



Is the water really bluer on the other side of the marina?

STORY BY LISA HOOGERWERF KNAPP; ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN BROOKS

SURVIVAL IN THE WORKPLACE is often a function of meeting your psychological and physiological needs and playing office politics. But since the nature of working as professional yacht crew undermines many basic human or animal needs – like adequate sleep/rest and an eight-hour work day – crew tend to get fed up much quicker than the average worker.

If you're starved for companionship, deprived of sleep and feel needled by the five roommates/coworkers who share your shoebox quarters, you'll be cranky, too. The easy fix for crew rejuvenation, in general, is to jump ship and leave your problems behind. But sometimes you just carry those problems along in your backpack. Is the idea of crew job longevity just a myth?

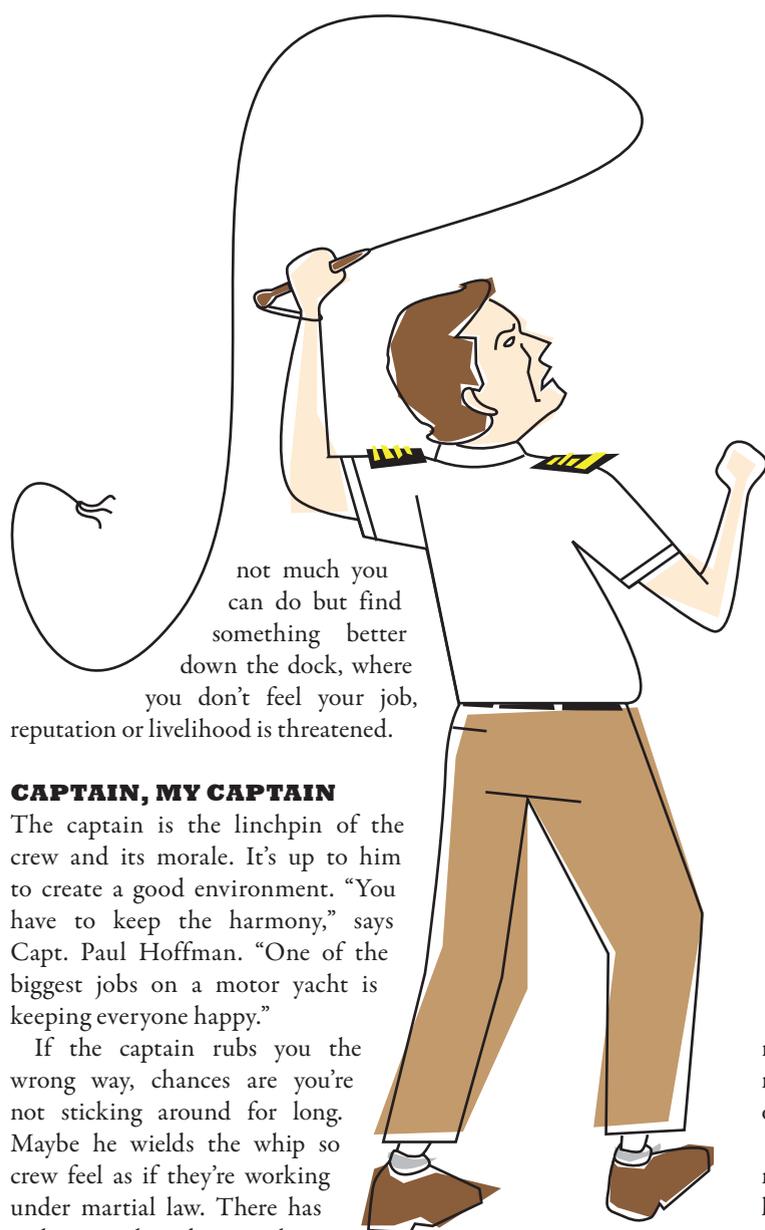
THE PUPPET MASTER

A good yacht owner can be a huge factor in keeping crew on board. If he or she has a good relationship with the captain and crew, it only

bodes well for the atmosphere on board. "In all honesty, what helps a stewardess enjoy and stay in her job, besides all the usual pay, holiday, etc. is the owner and how they treat you," says Rachael Martin, a retired stewardess. "[Especially] the owner's wife, as you often have a close relationship with her."

