

## Crew Training

Crewing is almost like a different sport than skippering; it requires much less experience but it is more demanding physically. When recruiting crews (whether a year before college or, as in most cases, from the student body after they arrive), the obvious attribute is their weight. We all need lightweight crews to sail with average size or larger, mostly male skippers. We must not stress weight as the most important factor for many reasons (health included). We are seeking lightweight athletes, not just lightweights. Athleticism is just as much mental as physical. If a potential crew has had success in other sports, then they may be ready to become champions in sailing because they understand the rigors of and commitment to training. They know that practice is just as important on the bad days as the good days.

Here are a few tips on jump starting the process of crew training.

Help them at first with some general goals. It takes beginners an average of one year to get good and three years to get great. That may seem like a lifetime to a freshmen but they should understand that (almost) every step along the way is a treasure.

Allow the new crews to imitate the expert crews, particularly downwind with jib winging to leeward, standing while jib winging to windward with boom control, centerboard control, vang control and assisting on jib winging.

Teach the crews to steer with their weight. When the skipper moves to windward, the action - reaction kicks the stern down and the boat heads up. When the crew moves to windward, the action - reaction kicks the bow down and the boat bears off, since the crew is in front of the centerboard or pivot point. This is taught through gybing drills and starting drills.

Gybing drills. The crew initiates the gybe with their weight. Crew weight moving to windward forces the bow down and speeds up the windward side of the boat because the sails are tipped over the windward side. After a few gybing drills, the crew will feel that they are making this positive turning motion. Otherwise the skipper turns the boat by braking the leeward side with the rudder.

Starting drills. Same principle applies. Even though the boat is not heeling when luffing slightly above close hauled, the crew should move to windward (not leeward) to bear off and accelerate the boat. This will power up the boat, now slightly below close hauled, which in turn now supports the weight of the crew on the windward side.

In short, the crew needs to know they steer with the accelerator while the skipper steers with the brake. One more example of crew steering is at the windward mark. The crew bears off by hiking out, then moves in to stop the boat from turning further. Many new crews go to leeward too early to wing the jib to leeward before the boat has borne off, which means the skipper must bear off with heavy rudder braking.

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