: 000

Though these articles are primarily aimed at Captains, they may well be found useful by all crew members, and managers, owner's rep's as they identify lots of issues and pose solutions. They may well also be a good insight for more inexperienced crew and prompt them to consider their own situations more meaningfully.

One of the keys to success of crew retention, is to have inspired your potential candidates / new crew members with confidence.

From the very beginning you should have been showing your new team member that you are professional, organised and know what you are doing. You need to keep going in this direction.

Be prepared to have everything necessary in place as soon as a new crew member arrives. I am continually surprised by the number of crew I come across that have:

- Never had a proper contract
- Never had an induction
- Never been given a full set of safety procedures to study
- Cannot recognise a general alarm signal
- Never done a safety drill
- Don't (really) know what an EPIRB or SATRT are
- Don't know what the MLC hours of rest are
- Never seen a set of Masters standing orders
- Never seen a risk assessment or PTW
- Never seen policy documents such as Life jacket, alcohol etc.
- Never seen an NDA
- Have no idea about how standard disciplinary procedures work, and the list goes on.

If you do your job properly and make sure your crew go through all the required steps to get them properly integrated onboard and they have not seen these things before, they will be thinking "Hey this guy is a bit different, he knows what he's doing."

You should of course be doing all this anyway, but feedback I have had over many years says that it frequently simply does not happen.

This is a great start to developing a good relationship with a new crew member, it may come as a bit of a shock to them if they have never seen or done all these things before; but they will see professionalism and will be feeling that they are in safe hands and that they have come to a yacht where they will learn a lot which will help propel their own careers.

Keep your finger on the pulse:

Trouble generally brews long before it fully manifests itself. If you are keeping an eye on things you will spot it before it becomes too big a problem. If you can't see it yourself (which as a Captain or Manager, you may well not), find out from your HODs in your regular meetings what's happening throughout the ship. If one of your HODs is the root of a crew members grievance, look elsewhere for the signs. Take the time to even casually but discretely ask crew if everything is OK.

Monitor (*informally*) your crews performance and progress from the beginning.

Have regular and scheduled performance reviews (approx. every six months).

Intervene to assist and mentor from an early stage, and as necessary, in conjunction with your HODs depending on the size of your vessel / crew.

Be accessible to all crew at all times, if you are busy, make the time, it's generally worth it. Make it very clear to them that your door is always open. Exercise proper confidentiality to strengthen trust.

Plan ahead and be open. If you are genuinely open, to listening to what your crew have to say and you make the time for them, then they will usually come to you and tell you their gripes before they become terminal. This gives you a good opportunity to try to resolve them and get more into the mentoring process.

Additionally, it's easy for a busy Captain to start to lose a sense of what's happening onboard with the crew, and having regular performance reviews and informal chats with the crew can be a very valuable insight as to what might be brewing or already happening.

If retention ultimately fails in any given case, then at least you are also getting a heads up that there are issues that if not resolved may lead to a departure, therefore you can start looking into a replacement as a plan B if the mentoring does not work. It buys you some time at least and can keep you a step ahead.

It's entirely possible to keep good crew in very challenging roles if you invest the time and effort and go about it the right way. You need to instil confidence in them and earn their trust and support, if they see you as a good leader and a consummate professional, they may want to stick with you regardless of challenging circumstances.

Not all crew are the type you want to keep onboard. A good captain will probably get this figured out person by person at a very early stage.

Often times we will end up hanging onto a crew member who is not up to scratch simply because mid season for example it can cause more problems than it may solve in the very short term. Sometimes it's better to endure till the end of the season, and use the interim period to give yourself plenty of time to find someone more suited to the role.

All that is written in this series of articles including and beyond this section will only relate to those crew that you really wish to keep onboard. There will almost always be people that do not fit in one way or another and who it may be better for all concerned if they move on. This article does not intend to go beyond anything that is previously discussed in preceding chapters to try to retain crew. If you have done everything from your end to make it work but it's just not happening then there will come a varying point for everyone beyond which further effort is simply not justified.

You need to make a decision on how much effort is put into trying to retain one of your team, as it can be time consuming and take a lot of effort to do so and may cause you some damage in the process depending on where you sit in your own role within the cycle. Careful consideration should be given in all circumstances as to how far you will go in the process before you just send even a good crew member on their way. Let alone a less than ideal one. I speak from bitter experience.

You will need to be your own judge of when that point has been reached.

Internal Politics.

I know given that everything that yacht crew have going for them this really should not happen but it does, constantly. I do not understand why this is such a prevalent issue but it is.

Yachting brings with it a good deal of sacrifice, but it also brings what for many with limited skills and experience are unprecedented rewards especially in financial terms. I believed that the more you are rewarded for something, then the more you should be able to tolerate the things you are not so happy about.

The amount of petty politics that occur onboard many vessels is way out of line with what I think is reasonable. It has to be dealt with none the less.

Much of it can be prevented by my favourite of statements relating to the whole issue of retention and that is: Try to hire the right crew in the first instance. Properly experienced crew that are consummate professionals and that have wide and varied experience are less likely to find themselves involved in petty politics onboard. Not only that but they will also often be part of the solution in that they may use their experience and relative wisdom to help diffuse situations. They may however because of their experience, be less tolerant of those that do not pull their weight or are otherwise troublesome.

What I have found at the root of so many petty issues is a generally high level of expectation verses a very low level of responsibility and or accountability. People are often so very short sighted onboard and can not see outside of their own department.

Deck moan about Interior and vice versa whilst failing to be sympathetic enough towards each other's departments. A couple of classic examples are as follows: Deckies make a mess of the interior that has just been cleaned and polished all be it unintentionally by leaving fingerprints and other blemishes. Stews upset the deck crew by allowing something to drip on the deck whilst taking the rubbish out.

If you have properly trained and experienced crew onboard in the first instance, these trivial little flashpoints can be avoided because each department knows the general do's and don'ts of other departments and will duly comply with and respect the rules.

To be continued:

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