It really boils down to respect. An owner who understands that crew are human and have certain basic needs may be the first step to ensure a loyal, long-lived crew. Stews Ann Hickey and Judi Petty both sail with their husbands and respect tops their list of requirements; for a professional relationship, it's essential that an owner respect the crew and understand that crew take their jobs very seriously. The owner should too. "Treat this as a profession. We're a team on this boat and we're here until we retire," Hickey says. "Respect is worth more than money – some boats treat you like some glorified toilet bowl cleaner – I'm licensed."

If an owner causes trouble because he/she crosses the line, there's



CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN

The captain is the linchpin of the crew and its morale. It's up to him to create a good environment. "You have to keep the harmony," says Capt. Paul Hoffman. "One of the biggest jobs on a motor yacht is keeping everyone happy."

If the captain rubs you the wrong way, chances are you're not sticking around for long. Maybe he wields the whip so crew feel as if they're working under martial law. There has to be an onboard atmosphere conducive to work – one where problems are able to be voiced in a non-confrontational manner.

"I got off because I was hurt (had a hernia), was homesick and was done being verbally abused by that particular captain," says a mate who prefers to remain anonymous. He left that vessel after one year's service. "I had the hours and got my ticket. I was also worn out. I weighed two hundred pounds when I came aboard and left at one sixty-seven."

Some captains flip mates like pancakes, which can lead to burnout and job insecurity. If your wellbeing is a concern – well, how long would you last? The bottom line is that a tense atmosphere where crew feel oppressed and insignificant is only going to mean one thing – a bad boat reputation and a never-ending crew rotation.

But a good captain is beyond measure. Rory Donaghy, a new engineer, says his longest tenure was on a yacht that was low paying because he liked the captain so much. He changed boats with the captain each time. A relationship based on respect like this one will prove invaluable.

A captain can do a lot to encourage loyalty. According to Capt. Tim Forreder, "Providing tools to do the job, respecting and appreciating their effort and making a fun, cooperative and calm environment on board is something I can control." Capt. Hoffman concurs, "A pat on the back from the captain goes a long way."

Taking a personal interest in helping crewmembers fulfill their potential can go a long way to making them feel important and is a vital method to building a solid team and creating an atmosphere for



TOP REASONS TO STAY

- A good owner
- A good captain
- Respect/crew chemistry
- Job security/advancement
- A set schedule
- Good benefits
- Being challenged
- Good crew accommodation

learning. "Cross-training on a smaller boat made me feel more valuable," says Nicole Thompson, who freelances as a stew and cook and is now the Broward County sales rep for Merritt Marine Supply. "I could handle anything, anywhere in the world. The family environment on a boat where everyone does a little of everything is good for crew."

"The only way to stay on a boat for a long time is to be treated really well," Capt. Hoffman says, adding that time off to avoid burnout is important. If a captain works with the crew to train them for advancement on board and is understanding about sea time and training, crew have no reason to look elsewhere. According to Capt. Todd Rapley, "It's human nature in all industries that people just want to be respected, given opportunity and be encouraged to develop."

And the captain sets the tone for everything on board. "Crews need a role model," Capt. Brian Pridgeon says. "A fish rots from the head down."

PERSONALITY CONFLICTS

It may seem pretty obvious, but people who get along, stay together. However, it may not be easy. With five different departments on board a yacht run by distinctly different egos, conflicts are bound to emerge. Surprise, surprise – personality conflicts are the most common excuse for jumping ship.

For personality conflicts that occur at shore-based jobs, the 5:00pm whistle allows you to go home and get away...at least for a night's sleep. But that's not usually an option for yacht crew. When you have nowhere to turn to let off steam and you're living in close confines with the person who just pissed you off, things can get rough.

Thompson left one yacht abruptly after three months to escape a situation she hated. A crew veteran of 17 years, she saw every job to the end – except this one. "It was so much political bullshit," Thompson remembers. "The women on board were absolutely brutal," she says. "They were not nice people because the owner 'favored' me. He wanted me to be more than a stew, which I didn't tolerate. It put me in an uncomfortable position."

Thompson takes her job seriously and says that other yachts she served on were all good experiences, but sexual harassment and innuendos on board yachts happen all the time. The megayacht environment is both a smorgasbord of temptation and deprivation for those on board.

