



## Lessons from the Boat: Part III

### Building a team on culture and character

John Burnham

“Sail to the point of discomfort!” That was a mantra my friend Rob Moore used to preach when we were in our 20s, sailing overnight races, and it has stayed with me over the years.

To be part of a winning crew requires individuals who are willing to sacrifice personal comfort and contribute to the team effort. If it hurts a little, you know you’re putting out more effort than crews on many other boats.

Will your team do the same, on a boat or in your business? It depends on whom you bring along as part of the crew and what you do to generate a culture in which giving that kind of effort is both the norm and part of the payoff.

#### Hiring for behavior over skills

Bob Denison, president of Denison Yachting, a growing business focused on new- and used-boat sales and yacht charters, told me recently, “There should be a

little pain involved.” He gave the example of picking up a client from a red-eye flight at 6 a.m. “Whenever we’re interviewing,” he says, “we’ll always share our core values ahead of time, and not by coincidence, one of those is that really good customer service is going to hurt a little bit.”

Denison is not alone. Frank Peterson, president of the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation, put it to me another way. “We hire people with certain skills, but we also hire for behavior,” he says. “We hire based on core values of the organization, like character and integrity.”

Matt Gruhn, president of the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas, also emphasizes core values such as authenticity, integrity and drive. “We look for great people,” he says. “Not employees, team members or boating people — great people.” He adds that the MRAA will often test the skills of applicants but will spend most of the time discovering

ing to put their attention on what will make a difference and how they can help one another succeed.

Sometimes that kind of chemistry appears before a race when we are practicing maneuvers we’ve done a hundred times. Sometimes it appears when we travel out of town to sail, suddenly doing different things together.

At the MRAA, Gruhn and his team took a Gallup StrengthsFinder test (now known as a CliftonStrengths assessment) to learn about one another. They also discussed books such as Gallup’s *First, Break All the Rules*. “I told the team, ‘I’ve read this book twice, and I believe in the concepts and tenets, and I work hard to live by them. Now you have the right to hold me accountable for this,’” Gruhn says. “Their level of engagement has been incredible.”

Building that engagement and passion for the work makes all the difference, says Chris Baird, managing director of Fu-

*“We look for great people. Not employees, team members or boating people — great people. As a result, their level of engagement has been incredible.”*

who they are as people. “It’s critical to our culture,” he says. “We spend most of every day together.”

To underline the point, Denison describes the answer given by Howard Schultz, retired CEO of Starbucks, when asked how he gets all of that company’s baristas to smile: We don’t train them. We only hire people who are already smiling.

sion Entertainment. “If your people have passion for the business, for the brand, for the team and for the customers, that comes across in the marketplace,” he says. “If you’ve got passion, you can roll over some of the biggest competitors.”

Where does that passion come from? It’s a combination of whom you hire and how

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#### Seeking team chemistry

On a boat or in a business, no matter how well you advertise and interview, your new hires are unlikely to be a perfect fit for your culture and team from Day One. There are always the basics of orientation, systems and software that need to be learned from the get-go.

But there’s something more that we’re after. Let’s call it team chemistry, a term that describes the state of a boat’s crew beyond mastering the mechanics of trimming a sail. Good chemistry occurs when all members of a crew are consistently will-

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## Management Perspective

your team builds from there. One factor you as a leader can always control is how you show up. "Exemplify it," Baird says. "Try to be at the coalface with everyone. I go to trade shows around the world, and I don't see my counterparts sitting there."

### Building on strengths

In theory, you hire a great team, you lead from the front, and you're off and running. But it's rarely that simple. "Hiring people is the challenge," says Dave Wollard, senior director of the leisure division at Webasto Thermo & Comfort North America. "When you need to fill a job, the right person for the job is not always the best person available. What do you do? It's important to work toward strengths and support people in areas where they are weak."

It's also important to notice body language, as Wollard describes in introducing a new business plan. "Being aware of the unspoken feelings within the team is

key," he says. "Take the time to let each person open up and share a true feeling. Don't leave a festering, unspoken thought. This gives you the chance to build a plan with knowledge."

That story reminded me of the time we introduced the idea of shifting a couple of key tasks between crewmembers on our boat without first describing our goals and exploring other ways to improve. Our crew chemistry suffered as a result, and after we went back to the old system, our performance improved.

### An attitude of humility

As the leader of a sailing team, I know that we do best when I am willing to be wrong or simply not know the answer. When racing, you can often gain an advantage by sailing along one side of the course or the other. In a recent race, we discussed it and discussed it but couldn't decide which way was favored, and we finally agreed: "Let's just sail fast and stay

close to most of our competitors."

That's what we did, and along the way, we noticed some opportunities to make gains that added up to a strong second place. Our only error was in splitting with our competitors on the last leg, thinking we could outsmart them, and nearly dropping to third at the finish.

"One of our core values is humility," Denison says. "When we look at innovation and new technology, we're pretty quick to respond. We have to be ready at any moment to be wrong. Innovation never happens when teams think they have it all figured out."

Circling back to Moore's mantra of "sailing to the point of discomfort," I realize that this relates more to a mental capacity than a physical one. Build an attitude across your team of constantly pushing beyond what's comfortable, to adopt and adapt new ideas with urgency. Yet be ready to admit when one's brainchild isn't working and take a new tack. ■

## Beneteau acquires two European boatbuilders

Groupe Beneteau has acquired a majority stake in Slovenian builder Seascope and announced plans to become majority owner of Poland-based Delphia. Seascope builds sailboats from 14 to 27 feet and gives Beneteau a presence in the transportable performance cruiser segment. "Our acquisition of a stake in Seascope lets us offer a selection of small sailing yachts for novice and enthusiasts, often first-time buyers," says Hervé Gastinel, Groupe Beneteau CEO.

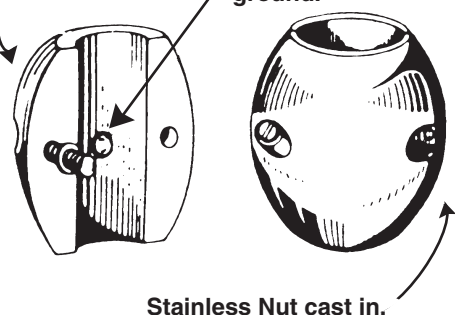
Delphia Yachts has built more than 25,000 boats since it was founded in 1990. Beneteau's buyout will give it a much larger production capacity in Delphia's 194,000-square-foot facility, as well as better access to central and eastern European markets.

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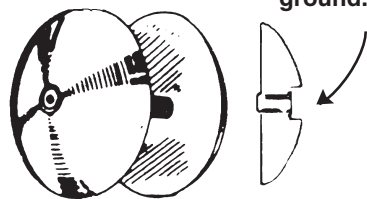
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