

# Lessons from the Boat: Part VI

## This crew keeps a boating attitude in their workplace

John Burnham

Most work cultures don't encourage people to slip out early. But what if such behavior were celebrated everywhere, as it is at SpinSheet Publishing Co., which produces the sailing magazine *SpinSheet*? I decided to explore this after hearing an unsolicited pitch from a staff member last fall.

"Everyone is a boater in the office," says Mary Ewenson, publisher at the Annapolis, Md.-based company. "And they have to be committed to boating, to walking the walk. We keep a chart on the wall and track how many days each of us has spent on the water and what we did each day. I'll write about my regattas. Lenny [Rudow, the editor of *FishTalk* magazine] records the fish he caught."

The exercise grew out of a "Century Club" that the staff created for *SpinSheet* readers to log their days on the water. For those who reached 100 days, the season ended with a party and a Century Club burgee.

When I checked out Ewenson's approach with two staff editors, one of them said, "I have never once received a strange look for leaving early. Mary trusts us to get our work done and knows that may not happen in a 9-to-5 framework."

Last year, the 12-person staff averaged 55 days afloat each, which is "pretty significant," Ewenson says, "considering we drive desks for a living." The staff output was significant, too: three dozen magazine issues, multiple *PortBook* publications, an annual *Start Sailing Now* guide, several websites managed, plus four crew parties.

### Building a Business on a Mission

Focused on the simple idea of getting people outside and on the water — sailing, fishing, cruising Chesapeake Bay — Ewenson and her team have started not one, but three regional boating magazines. She launched *SpinSheet* in 1995, *PropTalk* a few years later and *FishTalk* two years ago.

"We have websites and social media," Ewenson says, "and maybe fewer people read

print, but plenty still want something they can relax with away from their screens."

By all accounts, Ewenson didn't have a master plan to create a regional publishing juggernaut, but she thought a magazine could make a difference. "We can be in-

fluencers," she says. "If you don't grow up in the boating lifestyle, you may not think about it; but if exposed to boating, you'll find it's good for your soul."

### Motivating a Team

Ewenson says her main job is signing checks, adding, "You have to trust the people around you. If you don't, you spend your life checking on them."

According to another editor, Ewenson's method is built on more than trust. "Around the office you won't hear people use words like 'boss' or 'employee' — you'll hear 'teammates' or 'friends' instead. She has a deep understanding of how to

get people working together efficiently and is very sensitive to how people can be motivated not necessarily just to accomplish something, but to *want* to accomplish something."

Ewenson knows she has to hire people who are self-starters, are good at what they do and are committed to the vision. She's not looking for people who need a "clear, delineated position and want to punch the

### Nurturing Leadership, Building a Culture

clock." Rather, she wants the type who will leave early to watch their kid's soccer game, then show up to represent the company at a Saturday event.

Expanding a business operation requires balancing opportunity and risk, and Ewenson jokes that since starting the third magazine, there's a rule at her house that she can't start another new business without giving one up.

"Mary leads by example," says one editor. "She's the first to arrive and last to leave. She's also a force in the community with the Annapolis Sailing Industry Association, which she founded, the many boards she's on, such as the Eastport Yacht Club Foundation and the county's Maritime Advisory Board, and her partnership in the Annapolis boat shows."

"I'm super fortunate to have really talented team members who can manage me more than I manage them," Ewenson says. "They'll come to me sometimes and say, 'Hey, have a look at this. We might need to put more attention over here.'"

