

Communication For Crews



The first is our new series of articles to help you improve your speed and decision making skills. We will cover general information as well as class specific guides as well as interviews and articles from some of the best dinghy sailors from around the world.

To start the ball rolling I have included an article I use as a basic guide to communication for crews. As a crew one of our most important and sometimes over looked jobs is communication with the skipper, below are some of the things you should be thinking of when your hanging out the side looking at a fleet of boats tacking on you, look ahead, plan ahead and communicate with your help to anticipate the fleet and the conditions.

Aims: To provide information on wind, waves and boat movement in the short term (what WILL happen) and long term (what you THINK will happen)

Short Term

Short term we are talking about the next minute of sailing, this information will be used to make boat speed decisions. Generally we will communicate when things are going to change, no communication means no change, this is communicating in itself so be aware of silence

Long Term

Long term decisions are those which will effect mainly the tactics and race plan. Wind shifts and the movement of the fleet above or behind are examples of some things that the skipper needs to know about

Upwind

Pressure coming on the right, should knock - Stating an increase in pressure with a location and what you think it will do. This is short/medium term information, this can be used to make a tactical decision and also a boat speed decision. Once the information is known to both skipper and crew a decision can be made on tactics. Final decision rests with the skipper. Boat speed decisions are made by the skipper and maybe communicated to the crew if they need something in particular eg ease jib with the gust.

Pressure on in 5,4,3,2,1 - Short term information purely for boat speed decisions. Both skipper and crew use the information. Both skipper and crew will trim sails and make choices from the information given. Skipper may communicate if he needs something specific from the crew.

Boat Tacked 3 boats lengths to leeward, drive hard over the top - Short term tactical information that will require a boat speed decision. Crew has identified a risk that the skipper needs to know about and has given advise to eliminate the risk (drive hard over the top). This means drive the boat low and hard over the top to eliminate being lee bowed. This is a short term boat on boat tactical decision that can be made by either crew member but cannot be discussed as it must happen immediately.

Boats ahead have knocked 20 degrees, pressure on the right, need to get there - Long term weather and tactical information. States the change in direction and the pressure and what is causing it and what may effect it. Also stated an opinion that you need to get there immediately as it is a large change. Once the information has been communicated the action to be taken can be discussed and a decision made. Skipper has the final say.

Downwind

Downwind in light condition the crew controls the angles the boat is sailed for maximum boat speed and VMG. He does this by calling the pressure in the kite and calling the skipper up and down to match the pressure eg pressure dyeing come up, hold there, go with it (run away). The skipper controls the placement on the course (left, right or middle. Gybe now etc). These decisions can be discussed but kite trim is number one priority for crew, if he is looking around for information he is not concentrating on spinnaker trim.

Downwind the crew MUST have his priority set around the spinnaker, the skipper can look around and communicate information that is necessary for the crew to know. Simply put, EYES ON THE SPINNAKER ONLY.

General Points

- **Skipper has the final say.** It is important that one person has the final say in things. As a crew you need to accept this and move on. Build a bridge and get over it. If your information is good enough you will both be thinking the same thing tactically anyway so it is really a non issue.
- **The skipper can ignore the information you give if it is irrelevant,** but he's not a mind reader. Give him everything you think he needs, boat on our hip go for speed. He should already know this but if he doesn't he does now. If he already knows he can just ignore what you say.
- **You are providing information.** Don't tell your skipper what to do, give them the information they need and your opinion, never argue over a decision. There is a time and a place to discuss the decisions and the reasons for them and it is NOT on the water. No matter how stupid the decision or the mistake, your job as a crew is to keep it all together. You are the calming influence and the one in control. You have more power as a crew than any skipper will ever admit or know.
- **Be consistent.** Don't be afraid of being wrong, call it as you see it, if you don't know what's going to happen, say it. Pressure coming don't know the direction. At least the skipper knows about the pressure and knows he has to be ready for anything.
- **Toughen up.** Put you ego aside and accept you wont always get your way. You are the engine of the boat and provide the boat speed. Tactics are useless if you are going slow and cant put the boat where you want it. Do your job and only your job. There is a time and place for discussing what the other team member does. Don't do it during a race.