

Salty *Sea* Dog *Experience Counts*

You are Only as Old as You Feel
says **Captain Michael Howorth**

As a grey haired sailor, I believe I am allowed to use the adjective 'experienced' when I describe myself as a superyacht Captain.

While it is true, that more recently, I have chosen to work on yachts only as a relief Master I still like to consider myself, very much, a working Captain and I believe the fact that I work as such, adds credence to my writing on the subject for this and other superyacht magazines. (Fortunately so do my editors).

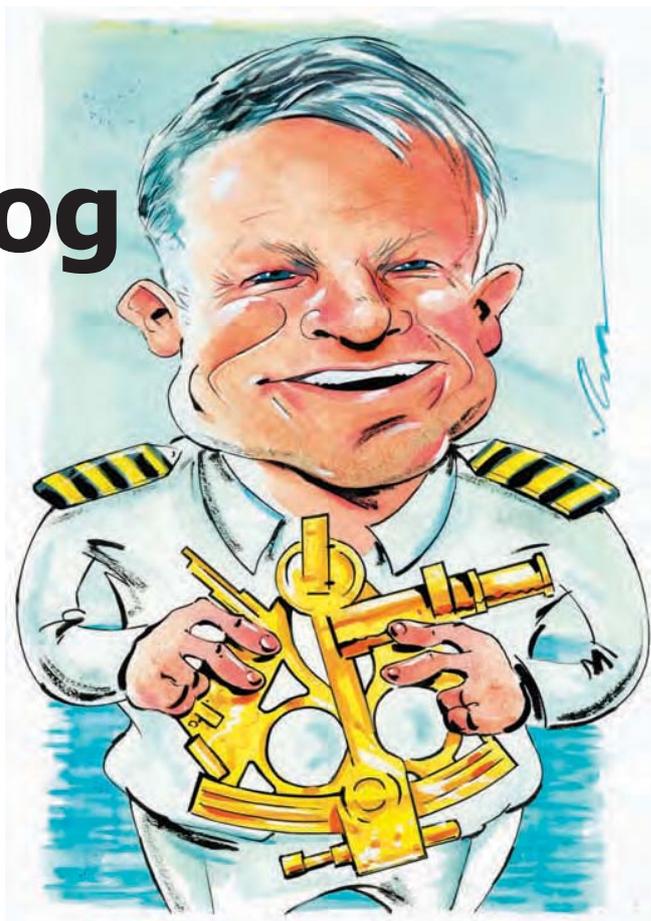
I did say I like to consider myself, because, until the other day, when a yacht Captain friend of mine, telephoned me, I still thought of myself as being eligible for employment. He phoned to ask if I knew of any jobs, adding he had been out of work for eight months. Knowing how conscientious he is, I asked why it had been so long, hoping that he would not tell tales of how he lost his last 75 metre yacht on a rock. I was somewhat shocked to hear that he thought the reason was, that at 45, he was too old!

Now this happened not long after Captain Chelsey B Sullenberger III, a somewhat grey haired and highly experienced airline pilot beautifully crafted an emergency landing onto the surface of the Hudson River. It was, it turns out, precisely because he had so much experience flying aircraft in the days before automation became the norm, that he was able to revert to his library of hard earned experiences and use those to save all those lives.

Nice Legs!

Clearly questions have to be asked of crew agents and others who appoint Masters to command superyachts that are, in some cases, just a tad smaller than mini cruise liners. How old is too old, and at what point does looking good in a pair of white shorts become a better bet when employing a Captain to oversee a crew of 20 plus professional yachties?

Surely there can be no substitute for experience built upon the sound foundation of top class training, and just because a candidate for a job has a piece of paper saying he is qualified to command a yacht, it does not mean that he should be allowed to do so without first having served under the command of a senior yacht captain from whom he can learn the tricks of the trade.



Just the ticket

We work hard to gain professional qualifications, but ask any MCA examiner, and they will tell you the same thing. "There is no substitute for experience when it comes to command." While we all have to become Captain once, for the first time, it should, I feel, be at the back end of the career rather than on day three. I remember well, a serious fire on board a yacht of which I was in command. I recollect the awful feeling on hearing the alarm, I recall the rush of adrenaline when I looked at the CCTV screens showing my engine room ablaze. My chief engineer confirmed my worst fears and for several hours it looked as if we might lose our yacht. During the incident, I ordered the evacuation of all passengers and, with the help of my extremely well behaved and trained crew, went on to save the yacht from sinking and organised her safely towed into port by tugs.

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Instinctive Action

Since then, I have been asked, why did you do this and what prompted you to do that? How did you know that was the right thing to do? My answer to all questions is I do not rightly remember. All I do know is, that I reacted automatically and I did so by drawing upon the library of training I had received and the experiences that life at sea had taught me to overcome and I acted accordingly almost instinctively. Perhaps it is those qualities that make a good Captain.