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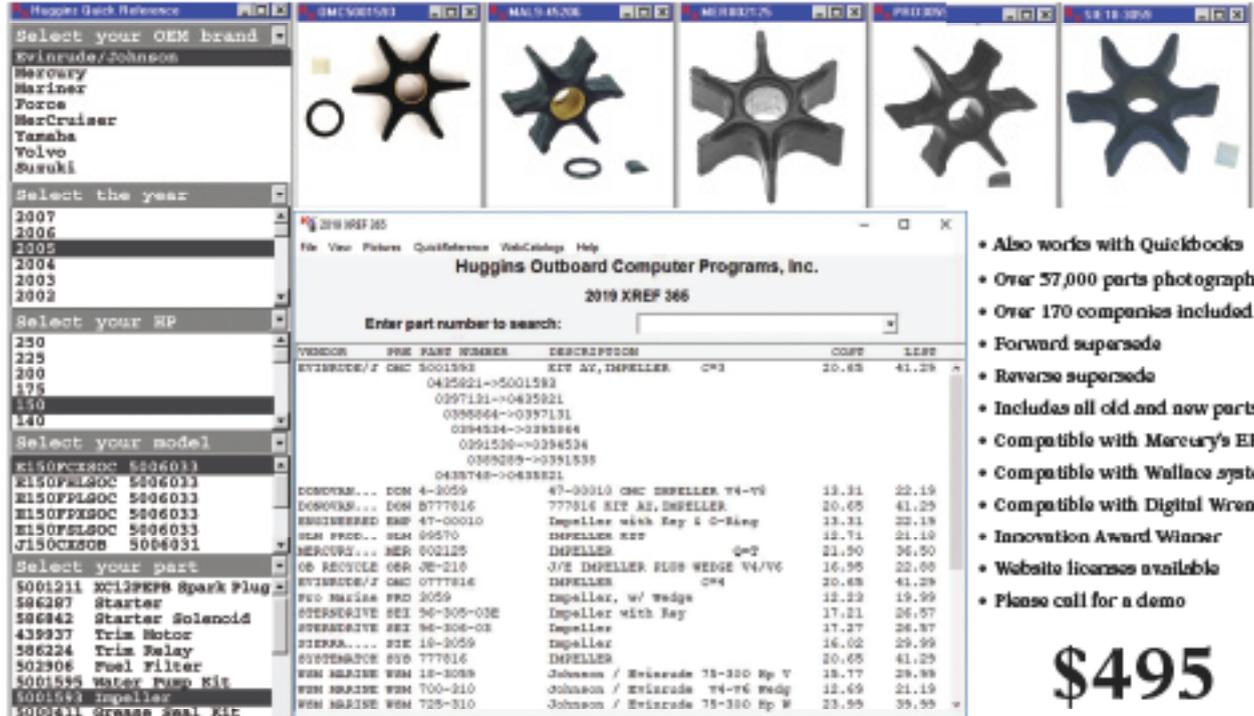
*"We keep a chart on the wall and track how many days each of us has spent on the water and what we did each day."*



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		0398864->0397121			
		0394534->0398864			
		0391530->0394534			
		0392829->0391530			
		0428748->0392829			
DONOVAN...	DOM 4-3059	47-30010 OMC IMPELLER V4-V6		13.31	22.19
DONOVAN...	DOM 577816	777816 KEY AX, IMPELLER		20.65	41.25
ENGINEERED	EMD 47-00010	Impeller with Key & O-Ring		13.31	22.19
SEA PRO...	SEA 69570	IMPELLER KEY		12.71	21.19
MERCURY...	MER 602125	IMPELLER	Q=2	21.90	36.50
OB RECYCLE	OBR 36-210	J/Y IMPELLER PLUS WEDGE V4/V6		16.95	22.00
EVINRUDE / OMC	077816	IMPELLER	Q=4	20.65	41.25
SEA PRO...	SEA 3059	Impeller, w/ wedge		12.22	19.99
OVERHAUL...	OEI 96-305-03E	Impeller with Key		17.21	26.57
OVERHAUL...	OEI 96-306-02	Impeller		17.27	26.57
STERN...	STK 10-3059	Impeller		16.02	29.99
SYSTEM...	SYS 777816	IMPELLER		20.65	41.25
SEA PRO...	SEA 18-3059	Johnson / Evinrude 75-300 Hp V		13.77	29.99
SEA PRO...	SEA 700-210	Johnson / Evinrude 74-V6 Wedg		12.65	21.19
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## Marketing Insight

people on the water today equals more boats being sold tomorrow.”

