

# Crew Retention Chapter One, (part 4/4)

## What causes crew to leave ?

In this final instalment of the first chapter we look at some of the remaining reasons that can be considered as significant influences for crew and their willingness to remain onboard.

### Training:

Some crew expect that a good portion, if not all of their training (once they are onboard) should be paid for by the vessel.

The general culture of entitlement that seems to be ever present across the board has unequivocally made its debut in yachting as well.

I have always encouraged and assisting good crew with the cost of their training as an investment in them and have been rewarded with some loyalty over the years.

Many crew however have had to pay their way right to the top. A willingness to pay your own way perhaps shows that someone is more committed to their own career progression and development so may well be a good person to employ in the first place.

You can see it from a crew members point of view. If there is an offer from another vessel that has a general policy to pay for crew training vs staying with their current boat that will not. Not only is there the direct financial incentive but it also sends a message about the way the other yacht is run, the Owner, Captain and a generally good philosophy towards nurturing / developing / retaining good crew.

You then have the crew that have accepted the fact that the boat will not pay for their training, but at the same time have not allowed any additional time off from the boat to allow the crew member to do the courses at their own expense.

A month away from the boat doing intensive courses back to back is not exactly conducive to the crew member coming back feeling refreshed having used a whole years' leave entitlement only to return to the boat more stressed than when they went on leave to do their courses.

### Salary:

All crew should be adequately rewarded for their efforts, furthermore there should be an industry wide scale of what constitutes an acceptable minimum salary per role onboard.\* However like in most jobs what you ought to be able to expect by way of your salary should be intrinsically related to your (relevant) qualifications and experience in (similar) roles or at least ones that utilise the same skill set as is required on a yacht.

Younger crew seem to be expecting good salaries regardless of having little or no relevant qualifications, experience, and or skill set to offer in return. This has obviously only been tolerated by market forces, if there were a glut of good crew then these less experienced ones would soon experience less tolerance of their salary demands.

I'm getting slightly off point here, but feel it's relevant. Let's just have a more detailed look at junior crew salaries.

The mean income in the UK for 2017 was £ 27,195 or equivalent to € 30.617, before tax  
Rough calculation post tax gives a take home pay on this UK salary is approx. £ 21,876 or € 24,632 per year.

If we take an industry standard starting salary of £ 2,220 or € 2,500 per month that equates to £26,643 or €30,000 per year.

Many crew may LEGALLY\* have no obligation to pay any income tax (earned whilst working onboard, depending on where they are resident for tax purposes) which is a huge advantage and draws many people into the industry. Then there are all the other perks such as zero living expenses etc.

Right off the bat that puts the most junior of crew (assuming £ 2,220 or €2,500 per month basic salary), £ 4,767 or €4,233 per year ahead of people doing much more skilled jobs in the U.K. That they have had to have worked a number of years to even get into a job that will pay them that mean salary.

What else at these tender ages and with few marketable skills and very little experience is going to bring them in this level of income ? The point here is that regardless of how well off these young crew are, many of them still seem to have high expectations.

My first job at the age of 18 which was semi skilled, and paid me the princely sum of £ 96 per month allowing for inflation that would return me the staggering salary of £ 384.36 per month today. Today's entry level yachting salaries are almost six times more than I was earning at the age of 18 allowing for inflation.

I am not suggesting that any crew onboard should be paid any less than these figures mentioned, but that these junior and inexperienced crew should be more mindful of just how well off they in fact are in relation to their peers in other industries.

\*Do your research according to where you are tax resident and if your country's regulations allow for reduced or zero tax for seafarers, make sure you follow the process correctly.

### **Parity of salaries:**

I have a particular interest in this subject which will be covered in detail in a later instalment, but just as a teaser; we will look at the issue of crew being paid different salaries for effectively doing the same job according to where they come from.

### **General career progression:**

Career progression can be a great motivating factor for many people, regardless of industry. A lack of or a clear way forward or even a fuzzy view on career progression within a time frame acceptable to any given person, will deter anyone who wants to move up in the world.

I believe the maritime sector is one that has better than usual opportunity, which allows Captains and senior officers to teach, nurture and mentor those coming up through the ranks. The relatively small number of individuals involved (specifically in the Deck Officer area) makes it easy for a captain to be very involved in assisting these people with their career progression by one to one training, and mentoring. We should cease this opportunity and invest our time in the hope those that will fill our own shoes, will display equal integrity and willingness to assist their subordinates when they reach their own tenure as Captains.

I see it as an inherent responsibility that comes with the territory and is or should be, an integral part of any Captain's role that should be taken very seriously. It is disappointing to hear so often of Captains that have no interest in this part of their role.

There are many reasons that there may be such a lack of career progression such that a crew member will cite it as a principle reason to move on.

The crew may already be very good and stable, and the owner and boat may be very good so the deckhand cannot see a point in the future (within a timeframe acceptable to him) when he will become bosun. The chief stew is only 24 and has no plans to leave till she is ready to make her exit from yachting completely, so her second stew may have a long wait to move up the ladder.

The yacht will not invest in training crew as the owner is satisfied that his crew are very stable and committed so does not want to spend money on junior crew that may leave before they would ever get the opportunity to progress on his yacht.

Most crew when faced with bleak prospects of progressing in their own career path will search for a vessel where their prospects will be more promising.

### **Internal politics:**

It never ceases to amaze how much internal politics can develop among predominantly young people that are generally very well paid in relative terms whilst working onboard and otherwise getting much more out of life than their peers.

It happens none the less. More importantly it is a major factor that causes crew to become disgruntled to the point where they feel they want to move on.

Politics seldom go completely unnoticed throughout the yacht, which is bad enough but though some owners may be mostly oblivious to it, many more very perceptive and will smell it the second they walk onboard.

No one generally wants to stick around on an unhappy boat.

Politics should be avoidable and it is a major contribution to crew deciding to leave.

### **Cultural incompatibility:**

I give this issue specific mention despite the fact it could possibly have been included under the Politics banner, but I feel it is worthy of its own consideration as a factor that can contribute to retention issues.

As yacht crews become more multi cultural we are seeing more issues arise relating to ethnicity. A minority group can suffer from isolation, but equally if a minority group gets a little stronger, say by the addition of one or two crew of the same ethnic background, this may also cause further issues. It could help to strengthen the minority in a positive way, but it can also go the other way when the group strengthens but it manifests itself in a more negative way.

I have seen this happen onboard when a particular ethnic group's strength went from two to three. It made a considerable difference in a negative way.

Cliques can easily form onboard for many reasons but ethnicity is always going to be a natural front runner. Most people will instantly gravitate towards their own culture and unfortunately it can go either way in terms of general harmony onboard which in terms of contentment / retention can affect either those inside or outside any specific ethnic group onboard.

### **Ts & Cs:**

An overall dissatisfaction with contractual terms, Salary too low, no bonus, no medical insurance, not enough leave etc. An alarmingly common issue is the complete lack of a contract what so ever, it just keeps happening and it shouldn't.

Very little reason for any crew to stay when the company cannot even provide a proper employment contract. Crew will justifiably feel very insecure and will want to move on as soon as they can.

### **Poor overall job satisfaction:**

Just not getting what they want from the job for a myriad of reasons. People have very different attitudes to work. Many simply see it as a means to an end but especially given the unique nature of our industry many crew are looking for a lot more than that, not only as a career but also as a lifestyle, rightly or wrongly there are a lot of crew looking for a lifestyle as well, and if they are not living the dream, they will be looking to move to a vessel that takes them closer to their perception of that dream.

In Chapter Two we will start to look at how you can work on reducing the turnover of your crew.

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