"If someone invades your personal privacy and wants to compromise your professionalism, don't put up with it. I didn't," Thompson says. "I speak from experience. You trust these people [on board] with your life

and then you're uncomfortable, but it's not like you can get off in the middle of the ocean. The experience didn't discourage me, it made me stronger. Ever since, I make sure owners know the boundaries and I bunk by myself."

The atmosphere on board and crew chemistry are vital to ensure a contented crew and in general, relationships at every level affect the camaraderie and happiness of everyone on board. If you're living, eating and sharing quarters with the same people, your fellow crewmembers become family. Any disturbances ripple through the crew and can cause unrest. And if there is a couple or two on board, crew morale can mirror the swinging pendulum of the crew couple's emotions – if things are going well, everyone's happy. But if things turn sour, watch out. "It depends on how they handle themselves," says Capt. Mark Howard. "Guys and gals can be cliquish, almost. During their time off, some couples don't interact with the crew. With others, you don't even know they're a couple because they socialize with everyone. If they isolate themselves from others, it creates a strained atmosphere on board."

Lovers' spats at the dinner table can become tense for everyone. "Okay, so what do we say now?" Pridgeon wonders. "Pass the butter, please? Anyone for some jam? If they've had a tiff the night before, you'll ask a gal why she looks down and she'll say, 'Well, he's a bastard.' That's no way to start the day." And if the relationship doesn't work out, you might lose two crewmembers.

Although being part of a couple on board may be incentive for some to stay if things progress well, sometimes there are other reasons couples stay – occasionally, the grass on the other side of the fence is sparse. Couples looking to work together need to find a yacht where both positions are open, both salary requirements are met and the right working chemistry exists for both. The positions have to match both their skills, interests and desires. "If I wasn't working with Jillian, my wife, I would be elsewhere," Capt. Tim Silva says. "But the grass is not always greener. We turned down two or three other jobs because they wanted her as a chef/stew and she liked being outside."

Although crew hooking up may be inevitable on board, some captains have policies against onboard romance; other boats are more lenient. But it might not be a bad idea for captains to lay out some basic ground rules when new crew step aboard – if the policy is open to coupling on board, then it should be understood that romantic nuances, good and bad, should stay between the couple as much as possible. Perhaps a code of conduct for crew to sign along with their contracts could help to keep the gossip and the drama down to a bare minimum and may prevent future contretemps from bubbling to the surface.

PLANNING FOR A LIFE

Perhaps the toughest part of being crew is the sheer unpredictability of scheduling and how it interferes with forming a healthy, normal social and family life. In Capt. Scott Frischhertz's opinion, "Schedules are number one as far as keeping crew from jumping ship," he says. "Malcolm Forbes' boat, *The Highlander*, has schedules for crew one year in advance. They know when they will have time off, when there will be guests, when there is a charter. They can plan to have a life. On other boats, the owner shows up and says let's go to The Bahamas – now. Then you cancel a date with your girlfriend or an activity with your kids. So the more notice, the better the morale."

Being able to project a schedule several months in advance is important. "If I can look on the calendar and see I'm on June 20, maybe I can trade that day," Capt. Howard says. "Scheduling in advance lets them plan their own lives and have their own lives. That's what you can control. But if the owners change their schedule, you have to comply."

"No time off can kill a crew," Howard says, adding that schedule

changes with no warning upset crew trying to plan extracurricular activities. "You're bound by circumstances and policies in place by the owner and have to work within those confines. But their lives are affected by what's done on the boat since crew work, live and play there. If individual needs are not recognized, we'll lose 'em."

The truth of that statement is borne out with every job change. "I was burned out," says Rachael Martin of her 10-year career as a stewardess. "I'd had enough of the industry and dealing with demands twenty-four/seven."

PROACTIVITY PAYS OFF

Some potential problems can be averted before the job starts, with a little proactive thinking in the hiring process. "There are many factors that I can control to keep crew from jumping," Capt. Fordecker says. "I ask right upfront, how long do you see yourself in this job? Why would you move on? What are your long-term goals? How can we support those? Is there a fit?"

Making good hiring decisions upfront is essential, as well as taking a personal interest in the crewmember and supporting their goals while matching compensation to their qualifications and performance.

