

# Velocity Made Good

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 the second edition of their book: BOAT to BOARDROOM. In this article we look at what the name of their company actually means...

## VMG – Velocity Made Good

**Velocity Made Good** or 'VMG' is a yacht racing expression used to describe the most efficient use of effort towards a goal; the antonym being wasted effort and time spent going the wrong way, straying off course or sailing too close to the wind.

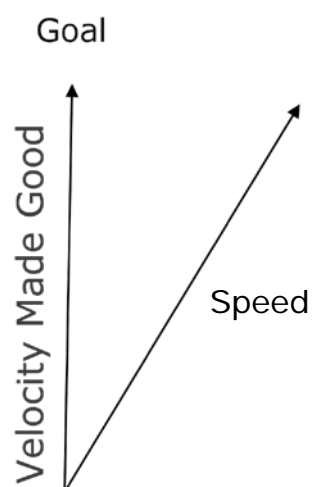
Velocity Made Good is:

- The most efficient use of effort towards a goal

Velocity Made Good is *not*:

- Straying off course
- Sailing too close to the wind

When sailing, a yacht cannot sail straight in to the wind but at an angle either side of the wind direction of approximately 40 degrees (depending on the individual boat). In order to sail in to the wind, crews have to 'tack' the boat; zigzagging towards their goal. Each boat varies (according to length, weight, build, etc.) as to their optimum speed in any given wind-speed / wind direction combination, so many boats have VMG 'Polar' charts which depict graphically the optimum boat speed to wind angle for maximising performance towards the goal.



The expression 'sailing too close to the wind' comes from this physical circumstance. If you sail too close to the wind, although heading towards the goal, progress is slow. Equally, sailing too far from the wind, although faster, will result in travelling extra distance, away from the goal. There is an optimum trade-off between boat speed and distance sailed, and that optimum is VMG.

'VMG' is a yacht racing expression used to describe the optimum speed achievable towards a goal or 'mark', taking into account factors such as wind strength and wind angle.

**Velocity** *n* speed of movement in a given direction

**Made** *v* produced; performed; created

**Good** *adj* high quality; beneficial; financially sound

If organisational success were compared to a yacht race, there would be a finish line to cross ahead of the competition and buoys (targets) to go around en route. The overall organisational strategy would determine the route and the operational tactical activities would determine the hourly progress of the boat. BOTH need to take VMG into account. The long-term direction and the short-term activity should be the most efficient effort towards the goal.

Sometimes progress will be fast as the boat sails with the wind, propelled along with its great spinnaker sail up. At other times progress will be frustratingly slow, as the boat tacks in to the wind. The wind is the force, whether good or bad, driving the boat. Leveraging the wind's force to the best of the crew's ability is what yacht racing is all about.

The analogy then is that organisations need to sail at their optimum angle according to both long-term climate and short-term local weather conditions.

## Sailing Too Close to the Wind

If businesses sail too close to the wind (by cutting corners, for example) they will lose speed and potentially stall. In organisations, examples of this may be: under-resourcing a project; failing to sustain cash flow; running a company with too few people (and thus saving on wages); or over-promising and under-delivering to a client.

Similarly, sailing completely into a no-go zone, thus stopping progress, may be evidenced as: competing too hard on price at the detriment of quality; producing products where competitors already have the market share; or providing an out-of-date service.

Conversely, sailing in the other direction – too far off course, may mean: delivering products or services that are far beyond the core purpose – vision, mission or values – of the organisation; or a strategic volte-face when in fact none was required or beneficial to long-term performance.

If organisations get distracted and sail off in the wrong direction – although appearing very busy – they will make less progress towards their ultimate goal (vision, strategic plan, mission, etc). Heading off course, losing focus of the finish line or buoys, will slow a business down and deviate it from its core purpose.

## Polar Charts

Ideally, organisations have their own version of a 'Polar Chart'. This would not only depict the no-go zones and the areas that were too close to the wind or too far off course, but also the positive framework within which they should operate.

Discussing and tangibly defining what outcomes or outputs (products or services) an organisation *should* aim for is just as useful as defining the ones they *shouldn't*.

A graphic illustration of these VMG and non-VMG areas would be extremely useful for everyone working for the organisation (who are all in the same boat). The discussions around determining what goes in and what stays out would be enlightening and aligning – for both the leadership team and the employees.

So what is your organisation's optimum zone of performance – the products or services that sit at the heart of your core purpose and that you're really good at? And what's your definition of sailing too close to the wind or too far off course? Do you really know? Is it worth a discussion to find out how aligned your leadership team really are and what they can do to achieve maximum performance towards their goals?



Alex Alley and Paula Reid are Directors of Velocity Made Good, a leadership and performance development company based in London.

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