

Avoiding the Slip into YACHTYITIS

WORDS Doug Mitchell

Yachtyitis. It's a term introduced to me by a friend referring to the swelling of one's head after obtaining a glamorous job on a luxury yacht; the unwarranted attitude change stemming from the idea that this newly held position working in the yachting industry elevates oneself above the masses still desperately trying to join the club. It is a plague that is not gender-, age- or nationality-specific, but it does seem to affect those just starting in the world of yachting or at least lacking the experience to understand that no job entitles someone to forget those who have helped along the way.

To some extent, I may not yet have the experience to give proper insight into this topic. I have only been working on a yacht for about nine months myself. However, I have been through the progression from bright-eyed, naive, wannabe yachtsman to full-time employed deckhand. It was not a quick progression, either. I came down to Florida in September 2008 knowing squat about the industry and hoping to be hired shortly after completing my basic courses. For the next three-and-a-half months, however, I learned what an extremely competitive market and a struggling economy could do to one's confidence.

Dockwalking, networking and polishing the résumé 1,001 times are just some of the things we do to start out in this business. Most of us stay in crew houses, coming from all over the world and making a lot of new friends during our studying and job hunting. For some it is a major career shift. For others it is a chance to see the world, make some money and have some fun for a year or two. Either way, the struggling economy and tough job market have been a test to one's patience and determination.

Some have battled through the stressful rollercoaster

of empty job leads and strained bank balances, while others have packed their bags, returned home and surrendered to that dreaded office job they left in the first place. One thing for sure is that the dire situation has been uniting. Every newcomer to the industry, current or past, has had some kind of help in one way or another. Maybe it was another set of eyes to proofread a résumé or the loan of a white polo for an interview. Perhaps someone who listened to your tales of discouragement after another long day of meeting with agents or waxing a boat that, in the end, coldly sailed away, leaving you and your dreams of being a yachtie on the dock. Or maybe it was someone just treating you to a bite to eat or a few cold beers at the pub when the funds began to dwindle. No matter how big or small, these things made an immense difference.

Our boat returned to Fort Lauderdale about a month ago, the same time of year I arrived tanless and excited about the world of yachting last year. As we crept up the intercoastal, passing familiar docks and marinas, I couldn't help feeling extremely thankful for my solid position onboard. Coming back to the place where it all began for me sparked so many memories, some great, others not so much. Taking courses that make you jump off diving boards wearing survival suits and put out blazes wearing full firefighting gear, partying with new friends around the crew house pool or at the beach, and sinking comfortably into the Florida lifestyle were things I'll never forget.

But there were also moments on the descending curve of that rollercoaster when you would wonder if you had made a terrible and foolish mistake. A long day of pointless dockwalking after a month or two not only deflated your spirits but your bank account as well. By all accounts, if you were keen enough it had been easy to

get a job in previous years. But sometimes things change without much warning and when reality begins to set in that you packed up your life at home to begin a new chapter somewhere else, only to find a few brick walls waiting for you, it can be scary.

However, I do believe that if you want something badly enough it can be yours. Luckily for me, I had plenty of support to keep me going for those three-and-a-half months and now I am riding the crest of a beautiful wave. There is my good Australian friend that I met last year who actually got me a job with her on the yacht and who I have thanked so many times it now causes serious annoyance. There are all my friends and family back home who knew I wanted it so badly and so encouraged me to stick it out and make it happen, while only slightly hinting at their concern and hopes that I would just come home. There were placement agents and veterans of the industry who offered their candid advice on the current job front and on how not to freak out when things looked glum. I got important experience,

references and food money from my many dayworking jobs and the invaluable lesson of humility when they weren't to be found. Needless to say, I couldn't have finally broken into the industry when it was struggling without them.

So for those who have gone through the trials and tribulations and come out employed, yet offer nothing but attitude to the person on the dock with a résumé in hand: remember how it all began. There is always time to send a quick message to that friend who had your back when you were ready to throw in the towel, and there is never a reason to gloat about the places you have been to or the money you have made to the people who have not had that chance. Living and working aboard a luxury yacht is an amazing lifestyle. Sailing to some of the world's

most stunning locales, getting paid to work in, on, and around the magnificent oceans, and reaping the rewards of all those miles walked on the docks, hours spent updating résumés and days of frustration endured is a remarkable experience. Just remember to avoid the slip into yachtyitis. ■

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