



Lessons from the boat, Part IV Practice, and the path to mastery

John Burnham

A successful day of sailboat racing begins the same as a successful day at the helm of your business.

- You're up early with a game plan already set.
- You've made your bed, stretched, and visualized success.
- Your bag is packed and your phone is charged.
- Your family and your dog are awake, fed, and happily in motion.
- When you meet with your team, they're

ready, too, and you're all on the boat or in the office with time to spare.

It may sound boring, but aboard a business or a boat, do you really prefer those mornings when you're already doing triage at 8 am? On our sailing team, that could mean searching for boat parts, missing sunglasses, or a hung-over crewmember. At work, it's not so different. Emergencies sometimes will come up, but it's easier to handle them when you're not already under pressure.

When you're truly ready for the day, whether you think of it this way or not, you've engaged in a number of positive practices. This includes what you do on your own and as a business leader. In my experience, they are all connected.

1. Develop your personal practice. I'm a leadership coach as well as a writer and sailor, and my mentor coach regularly reminds me that keeping my "personal base" squared away allows me to give a client my full attention. It's true for any leader; healthy daily practices can make all the difference.

My daily practice begins the previous evening, with a check of my calendar of appointments, and continues in the morning with yoga or a walk. The combination prepares me mentally for what's ahead and reminds me that my arterial system remains fundamental to whatever I'll be doing.

what team members are up to, Denison makes this an opportunity to counter his tendency to be a bottleneck, by making it a practice to always ask, "Is there anything you need approval on?"

For MyTaskIt CEO and founder, Kevin Hutchinson, simple open-ended questions sometimes result in an extremely valuable one-hour conversation. His stock question to both employees and customers is, "How are we doing?" Software products need to be in continuous development, he says, but a lot of people "are afraid to ask the question for fear of getting a longer to-do list."

On our sailboat, before every race, I'll ask crewmembers to look up the course and say where the wind looks strongest. The answer is rarely clear-cut since wind is invisible, but with practice, you learn to look at the texture of the water and make good calls. Their answers serve as a check

"As a practice becomes part of our team's muscle memory, we begin to do it without effort, putting the organization on a path towards a healthy culture."

Chris Baird, managing director of Fusion Entertainment, walks for half an hour at 6am since a back injury sidelined him from playing sports. He says it's vital to be fit and alert in a high-pressured business. "I find it clears the head and gets me ready for the day," he says. "I also remind myself every day is an opportunity." That's no cliché.

"Good coffee is part of my daily ritual," says Bob Denison, president of Denison Yachting. "I credit it for making me a better person. It also gives me permission to really get going for the day."

Meditation, exercise, reading, and nutritional practices—none are earth-shaking innovations, but the point is to develop your own and engage in them for their own sake. As you do them regularly, you'll also shift gears mentally and be ready and open to the possibilities of the day ahead.

2. Make your questions a practice. Denison gathers his marketing/admin team for a 15-minute standup every day, not to tell people what to do, but for people to share what they're doing. In addition to learning

against what I'm seeing, and as a group we develop the practice of looking for the best wind throughout each race. Some days, being the first boat to spot the new wind makes a decisive difference.

3. Use practices to create culture. Like good questions, any healthy practice with our teams can be transformational. As the practice becomes part of our muscle mem-

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When 5G is fully rolled out over the next few years, these trends will only accelerate. If the next generation of boating leaders are smart, they will embrace this new technology with open arms.

The alternative to doing business as it has been done for generations is downright depressing. Consider Grow Boating's recent study with marketing consultant Olson which determined that there are a million fewer first-time boat buyers today than a decade ago — a 30 percent decline in first-time used-boat buyers and a 54 percent drop in first-time, new-boat buyers.

Or, how about this revelation: Only about two in 100 people who are researching their first boat will actually buy one, and only one of the two will keep it. I literally fell out of my chair when I saw these numbers.

The problem is well-known and two-fold. First, how to get more folks into boating and second, how to retain them

as active owners and participants. A solution for the latter will, in my humble opinion, require a drastic reimagining of this industry. For more insight into this see my colleague Reagan Haynes' article "The First Time Buyer Blues" at <https://www.tradeonlytoday.com/grow-boating/the-first-time-buyer-blues>.

As to the former problem, the good news is that we can make boating more appealing if we can figure out a way of harnessing these new technologies to capture the imagination of an ever-increasing segment of consumers who are always in search of an experience they just can't get elsewhere. Virtual and augmented reality should — in the not too distant future — be able to deliver an experience more than sufficient to kindle the interest of consumers at a fraction of the cost and with a lot more pizzazz than is currently the case.

Think this is pie-in-the-sky? Consider the online video gaming industry that has been transformed from a motley crew of

nerds in their parents' basements into a multi-billion industry that claims more than 100 million active participants (see <https://www.limelight.com/blog/state-of-online-gaming-2018/>).

Connecting to upcoming generations is going to require the boating industry to get out of its comfort zone. To take a peek at this brave new world, ask a Millennial about interactive pop-up "museums" such as the Museum of Ice Cream, Rose Mansion or the Dream Machine. They are attracting hundreds of visitors a day at \$35 or more a ticket, according to Bloomberg Businessweek. They deliver a surreal experience that patrons share on Instagram and Snapchat (see <https://www.scribd.com/article/386368622/Snap-Til-You-Shop>). Recreational boating should have one, too.

I'm convinced there are lessons to be learned and boatloads of money to be made if we just open our eyes and take a giant leap forward. ■

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ory, we begin to do it without effort, modeling behavior that puts the organization and its team members on a path towards a healthy culture.

Keeping doors open: Most leaders I've interviewed on the subject keep their door open most of the time; others walk the building to be sure they are connecting with staff regularly. Closed doors change mood and mindset. They also reduce the flow of information to as well as from leadership.

Avoid interruptions: When speaking with a team member, Thom Dammrich, president of the NMMA, says his practice is to stop everything he's doing and give them 100 percent of his attention. We all know that how well a leader ignores his or her smartphone will quickly be modeled by others.

Be mindful of others: Eric Braitmayer, CEO of Imtra Corporation, says due to past mindfulness work, he realized he needed to adjust his pace sometimes to match that of individual staff members. Being mindful of others this way shows respect and will shift any conversation from one-way to two-way.

Start meetings on time: For online conferences, Ian Atkins (president of Boats Group's predecessor, Dominion Marine Media, and my former boss) insisted we respect others' time by starting exactly on time. Plus, if five people wait six minutes for the boss to show, it better be a good meeting — you've already lost 30 minutes of productivity.

"Let's go to lunch." At Fusion Entertainment, Baird takes an employee to lunch regularly. He gets to know him/her on a personal basis and learns about his/her work while modeling the fact that he's accessible to all.

Practices will make any business or sailing team healthier, more successful, and sustainable—or the opposite. While the CEO or skipper has an out-sized effect at times, your practices in any leadership capacity will have an impact on the outcome. ■



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Marquis forms joint venture with Lexus on new 65

The Marquis-Larson Boat Group has formed a joint venture with Toyota Motor Corp. on a new Lexus 65 that Marquis is building for its Lexus division. The boat should be launched in the second half of 2019.

Rob Parmentier, CEO of the Marquis-Larson group told Soundings Trade Only that the build is proceeding as planned. The company built a Lexus 42 two years ago as a one-off, custom project, but the 65 will be a semi-custom boat.

"We've already sold the first hull," says Parmentier. "It's a more traditional build than the 42, which was built like a spaceship with all sorts of high-tech features."

The 65 will have styling cues from Lexus automobiles. The interior was designed by the Italian firm Nuvolari and Lenard, with help from Lexus engineers.