

The Crew

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REPORT

BOYS AND GIRLS

The challenges crew face working in a department typically dominated by the opposite sex.

EMERGENCY!

What are the most common crew ailments? The facts and figures behind crew medical calls to shore.

BEHIND BARS

We look at the legal ramifications for captains in an increasingly regulated industry.

SPRUCING UP

How interior crew can go the extra mile and upgrade the yacht's interior.



Above: Peter Vogel

The introduction of the Human Element, Leadership and Management course (HELM) that was brought about by the STCW Manila amendments – introducing crew training in resource management, leadership and team skills at operational level, and leadership and managerial skills at management level – is a step in the right direction for the industry. But Vogel and Captain Aeneas Hollins explain that there can be more practical steps made on board that will help secure, develop and keep a good crew.

Within the HR programme of any superyacht, the recruiting, learning and development, employee relations, performance management, compensation and benefits, and compliance process can be altered to incorporate a more corporate approach. “These practices really do work,” says Hollins. “Very few in yachting have actually studied management academically but it is very valuable. The best practices are out there; they just haven’t fed through properly to the superyacht industry.”

And the business approach does have its advantages. “It sends out a message to the industry that you are a professionally run boat,” Vogel explains. “It gives you the ability to attract high-quality crew, increase crew retention, enhance crew satisfaction, provide consistent treatment, professional and personal development and employee engagement.”

The recruitment process can be easily and effectively adapted to include tried and tested corporate methods to benefit the overall longevity on board. Hollins believes in the importance of taking the time to choose the right crew for the boat – a process that a lot of boats rush. “From an HR perspective, I ran a very family-orientated boat,” he explains. “We spent a lot of time choosing our crew and it worked: at one point we had an average crew longevity of five years.”

In order to establish that a candidate is the right fit for a boat, Vogel emphasises the importance of establishing the vision, mission, goals and values of the boat, and having this documented so that it can be used as a reference point. With this, job descriptions can be written for each individual crewmember so that performance can constantly be measured. “So many boats rely just on generic job description,” comments Vogel.

With regards to the interview process, Vogel believes that this is an area where the industry in general can improve. “Usually, the interview process is copied from the

previous experiences of the captain or heads of department,” he explains. “There are courses available to teach you how to interview professionally. The basic rules to follow are that there should always be two types of interview – behavioural and technical – and you should have a different interviewer for each interview.”

Behavioural interviewing is a technique commonly used by HR recruiters who ask the applicant to describe past behaviour to determine whether he or she is suitable for a position. For example, an interviewer may ask, “Tell me about a time when you dealt with a crew conflict on board.” Whereas a technical interview typically features questions that are specific to the role being applied for, to assess whether their ability is actually in line with the job.

Vogel recalls one of his former boats on which he worked, motoryacht *Octopus*, as having one of the most exemplary interview processes he has experienced in the industry, with five interview stages for middle-management positions. The recruiter would interview for position fit, the head of department would interview for technical fit and the captain would interview for behavioural fit. This would then lead to an interview with the lead stew or bosun, and finally an interview with the owner’s representative, who looked out for the owner’s preferences.

“In all five interviews, if one person said ‘no’, then there was no hire,” Vogel continues. “It is time-consuming, but once a structure like that is in place, it is so valuable for finding the right crew.” Such a lengthy procedure may not be realistic for some boats, but even if parts of the methodology can be adopted, it will go a long way.

Another common issue in the industry is the value of references. “It is always important to know the right questions to ask the reference,” says Hollins. “This comes back to the vision for the boat, so bear this in mind: you want to find the best people for your operation. A good question I always start with is, ‘Would you re-employ this individual?’”

The familiarisation, orientation and paperwork of a new crewmember should be completed in the first 24 hours of them stepping on to the boat, but Vogel acknowledges that this is often taken for granted. “Especially on the interior side, where there are no standard operating procedures and nothing is mandatorily documented,” he says, “whereas deck and engineering departments are protected by a safety umbrella.” »

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In terms of training and retaining crew, Vogel and Hollins point out a popular methodology for exceptional leadership on board. The method is not only about how to develop one's own style but also how to create leaders on board who teach and guide others, who are then inspired to remain an important part of the team.

"Nurturing crew and helping them to develop requires an understanding of the individual and where they are on the development scale in relationship to the task assigned," Vogel explains. "Even the most talented deckhand will still need to be shown how to complete a task when doing it for the

first time. With time, practice and effective leadership, a crewmember can become an expert who is able to teach others, freeing up your time and energy."

The Situational Leadership Model is a theory of business leadership that promotes the benefits of combining a range of managerial styles to cater for different people within the same organisation. "Situational Leadership provides a shared process, language and culture," Vogel continues. "It will help you to create a culture of shared leadership and professionalism on board, where individual goals and collective goals merge, enabling crew to see their potential

professional development pathway clearly laid out before them."

According to this method, every member of crew and every situation requires a slightly refined, nuanced style of leadership if you are to create consistently positive outcomes. Situational Leadership teaches how to analyse, diagnose and apply the best leadership style to any situation.

Though it's meant to provide extreme adaptability, there are four basic styles when it comes to the Situational Leadership Model, each tailored to elicit the highest productivity from each employee or team. (See below.)

DIRECTING

Appropriate in situations where followers lack competence and therefore need to be shown how to do something, but are enthusiastic and committed, so they are willing to accept direction.

The effective leader in this situation responds by giving lots of direction, such as solving problems, making decisions and providing specific instructions covering the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of task completion, while providing little support or encouragement.

As followers grow in confidence and competence, they can resent being subject to what will begin to feel like an autocratic leadership style. Leaders should then adapt their style accordingly.

COACHING

Appropriate where followers have some competence but a lower level of commitment. They will need direction and supervision because they are still relatively inexperienced, but will also need support and praise to build their confidence, and an involvement in decision-making to increase their commitment.

The effective leader responds by continuing to solve the problems and make the decisions, and directing and closely supervising the task accomplishment. However, they will explain decisions, solicit suggestions and support their followers' learning and progress, giving both direction and support.

SUPPORTING

Appropriate for those who are competent but still lack confidence or motivation. They do not need much direction because their skills are at a higher level, but they do need support and encouragement, particularly if their commitment is low.

The effective leader responds by sharing responsibility for problem-resolution and decision-making with others. While it might be easier for them to make the decisions, instead they facilitate and support their followers' efforts towards task accomplishment, giving less direction but a lot of support. This is the point where we move away from a directive leadership style to a more facilitative leadership style.

DELEGATING

Appropriate for followers who have high levels of both competence and commitment. Such people are able and willing to work by themselves with little supervision or intervention. The leader will provide such followers with clear objectives, and some boundaries or limits to their authority, but otherwise followers should be allowed to get on with it.

This helps us understand the true meaning of empowerment: giving followers the permission to act and make decisions aligned to goals and within clear boundaries. It is important to note that it is not abdicating responsibility.

Most managers in the yachting industry tend to lean towards the delegating method.

According to situational leadership theory, there are no good and bad styles, only those that are appropriate for the given situation of task and people. One of the key characteristics of effective leadership is to assess the situation correctly, select and apply the appropriate style, and continuously review your choice.

In his experience, Vogel has found most managers in the yachting industry tend to lean towards the delegating method. "Delegating comes naturally," he explains. "But what is often neglected is the directing, coaching and supporting options which will most likely lead to better results."

With the corporate world dedicating much time and money to leadership and management guidance, and this training already an established part of the commercial sector, it is fitting that the superyacht industry should follow suit in its drive to become more professional. Now that superyachts are perceived as businesses, it's time to get the HR functioning to the same level. ■

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