

# All in the Same Boat

By Alex Alley and Paula Reid

Alex Alley and Paula Reid were core crew on the Global Challenge round-the-world yacht race and own Velocity Made Good – a leadership and performance development business. They recently published their second book: **The 7 Racing Rules**. In this article we look at Rule #5: Two Watches, One Boat.



In organisations, 'Two Watches, One Boat' translates as two - or more - teams working collaboratively towards the same end (vision, mission, strategy, goal, project, etc.). This is further described as follows:

1. Two watches: different departments, offices, regions, countries, teams, shifts, projects, etc.
2. One Boat: as in you are *all in the same boat* (organisation). All in the same boat implies that everyone is experiencing the same general working conditions at the same time and are working towards the same end. People who are all in the same boat must work as a team because they face the same challenges and need to cooperate in order to succeed. The boat (organisation) will achieve greater progress if the teams share the effort and share the passion for reaching the destination.

Racing a yacht around the world is a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week operation, with no down time. Maintaining this continuous performance is achieved by splitting the crew into watches, usually two. While one watch is on deck racing the boat, the other is below deck resting, and they rotate on a regular basis (typically every four or six hours).

Within this system there needs to be a balance of expertise on both watches with each person having a double or opposite number on the other watch, sharing the same tasks.

On our boat racing in the Global Challenge – 'The World's Toughest Yacht Race' – we had a two watch system of eight people in each watch with the Skipper (CEO) and Navigator (Senior Strategic Leader) outside the watch system. It was crucial to have a balanced mix of skills, experience and attitudes to maximise the day-to-day performance of the boat consistently – it was a long race.

During a watch changeover – five times a day – there was a handover between opposite numbers to inform the upcoming crew about what had been happening, what to expect and to share best practices. This way the oncoming watch was up to speed much more quickly and therefore performance continued at a higher rate without faltering. (Rule #1: *Best for Boat*).

Have frequent handovers between work teams. Share:

- What's happened – useful headlines
- What to expect – facts *and* gut feel
- Best practice, tips and learnings

From a safety point of view it was also important to let the new watch (new shift) know the situation they were picking up and what weather (local conditions) to expect in the near future. There should be no surprises for the joining crew (who were asleep less than 30 minutes before coming on deck).

At one point during the race, in an attempt to improve the overall performance, it was decided to have a competition to see which watch could sail the most miles over a number of days. The intention was for each watch to push as hard as they could for the sake of the one boat.

However, the idea backfired. Each watch, comprising very competitive people, started to keep information, communication and motivation to themselves, rather than share it with the other watch. So rather than having two teams working together for the greater good, we ended up with two watches competing against each other to the detriment of each other and ultimately the entire team.

Very quickly this practice was scrapped as we were all in the same boat, working towards the same goal. It was important that each watch shared information and best practice with their opposite number in order to maximise the performance of

the whole team. At the end of the day we were not competing amongst ourselves but against the other eleven boats in the fleet, so the better we worked *as one team*, the better the overall result would be and the more likely we were to beat the competition.

Concentrate the effort and focus on everyone working together to beat the external competitors – the other boats (organisations) you are racing against – and eradicate any internal competitiveness such as departmental incentives or silo'd attitudes.

*So, how do you lead teams so that the different 'watches' are working collaboratively towards the progress of the 'one boat'?*

1. Share the destination.

Sharing the destination is ultimately about sharing the vision. The vision needs to be compelling, ambitious, aspirational, exciting, inspiring – visionary. Teams should understand exactly what their vision looks like in the long term, why they have it and how it translates tactically and locally.

Our vision on the Global Challenge race was to come first. To be on the top step of the winner's podium at the final awards ceremony in Portsmouth, in front of a standing ovation of the other crews, friends, family, sponsors and press. The vision was colourful, detailed, multi-sensory and motivational. Organisational visions should be equally exciting and compelling, driving and aligning everyone towards a successful future point.

2. Share the mission or raison d'être.

We also shared the same mission; the same raison d'être. Ours was 'to *race* around the world' – not to cruise or sail or swim or rally – but *race*. We were very clear on that point. We existed as a team because we had all signed up to a round-the-world yacht *race*; our raison d'être

was therefore to race and win. This was a very important point when, on Leg 2, we had to decide whether to *race or retire* after our second medivac.

### 3. Share the strategy and goals.

Organisations also need to share the strategy in order to operate as *One Boat*. The leadership team or Senior Management Team may have determined the strategy but it still needs to be thoroughly and clearly shared with everyone on the boat to ensure alignment and empowerment.

### 4. Share the values.

Finally, *Two Watches, One Boat* requires alignment around the culture and values. Behaviours and attitudes need to be consensual; the values respected, lived and believed in; the culture tacitly understood and adhered to.