Another way to ensure that crew are treated well is in the package deal. A captain who understands the value of a happy crew could approach an owner to create a benefit package that will entice anyone on board. Health insurance is good motivator and is something Capt. Hobart looks for, as well as more paid leave and vacations. "Year-end bonuses, 401(k)s, insurance, more time off, rotational captain and crew are my negotiating points these days." A sweet deal may mean there's no desire to look elsewhere, but Capt. Rapley maintains, "Money is important in as far as you must pay the industry standard but I have never had crew leave because they have been offered more money elsewhere. The same goes for me. The benefits and atmosphere [on board] has a far greater influence [on job longevity]."

But the onus to figure out how to avoid job switching with regularity is also on the crew – if crew figure out what they want from a job before stepping on board, the inevitable result will be better. If you like to keep busy and on your toes, a busy charter yacht will be more your speed than a quiet, family-owned private yacht that only does short trips a few times a year. "I was with the same owner for ten years," Capt. Frischhertz says. "We chartered out twelve weeks a year. Most crews like charters; chartering helps. The tips are there and you keep busy and aren't sitting around waiting." Then there are others like Stew Hickey, who says, "Personally, I prefer a family boat, not a charter [yacht]. The abuse of chartering wasn't worth the tips. Thanks for the tip, but I would rather have a massage and three days off."

HO HUM

Naturally, boredom with the itinerary or the job can cause crew to change boats. You can only go to Ocean Grief so many times or polish the stainless until you see yourself talking to your



own reflection. For crew who got into the industry for the travel, if a new boat comes along with exciting destinations, the allure can be almost impossible to resist.

Aside from the itinerary getting stale, sometimes it's all in the job. If you're not being challenged or stimulated, you're going to search for something better. Donaghy began as a deckhand and has now worked on 20 boats in six years, many of which were temporary positions. "My job as a deckhand was very repetitive, tedious and almost boring if you're just sitting at the dock during the summer in Fort Lauderdale," Donaghy says. "It rains every day at 3:00pm so you can count on chamoising the boat in the morning. Stainless, chamois, wash down, repeat. You've got to start somewhere, but after two months, I couldn't do this every single day."

Enthusiasm can only go so far – if it's not cultivated and encouraged, the captain will find themselves minus a crewmember.

UN-ACCOMMODATIONS

Late nights, early mornings, cramped quarters all conspire against keeping even keeled, so it's no surprise that inadequate living quarters are another reason crew jump ship. A lack of personal space snowballs into personality problems when people are living on top of each other. It could also boil down to the size of the crew mess and whether there's Internet access on board.

Although it's not something crew may be able to control, "Lack of design and attention to crew quarters are a major reason [to leave]," says Andrew Cosgreave, managing director of Northrop and Johnson. "Crewmembers would sometimes bicker and have no place to go," adds Capt. Frischhertz. "Depending upon crew quarter's setup, you could have arguments about going to bed early versus watching television in the crew lounge. You're so cramped."

