



## **Thursday Safety Series Special Edition Persons in Charge**

**June 21, 2012**

### **PERSON-IN-CHARGE**

The objective of this article is to bring attention to yacht racers the importance of the Person-In-Charge (PIC). The greatest asset both to the boat's safety and racing ability is the process by which its crew leader anticipates threats, resolves errors and brings the incident to a safe conclusion. The process of logically thinking and making sound decisions is the hallmark of a successful Person-In-Charge.

The PIC is much more than the skipper who pays the entry fee and buys everyone shirts. The Person-In-Charge assumes not only authority on the boat but also the responsibility for the lives and safety of the crew. The PIC has one overriding duty to his or her crew - to ensure that they safely complete their voyage. The race is secondary to your prime responsibility. We do not take risks in our sport; instead, we identify problems through education and experience and form strategies to prevent a recurrence. If you lack the resolve to embrace this responsibly then you are not ready to be a Person-In-Charge.

The term Person-In-Charge is used in the MSR's, but I think the better term is 'leader'. An effective leader is one who evaluates his team, uses their strengths, corrects their deficiencies, and has their loyalty. Blighs and Ahabs do not make muster. To be an effective leader, you cannot be an island unto yourself; you must use all the assets at your disposal and make prudent judgments both on and off the water.

Leadership is an attitude by which you constantly prepare the crew, boat, and yourself. In life the only constant is change and you need to keep abreast of new technology, tactics, and safety practices. Your crew will follow your lead. Are you lax about wearing PFD's? Do you accomplish the MSR safety checklist only so you can pass the post-race inspection? Be lax in any area, especially safety, and your crew will do likewise. Effective leaders do not go through the motions - they believe in them and pass that attitude on to those who sail with him.

There is nothing like experience to learn about your boat and crew. It will also help you to learn about yourself. Practicing sailing skills will aid your crew not only in trying circumstances, but it will also let the crew perform quickly in an emergency. You can talk about alternate take down procedures all you want but you do not want to try it out in a real emergency.

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Last year we lost two of our own. That should give us all pause and cause us to redouble our efforts to be safe. A PIC may have to realize that the race is secondary and the safety of the crew now takes priority. During the storm last year did you anticipate the weather? Did you shorten sail early? Did you stop racing hard and order the crew into the safety of the cockpit? If you did not do these things, your attitude towards safety, your judgment and your leadership skills need some tweaking. You will have to grade yourself. We are all professionals at our career. Transfer that professionalism to your sport. The CYC Race to Mackinac is an amateur race, but is not a place for people who act like amateurs.

I can write a novel on this subject, but lets reemphasize a few things. Realize that the Person-In-Charge has a large responsibility. He or she is now responsible for human lives. You need to accomplish your mission in a safe manner. You need to develop leadership skills and gain the trust and support of your crew. You need to embrace safety. On the water experience will educate you and the crew and speaking of education never stop seeking knowledge. Keep thinking all the time; never be satisfied. It is a daunting task and you will always be checking your 6 to make sure you have accomplished everything. Accept the job willingly. Your reward will be getting the crew safely to the finish-line, the satisfaction of a job well done, perhaps a brag flag, and I will assure you the most memorable sailing experience of a lifetime.

Good luck on the race and see you at the Island!

*Note: The purpose of this article is to highlight some of the Mac Safety Regulations and how your crew can race the Mac as safely as possible. As always, ultimate responsibility for the safety of the crew and the decision whether to race or to stop racing is that of the skipper (RRS4, MSR2). This email is meant as a courtesy only and you should always refer to the Race Documents section of the website for the Notice of Race, Sailing Instructions and Mac Safety Regulations, which govern the race.*

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