Though I agree with Giglio that the fundamental challenge is getting more folks out on the water so they can have the experience that only boating can deliver, renting them the platform to do so is putting the cart before the horse.

What we need to do is to promote a lifestyle that people will aspire to by using every available marketing channel to present boating as an experience that is cool, hot and affordable. We need to encourage people to want to go boating before trying to sell them a boat. Our first job is to get people to identify with products and services we are marketing.

I've used this column over the years to make suggestions on how this could be accomplished. As we part, here are some of my insights on how we can make boating great again.

1. The naysayers who claim this industry

doesn't have the money to advertise on national television should take a look at a 30-second Watercraft spot from The Florida Keys and Key West (*isport.tv*, search "Florida Keys Watercraft"). If this one tourist destination can afford national television along with brands hawking pillows, car mats and sealing products, what's really stopping us?

2. Thanks to cable TV there's a television show for nearly every hobby and avocation. While not everyone agreed with my embrace of Bravo's *Below Deck*, something like *Jay Leno's Garage* would be a step in the right direction.

3. There's nothing like a major motion picture to attract eyeballs and build an ethos. The next time a film like Robert Redford's *All is Lost* is seeking advertising sponsors, the boating industry should jump in bed feet first.

4. One of the best ways to get consumers to identify with a product or service is to use

a spokesperson they can identify with. It was well-known that actor Jonathan Goldsmith — aka the "Most Interesting Man in the World" from the Dos Equis beer commercials — was a longtime sailor. Why the industry did not embrace this opportunity is beyond me.

5. By now, it should be obvious that you can't sell the experience until you get folks into a boat. Some of the best ambassadors for boating are boat owners. The industry, especially dealers and marinas, have to get fully behind a National Recreational Boating Week that provides incentives (such as free boat show tickets) for owners to take a friend boating.

6. The current boat show model is too one-dimensional. The industry needs to create a new presentation model that allows customers to experience the challenges and joys of boating, rather than simply allowing potential customers to ogle the merchandise. ■

## Chaparral Launches OSX Series in Chicago

Chaparral Boats unveiled the 300 OSX at the Chicago Boat, RV and Sail Show in January, the first in a new series it calls Outboard Sport Luxury. The OSX combines a sportboat with the functionality of an outboard center console, the company says.

"We probably spent as much time designing this boat as any we've ever come up with," says Buck Pegg, Chaparral founder and executive vice president. "We spent six months just deciding on the concept."

The company was trying to create a boat the public didn't know it wanted, says Chaparral senior vice president Mike Fafard. "That's the advantage we have in building fishing boats [with the Robalo line] and sportboats, and seeing them grow inland," he says. "I think it's an indicator people want something functional."

The boat was "highly anticipated" going into the August dealer meeting, says Ann Baldree, senior vice president of Chaparral. "A lot of innovation went into this boat," she says.

The 300 OSX is designed for entertaining. "Most of these boats end up on sandbars, but they want to get there fast," Fafard says. "This boat works perfect on the Florida coast and on the lakes. Hopefully we'll get it into Lake of the Ozarks and it catches on there."

## Management Perspective

How does Ewenson develop leadership in her team?

"Ask for ideas and use them," she says. "We've been hosting crew parties for years to help people find boats to race on, and a team member said, 'Hey, let's make a wall of boats.' We called it the Boat Gallery. I wasn't sure it would be a success, but people hung out there throughout the event, taking photos of the boats, taking notes and meeting each other. Some of the

owners hovered just in front of their boat to talk it up. At the end, we couldn't get them to leave."

In an email exchange with one editor, I asked about the business culture created under Ewenson's leadership. I received this reply, which I'll leave as the final word on the subject:

"Here's a shocker: Motivated team members will show real loyalty. When the all-hands-on-deck call goes out,

EVERYONE responds. The staff puts in an extraordinary effort, particularly on weekends during boat-show season and attending events both evenings and weekends year-round.

"The key is that everyone is driven to make sure the job gets done, deadlines get met, and a high level of professionalism and quality are maintained. The team doesn't have to be instructed to aim for this; they want it themselves." ■