



## **Crew injury, illness and death Why dealing with worst case scenarios is integral to crew retention**

**By Lorna Titley**

If asked what factors you think would ensure good staff retention in any organisation, you may cite salary, bonus, benefits and career prospects as playing a significant role in keeping people on board. You might also point to a positive workplace environment free of harassment or bullying, opportunities for training and skills development, or the importance of an employer whose corporate and social values are aligned with those of their employees, as being important in keeping staff engaged and loyal.

By contrast, how an organisation deals with staff injury, illness or death may not be the first thing that springs to mind when discussing employee retention. And yet, in environments such as a superyacht where captains, engineers, stews and chefs spend weeks working and living together, the way in which worse case scenarios are dealt with can have a huge impact on crew morale and ultimately, on retention.

Speaking at **Improving Yacht Crew Retention**, Quaynote`s conference in Nice last month, John Cook from the Lesia Group was clear: *“If yacht crew see, in the case where there is an injury or death on board, that other crew are treated badly, then they will leave.”*

So what does good – or indeed – bad treatment of crew who have suffered on-board injury look like? Liz Baugh of Red Square Medical believes that giving injured crew the time off to recover properly is the right approach. Speaking alongside John Cook and other industry professionals on a panel at the Nice conference, she explained, *“Giving a crew member say 2 weeks off to allow an injury to recover, is far better than letting it get worse and then you lose them for a year.”* Pointing to the issue of potentially escalating costs, she adds, *“Repatriation is so much more expensive than dealing with an injury properly, on the spot.”*

Cultural factors play a role in how injuries are dealt with on a superyacht. Observes Joanna Drysdale, Manager, Underwriting Services, at MHG Insurance, *“There is still a culture where crew members will grin and bear an injury.”* Crew are often understandably concerned that if they don`t work, they won`t get paid. *“This leads to crew carrying on working until something “pops”,* adds Liz Baugh.

Lack of management training on how to deal with a crisis such as injury, illness or even death is another factor leading to poor handling of difficult situations and ultimately, to crew becoming disaffected and leaving a yacht. *“Most captains have never even been on a management course,”* states John Cook. Without training for not just the captain, but for the crew too, adequate procedures may not be in place. Joanna Drysdale, as an insurance provider, recommends ensuring that crew members know what the right procedures are when an emergency occurs: *“Don`t call the insurance company first,”* she states. *“You need to call the emergency services first. I can`t call them on your behalf.”*

Good management is of course not just about dealing professionally and compassionately with the aftermath of unforeseen emergencies, but also in working to prevent these incidents occurring in the first place. John Cook points to yachts where there is no outdoor space for crew to exercise and of the psychological and physical impact this can have on crew. *“A fit crew member is a good crew member,”* agrees Joanna Drysdale.

The increased awareness of mental health issues, heightened during the pandemic, was viewed by the panel at **Improving Yacht Crew Retention** as a positive development. *“We are just about to give a stewardess a sabbatical because we believe that mental health is key,”* says John Cook.

For crew members in need of emotional support or counselling, Tracey Santrian of BZ Maritime Leadership recommends a tailored approach. *"I have put together a group of individuals who have conversations with crew members after a traumatic event to gauge its impact on them,"* she explains. Typically, the crew member will be asked how they are eating or sleeping. If there is a continued pattern of disrupted sleep or appetite, then further counselling is offered, but if the crew member's habits are returning to normal then no further action may be required. Liz Baugh adds that for crew suffering from PTSD, whether they have sustained an injury or witnessed a traumatic event, that *"we don't fully understand the nature of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Sometimes, a person will need follow-up conversations for some time into the future to determine how they are really coping."*

The fact that those working on a superyacht live together 24/7 certainly poses a unique set of challenges for anyone concerned with improving crew retention. However, there is no reason why superyacht crew should not enjoy the same workplace environment as anyone else. *"One of the principles of MLC (Maritime Labour Convention) is that crew are treated the same as shore-based works,"* concludes John Cook.

**Improving Yacht Crew Retention, 3rd Annual Conference**, is planned for Thursday, 7th March, 2024 in Nice. For more information about participating please contact us at [lorna@quaynote.ca](mailto:lorna@quaynote.ca) or [alison@quaynote.com](mailto:alison@quaynote.com)



Lorna Titley is a Director at Quaynote Communications, a communications company specialising in PR & Marketing Consultancy and Live / Virtual / Hybrid Conferences & Events for the Aviation, Maritime and Security Industries.

[lorna@quaynote.ca](mailto:lorna@quaynote.ca); [www.quaynote.com](http://www.quaynote.com)