

The Crew

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CAREER • TRAINING • TECHNOLOGY • MONEY • OPERATIONS • ADVICE



REPORT

NEW BLOOD

Today's engineers discuss how we can attract new, skilled engineers to this industry and tackle the shortage.

TENDER OPERATORS COURSE

We look at the pros and cons of the new PYA and RYA Superyacht Tender Operators course.

007

The captain of *S/Y Regina* – star of *Skyfall* – on working with both a yacht crew and a film crew.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Will we have enough qualified captains to skipper the influx of superyacht deliveries over the next few years?



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Tipping is an expected part of charter culture, but is handing over a sum of cash to a crew at the end of a charter a genuine reflection of the service received by guests? And is the expected wad of cash incentivising crew to provide an above-and-beyond service? Lulu Trask looks at the problems surrounding today's tipping culture and new and innovative ways of creating a sense of pride in the demanding workplace.

WORDS: LULU TRASK

“Over the past four years of chartering a 65m we have seen everything from four per cent for a tough two-week charter in the Caribbean to 20 per cent for an easy 10 days in the Med,” the captain of a 65m motoryacht tells me. But whether you're looking at four per cent or 20 per cent, a crew gratuity at the end of a charter is not only customary – as is often stated in charter contracts – but expected.

This already establishes a set of potentially controversial questions: who receives the gratuity – the captain or the individual crewmembers? Is the gratuity shared equally between the whole crew? Is the gratuity enough and worthy of the service provided? How should this extra cash be spent?

“My policy has always been to divide the tip equally between all crew. This helps to incentivise the junior crew, whereas the senior crew are better paid and the tip has less of an impact for them,” explains the captain of the 65m motoryacht.

This is not to say that requests for sums to be allocated to particular crewmembers do not happen. “I have frequently had charterers hand over the tip at the end of the charter and start to explain which crewmembers should get what, but I stop them in their tracks and explain that our policy is to split it equally”, adds the captain. “I explain my reasons and most end up saying that this is fine and actually commendable. I did have one American guest who just said, ‘You split it equally? You're crazy! You're the captain – you should get more’. But even he agreed in the end.”

David Price, yacht charter manager at Hill Robinson, adds that it is not uncommon for even distribution of a charter gratuity, which he labels as between five and 10 per cent. “Guests ask for this [allocations of different sums to particular crewmembers] but the captain will distribute evenly; captains are instructed to share equally to the entire crew – Hill Robinson will intervene otherwise. I make a point of finding out how much the tip is, that way it is shared evenly among the crew. A successful charter is a crew team effort.” »



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But what happens if a crew gets no tip? Or a sum the crew deems insufficient? In a culture where crew gratuities are presumed, there can be significant repercussions when that presumption is not met. “I do see the idea of being rewarded after a good charter,” Captain Allan Skanderup Nielsen of 124m *Katara* tells me. “Not everybody is happy about that, and about crew having 48 hours to blow all their money on a pair of Gucci sunglasses and a Louis Vuitton bag and get a magnum on the beach and pretend they’re billionaires, and then it’s all gone again. That’s all good fun and games, but when you turn it around and you see this detrimental effect it has on crew if they don’t get what they expect, from a captain’s point of view it can be a really frustrating factor, trying to keep your crew motivated and on the ball if they don’t get the amount they expect.”

This also poses a problem for the captain: if the gratuity comes out of the Advanced Provisioning Allowance (APA) pot and extra costs are incurred during the charter, when there is little left for the crew tip should the captain request an increase? “On some occasions the remaining APA funds at the end of the charter are significant, so the charterer may allocate part of it to be crew gratuity and ask for the remainder to be wired back to his account,” says the captain of the 65m motoryacht. “On other occasions there is only a small amount left and this puts the captain in the awkward position of having to diplomatically suggest that the charterer arranges a further transfer to cover the agreed crew tip.”

The charter market is always looking at innovative ways to improve its offering and, with that, the service on board. But with crew tips as expected as a swarm of dockwalkers in Antibes during the spring, is it time we begin looking at new ways of incentivising crew to perform better during a charter, aside from (or as well as) the typical wad of cash?

“There are always going to be people who are motivated by money,” says Alison Rentoul, crew performance engineer for Camper & Nicholsons International and owner of The Crew Coach. “But I think if you get through to people on a deeper, personal level about what they actually want to do with their life and get

them to engage more with why they’re there and how they contribute to the guests having a wonderful time, they might actually get more pleasure out of just doing the job well and receiving the recognition from the guests. And if they get money on top of that then that’s a bonus, and that’s how it should be. I really think that guests standing there on the aft deck, genuinely saying thank you, remembering the crewmembers’ names and writing wonderful things in the guest books, the crew really takes that to heart.”

A number of brokerage houses use guest feedback as the basis for year-round awards for charter crew, such as the Fraser Yachts Captains’ Dinner awards during the Monaco Yacht Show and the Camper & Nicholsons International summer and winter season Crew Stars awards, which are voted for by ‘likes’ on the Crew Stars Facebook page. The latest awards on the scene are Camper & Nicholsons International’s Show Stars awards, an extension of Crew Stars but focused on feedback on charter crew during the shows themselves, the first of which took place during the 2014 Antigua Charter Yacht Show. “The crew gave brokers this little card and the brokers had to walk round and think about how the crew had done in terms of the criteria,” explains Rentoul. “There were three things: the presentation of the yacht; the presentation of the crew themselves and how friendly they were; and the quality of the tour. It was really cool to see just how motivated they were by that – all the crew were really into it.”

These sorts of awards provide an environment for healthy competition – something that encourages junior crew to up their game and aids crew cohesion. “They just enjoy the spirit of competition and being up against the other boats in the show. And it not only gives the performance you want from them, but it bonds them together as a team. And when they do well as a team they feel really proud of the boat, so it’s a win-win,” adds Rentoul.

Perhaps most importantly, these crew awards, of which those mentioned are just some of those on offer in the industry, give crew the chance to make a name for themselves. “Just receiving a tip doesn’t really further you in your career



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as much. With these sorts of awards, it says the crewmembers' names, so they get a lot of public recognition," says Rentoul.

Not only this, but taking a more professional approach to service in this industry is likely to make crew think more seriously about those tips they do get: where can that money go? Should it go into a savings account or towards their next training course?

It's not hard to see that there are plentiful opportunities when it comes to finding ways to incentivise crew. That's not to say that tips shouldn't be given at the end of a charter (though perhaps we need to remind crew that they shouldn't necessarily be expected) but what the industry must remember is that a gratuity, which comes at the end of a charter, is not necessarily the most effective way of encouraging that above-and-beyond service and experience. Instead, incentivising crew with performance initiatives is more likely

to up their game and inadvertently change the tipping culture. We could be looking at returning to a more professional culture where better service is driven instead by performance and – hopefully positive – feedback. ■

TO COMMENT ON THIS ARTICLE, EMAIL LULU@THESUPERYACHTGROUP.COM WITH SUBJECT: TCR 73 THE TIP-OFF

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