

# HUMAN RESOURCES, *a Personnel Problem*

Walk into a Job Centre ashore and announce that you would like to work on a luxury superyacht belonging to a millionaire on which, you would be paid to work, while travelling the world, and chances are that you would get laughed at. Walk into a superyacht crew placement agency here in the Mediterranean and immediately you are taken seriously. This is not surprising say Frances and Michael Howorth it is a big business.

**W**alk into a Job Centre ashore or indeed any other personnel placement office and announce that you would like to work on a luxury superyacht belonging to a millionaire on which, you would be paid to work, while travelling the world, and chances are that you would get laughed at. Walk into a superyacht crew placement agency here in the South of France and immediately you are taken seriously. This is not surprising; it is a big business, with agents taking the equivalent of one month's salary for each crew member they place.

Crew are attracted to crew placement agents by their reputation and what those agents promise they can do for them.

Those who fulfil the promise and find them a job are rewarded. Crew tend to stay loyal to that agency and it becomes their first port of call when they are looking for a new position. Of course many cover their bets by placing their CV's elsewhere at the same time.

Recruitment takes time. Relations with candidate crew are built over many years. Developing a database of the raw product takes those in the business of selling the right crew into a job, years of caring, networking, meeting, greeting, emailing, and telephoning. Laurence Reymann set up YPI Crew during 2002 basing it in Antibes. The company is part of the Yachting International Partner group although it operates as a separate and independent entity providing crew all over the world to a wide

range of clients. Eight specialist consultants make up the team giving the company a complete understanding of the market and it's key players.

But in a time when the Internet is so readily available and social networking is all the rage, is the writing on the wall for crew placement agencies or is the Facebook job interview just a passing phase?

The recruitment industry is a people industry and whilst social networking sites play an integral part in the lives of most modern day crew, many believe that they cannot replace professional crew recruitment consultancies when it comes to finding crew. Time is a commodity that is in short supply for most Captains and social networking to find crew is a very time consum-

ing method of filling a job vacancy compared with using an expert to find a new crew member. Crew agents are relied upon for their expertise, intuition, and thorough reference and certificate checking. They exist to make the process more efficient and effective for the employer. The better recruitment agencies will interview selected candidates with the client's job in mind and only send a set of carefully considered CV's for the Captain or Owner to consider.

Recruitment is a serious and sensitive profession, the Crew Agents are "middle men" and as such they need to have a global vision and understand all the synergies at play from the client and candidate's view point. They also need to work within the legal frame of crew certifications and employment law. When

clients pay crew recruitment fees they deserve a quality service with lots of added value. What a good crew placement agent should not do is send a mountain of CVs and leave clients to struggle through them. Most agree there is no value in this. Captains looking for crew generally prefer the agent do the groundwork, spend the hours interviewing crew and creating a shortlist of suitable, available, qualified candidates who are not only ready and willing to work but whose references have been checked and whose abilities fit the requirements of the client. While there are definitely some captains and owners that have the time and patience to do this work by themselves, most do not find this the most efficient way to hire crew. On the other hand Captains *are* turning to the Internet to find day workers and short term crew. At the same time, crew agents are also using the Internet as an addition new component to "reference checking". After all crew cannot say that they do not smoke or drink when public pictures pasted on Facebook pages show otherwise or claim to be single when they write about their partner! There are an increasing number of Internet crew placement sites where crew register for free. Clients using these sites sift through applications using filters to find a selection suitable for interview. It is at this point, when they want to contact the applicant, that they pay the site operator a fee. The charge is significantly cheaper than the fees paid to Crew Placement Agencies but clients should be aware that getting the contact numbers is only the beginning. Applicants using the site have not had their references checked, qualifications established and all interviews have to be conducted by the client themselves. Many crew agencies are looking to improve services they offer and keep pace with an ever changing world. They are mostly acknowledging that social networking is here to stay, at least in the immediate future and are themselves embracing Social Networking where appropriate. Not all agencies serve the same ingredients and that is why crews need to register with a good cross selection. Zephyr for example offer owners a service whereby they crew a vessel part-time in busy chartering weeks if the owner doesn't have a full time crew. They source and make sure correctly qualified crews are placed on board for just the time the owners need them and this is a great way crew can work part time if they are not seeking a full time job.

### Training Counts

Other agencies offer additional services over and above crew placement. One such is D&B Services, an agency based in Antibes that has partnered with Nautilus International, the international trade union and professional organisation that represents many full time career minded professional yacht crew. The company has full MCA recognition as a training provider for the STCW95 Basic Safety Training and provides crew (job-hunting or not) already with qualified and substantial advice on Article 2 issues of the Seafarer's Employment Agreement from RYA, plus GMDSS General Operator courses and many RYA qualifications. Jorg Wendt says "Keeping our size classes to a maximum of 6 gives us an unrivalled pass rates" A new challenge for the yacht crew recruiting industry is to embrace changing legislation that will come as a combination of the MLC 2006 and the new STCW regulations. This means everyone has to understand the regulations in much the same way as commercial shipping business where everybody has a duty of care to the industry and all who work in it.

Technology is unlikely to replace the crew agent entirely in the near future. Of course this will change when a computer can perform all those functions that a human now does such as screening CVs, checking licences and qualifications and most importantly following up written references. Crew Agents often have information about crew members over and above the usual CV and references that they have built up over the years, from face to face interviewing, talking and listening as well as all the stored information in their files.

### Support services

Looking for work is never a pleasant exercise, whether for a deckhand or a highly experienced captain. Everyone needs to be supported and the better agencies give crew seeking jobs advise on how best to address an interview, something even Captains can benefit from when they have been with one Owner for a long time. Naturally, agencies with training divisions such as D&B Services will also be able to work with crew members in helping to develop their careers and make sure they're adding to the CV in a positive way.

Lindsey Probert has been involved with yachts one way or another for almost 20 years so working in crewing seemed to be an obvious career progression. She now runs the Antibes office of The Crew Network. She believes, "It is my job to listen to crew. I listen to Captains, I try to match the two together so that everyone gets what they want as well as what they need. Crew Network interviews candidates in person as far as humanly possible, follows their career paths, verbally check references which can be very time consuming but worth it

and ultimately we try to ensure that crew are placed in a position where they will succeed."

It is no coincidence that members of placement staff in most agencies are called consultants and those who have been working for years in the business will obviously have the most experience. The chances are that the well established crew placement agencies are here to stay. They have created a service that the industry trusts and feels safe using and that is very much a cornerstone in the superyacht business.

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#### Contacts

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