When values, vision, mission, goals and strategy aren't shared, then teams/departments become silo'd, perhaps even working against each other to the detriment of the overall performance. When teams get too competitive or incentive systems are unfair, then collaboration takes second place to competition. If there is divisiveness around fundamental principles, such as whether the strategy is about price or quality, then potentially the company divides or people leave to set up their own company – and thus create two boats.

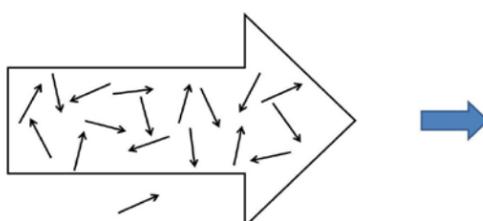
Here are some ways to achieve collaboration between teams to benefit the one organisation:

- Everyone shares, understands and buys in to the five unifying essentials at the heart of the organisation: the vision; mission; values; strategy; and goals. All of these should be clear; communicated effectively and repeatedly. An example in our case was that our skipper literally talked through the Navigational Charts at the start of each leg with both watches on deck. He explained the geography, our route, our strategy for winning – why we were taking the course we were taking and what conditions to expect.
- Leaders communicate the why and the what (vision, mission, strategy); employees are involved in the how (values, tactics). Once the skipper and navigator shared their vision and strategy for each leg, it was then delegated to each watch to carry out the strategy on a daily tactical basis through behaviours appropriate to

our values – safe, happy, fast. This sharing of the work and sharing of responsibility helps to engender a *One Boat* culture with less barriers and divisiveness vertically or horizontally across the structure.

- Leaders and managers walk the talk, actively demonstrating collaboration, *One Boat* mentality and behaviours. On Team Stelmar both the skipper and navigator kept out of the watch system so that they remained balanced across the two watches; ensuring that both teams held the same understanding and knowledge and were assuredly working in the same direction. Leadership was not biased or localised, and so remained objective and focussed on the bigger picture.
- The induction programme, ongoing development, performance management and appraisals affirm and support the *One Boat* principle. Team Stelmar's leggers (new crew who joined the boat for each leg) were given a thorough induction, enabling them to feel comfortably and intrinsically part of the *one team* as soon as possible, no matter which watch they were assigned to.
- Genuine collaboration between teams – not superficial. Cross-team, department, function, country and project working. Our two watches developed slightly different ways of working, had unique systems and practices, developed their own stories and jokes, but when it came to the work that really mattered, the collaboration was *Best for Boat (Rule #1.)* This was in the main part achieved through watch handovers at every watch change, 'happy hour' every Sunday at 6pm (which meant that both watches were on deck together for one hour to share stories and discuss team issues) and in port debriefs with the whole crew to review the past leg and seek performance improvements for the next. These Global Challenge activities are easily transferrable into business: quality handovers, 'happy hours' and whole team debriefs.

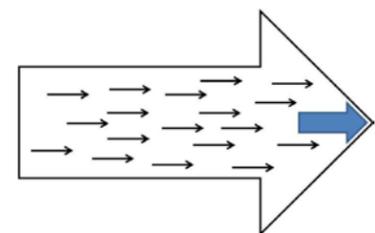
### Alignment: Two Watches, Two Boats



The previous diagram represents unaligned individuals and teams, not working collaboratively, and so pulling in different directions, potentially in conflict with each other or potentially working outside the organisation's strategy/brand, producing counter-productive wasted efforts. Activity is visible, but not necessarily the right activity at the right speed in the right direction (*Velocity Made Good.*)

The CEO/MD/Board (represented by the larger arrow) is working too far ahead or too far away and is not in touch with the reality of the organisation. They are not close enough to their crew to drive and share direction. They are too far removed to notice or be able to influence the disorder behind them.

### Two Watches, One Boat



Aligned leadership team with a clear and visionary direction, shared by management and employees. There are no resisting forces creating friction. Individuals and teams are pulling in the same direction, thus creating momentum and increasing efficiency, speed and effectiveness (maximum *Velocity Made Good*).

The CEO/MD/Board are leading from the front – being visionary and future proofing – but are also visible, accessible and in touch with the crew. Leadership is forward-looking with long-term macro vision, but also close enough to be able to focus on internal detail and productivity. Balancing both is key. Zooming out and zooming in.

### In summary

#### Rule #5 Two Watches, One Boat

**Your organisation may well consist of different teams, departments, locations, countries, shifts. Prevent them from turning into silos. Work on connecting them; glueing them together into 'one team / one boat'.**

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[www.velocitymadegood.co.uk](http://www.velocitymadegood.co.uk)