

BOAT CREW BASICS

A GUIDE FOR BOAT CREW CANDIDATES & MENTORS

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Toughest Boat Crew Tasks?

Last month we discussed typical Crew and Coxswain candidate problems using the Heaving Line and aligning towee and tower for the Alongside Tow. This month we tackle the Coxswain's responsibilities directing the Crew during all underway evolutions.

Consider the following Coxswain tasks, all required during an initial qualification cruise: Effectively communicate with crew during stern tow; Make preparations to take vessel in stern tow; Safely moor a towed vessel to float or pier; and While getting underway from dock, safely and effectively handle vessel and communicate with crew.

Although only a few of these tasks specifically mention effectively coordinating the activities of the crew, the fact is that none of these tasks can be executed safely and effectively without competent crew work. And therein lies the rub.

Many coxswains and crews practice executing the standard boat handling and towing tasks over and over, until they reach a point where verbal instructions can be paired down to the bare minimums. Indeed some coxswains feel the zenith of boat crew work is attained when no verbal instructions need to be passed at all. Nothing could be further from the truth!

I once had a Coxswain candidate commence the stern and alongside towing evolutions without any communication with his crew! Somewhere along the line, he had become convinced that directing the crew, as they go through their paces, is somehow cheating! He wanted to demonstrate how well they had all practiced and learned their responsibilities, by minimizing his verbal direction of crew tasks. Mentors, have you suggested to your coxn candidates that this is the way to go? It's NOT!

A QE cannot accurately see how well a coxn candidate directs his/her crew without the candidate communicating with the crew! It doesn't matter how many times you have practiced the maneuver, we need to observe you 'directing' the crew, telling them what you want them to do, and in what sequence.

Crewmembers and crew candidates will undoubtedly want to demonstrate how well they are trained and may feel that acting independently, without direction from the coxswain is the way to show that. But that precludes the QE's ability to see how well the coxswain 'directs' underway evolutions, which is one of the most important tasks we want to see him/her execute.

An experienced, well-trained crew is a definite asset to any coxswain. But as in most 'team activities' there is a leader and there are followers. Coxswains, you are the leader! You are expected/required to demonstrate that you can issue orders and competently direct the activities of your crew; to demonstrate that (through situational awareness) you can recognize problems and remedy them. Not only when undergoing qualification activities, not just when training, but when out on actual patrols, when you may have different crewmembers, with different skill levels.

You cannot rely on all crewmembers knowing exactly what you want done, in what sequence, and how quickly. You need to communicate that to your crew. That is why your direction of the crew is one of the most important tasks for QE's to evaluate.

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