



CREW

However much you spend on building and maintaining your superyacht, it will be a waste of money without a good crew. **David Pelly** discovered some strong opinions when he asked the Burgess Yacht Management team about hiring a good crew.

Being well-served by competent and friendly crew is definitely the number one factor that motivates charter guests to request the same yacht, year after year. Conversely, if owners or charterers don't like the crew, it's a disaster that can ruin a very expensive holiday.

Crew has a direct impact on charter revenue and running costs

Burgess has always emphasised that it is not a crew recruitment agency but their Yacht Management division is constantly dealing with crew matters and for the past two years has had a fully-qualified HR manager in Lucy Medd. The fact that the company does not recruit is apparently not entirely accepted by the industry as job-seekers send in their CVs at a rate of roughly 30 per day and there are currently about 4,000 names on file. Nevertheless, as the division's director Mark Binnie says, "the real job of the HR department is supporting the crew already working on all the yachts that Burgess manages. We are involved in crew selection on a daily basis, but whether we eventually extend this to recruitment beyond the Burgess fleet is debatable."

Crew today are looking for long term engagement with career prospects

Since the operation of yachts became a professional business, it has become more and more important to have the right crew on board the right yacht. For the same reason, the emphasis has steadily moved towards crew who are looking for a long term engagement with career prospects. The gap-year johnnies and one-season cowboys are not really welcome any more, as they don't have sufficient time to pick up the skills and may not have the right attitude either. To those who think that Burgess and the other big managers are a stuffy lot who are squeezing the fun out of crewing, the message is "Stop thinking of it as a way of making a quick buck and instead look at it as a grown-up career."

Training is all-important and Burgess managers encourage owners to have a dedicated budget for it. A clear sign of the times has been the recent creation of Ultimate Crew, of which Burgess is a major sponsor. This 'internship' initiative will channel existing and potential crews through the programmes being developed by Flagship Training, which uses the superb facilities belonging to the Royal Navy in Portsmouth and Plymouth. These include some astonishingly realistic simulated ships, which can catch fire, capsize and even sink!

Loyalty is a good return on investment

Modern yachts are so complex that stable and well-trained crews, who know their yachts, are not only safer but cheaper in the longer term. They tend not to have expensive accidents or to neglect essential maintenance. Fickle or lazy crews simply don't stay on Burgess yachts.

It is interesting to discover just how long-serving good crews can be: some Burgess-managed yachts have maintained a stable core crew for many years. There are people who have served on the same yacht for 30 years. It is often the case that American owners expect crews to be completely loyal and stay for many years, becoming friends of the owner's family in the process, while Europeans tend to expect a certain level of turnover as crews move on to advance their careers.

Supporting crew in their work is a crucial part of the job for Lucy Medd and her colleagues. "As a starting-point, we ensure that they are legal, qualified and insured - and then move on from there," she says. "A good captain is everything, of course, but we can make his life a lot easier. For example, if a crew member gets hurt or has a health problem, they need to be off the yacht and brought home as soon as possible and we are ready to respond at short notice. Insurers can sometimes prove less than enthusiastic to pay out but we can put a lot of pressure on them. All yachts have a certain level of medical insurance but it is important to know the exact scope of the cover before an emergency crops up."

It's not about processes, it's about people

Of course, crew issues are just as bespoke and particular as all the other aspects of the Burgess Yacht Management service. "This is a complicated business," says Lucy Medd. "It is not possible to have one set of procedures that will fit all yachts and their crews. I would say that we are developing HR procedures that will be accepted throughout the industry." As Mark Binnie says "We care about crew and we are here full-time to deal with their problems." This is good news, because a happy crew makes for happy cruising.



Burgess has the largest and most qualified in-house operational management team in the yachting industry. For further information on the yacht management services offered, please contact Burgess in London or Monaco or visit:

www.burgessyachts.com/management



Burgess is sponsoring Ultimate Crew which is supported by Flagship Superyacht Academy. This is a new 'internship' initiative that aims to develop the next generation of senior crew for the superyacht industry. The foundation programme aims to attract and seek out talented and committed people for placement on board some of the most prestigious yachts in the world.

www.ultimatecrew.com