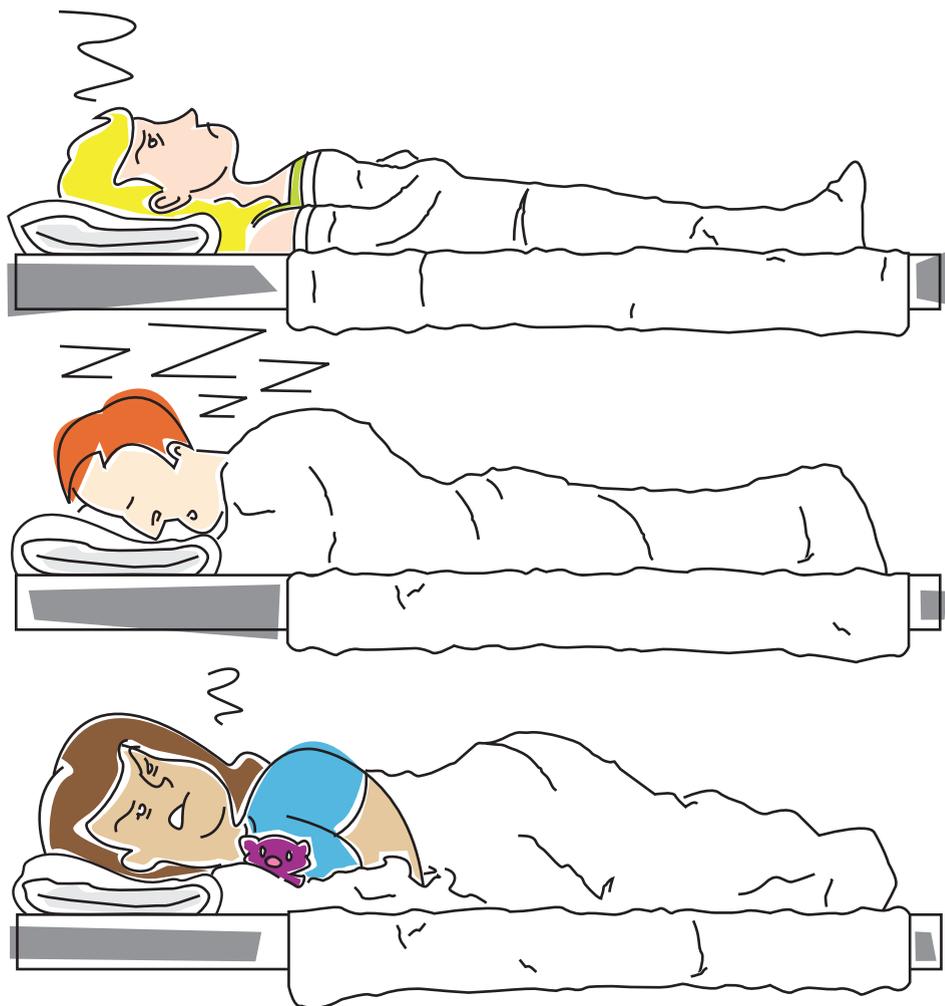
And if a boat has small crew quarters, it will have a hard time filling those bunks, let alone keeping crew on board. "A single crew bunk on a Sunseeker doesn't entice me," says Capt. Renee Hobart. She prefers the new crew quarter layouts on some bigger boats. For crew who partner with a spouse or significant other, accommodations and privacy are a huge factor. Builders take note.

LIFE CHANGES

But sometimes, no matter how much money, time off and perks someone throws at you, you're not going to stay. "Do I really want to travel for a living or settle down and have children?" Capt. Hoffman says. "Some [crew] have no family life. You turn around one day, your kid is twelve years old and you think, 'when did that happen?' Dating and family desires are a big reason to jump."

Capt. Frischhertz stuck by the same owner for more than 10 years – the owner even kept the boat close to The Bahamas just for Frischhertz's convenience, to be near his home. "But when my second son was born, I jumped and there was nothing he could have done to stop me," Frischhertz says.

Some factors are just beyond the captain's or owner's control.



Prime examples are personal issues, the need to move to larger yachts for license advancement, or outgrowing the job as it no longer matches your goals and objectives.

Is there a solution to ensuring job longevity? "It's hard to manage a program where all needs are met because yachting is not a long-term, stable environment," says Rupert Connor of Luxury Yacht Group. "When the most basic human psychological needs of safety and sexual intimacy are unfulfilled and you're deprived of sleep, your employment and personal wellbeing can be tenuous."

The nature of the industry is fluid and career advancement and training sometimes mean there's no option but to switch jobs. Captains and crew jump ship for myriad reasons: schedule and itinerary issues; desire for a social life; their age; the boss' or bosun's personality quirk. For most, jumping ship is a natural progression at sea for upward advancement.

But job longevity may not be a complete myth. Some captains stay for years, some crews stay together for many seasons. Why? Because they like and respect their owners, each other and the work each person does on board, and are encouraged to learn and move up through the ranks on board. Not revolutionary, perhaps, but certainly elemental. ★

ARE YOUR NEEDS BEING MET?

Self-actualization

morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, acceptance of facts

Esteem

self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, respect by others

Love/Belonging

friendship, family, sexual intimacy

Safety

security of body, of employment, of resources, or morality, of the family, of health, of property

Physiological

breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, excretion

Perhaps the reasons behind the ever-changing nature of crew employment can be explained by psychology, in particular, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Psychologist Abraham Maslow created a pyramid in the 1940s that broke down what he considered the five most important tiers of human needs. Starting at the bottom with the more primitive, physiological needs and moving up to the level of self actualization, Maslow divided his perceptions of human need. Perhaps crew job longevity – or lack thereof – can be measured in how many tiers of Maslow's pyramid your current job satisfies. If too many of Maslow's needs go unfulfilled, it's no wonder that you'll change jobs with regularity.

This diagram shows Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, represented as a pyramid with the more primitive needs at the bottom.