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Who Manages There?

FRIEND OR FOE



Middle man or meddler: the role and relevance of the owner's project manager (PM) is often a controversial subject. They can offer immense assistance to a project, but they can also be disruptive and divisive. Here Nic Clarke of Palma based Pure Superyacht Refit Management, a project management firm, argues that a competent and expert – on site – PM is the client, captain and project's friend. He also touches on key aspects of the job, supplying tips – even a form of checklist – to assess whether your PM or PM company is doing their job and truly representing your interests and advancing your project.

WITH THE ADVENT OF THE SUPER-, MEGA- AND gigayacht, good project management is essential. It should be embraced as a partner and an additional tool working for you in the yard, adding value to your vessel's work period. In the case of all-inclusive yard/build facilities, the yard-assigned project manager will naturally be representing, and be more biased to, the yard's interest than the owner's. In an open facility, the project manager will support the vessel, owner and captain with his knowledge of specialists and work to be performed.

With the increasing sophistication, regulatory requirements and technological complexities of today's superyacht, a captain's role is more than ever pulled in a multitude of directions. He or she cannot be expected to know everything and have a grasp of each and every activity and system. Therefore, whichever situation, it's prudent that a project manager is brought on for refits and/or new builds to represent the vessel and owner's interests for the work period. This representative should be an independent specialist, hired by the captain, owner or the yacht management company.

Captains and crews frequently resent yard time, but with today's requirements and workload (especially if yours is a charter vessel) it is a necessity to keep your vessel in perfect condition and in most cases a requirement to keep your vessel up to code. Utilising a project manager shares your workload, helps relieve the stress and allows a complete overview of all works being undertaken.

The Foe

Some companies and managers say they offer you the full project management service but, in reality, are no more than a couple of people sitting in an office pushing paper around rather than being out in the boatyard, on the vessel, managing. There are the others who are basically an introduction service (captain to contractor, contractor to captain) and inevitably looking for their commission payment without any care or passion for the project. These types of companies and managers should be avoided at all costs otherwise it will lead to disappointment, frustration and ultimately a bad experience and so consequently a bad project.

The Friend

However, there are a few select project management companies that specialise in a full, hands-on client service to you and your vessel.

They don't supply "in-house" or "preferred" tradesmen, but can offer you a completely unbiased and impartial selection of the best-suited specialists for the jobs required at the correct price, so that you, the client, can, in consultation with your project manager, agree on the best craftsmen to carry out the works.

By utilising a good project manager/management company, the client should be able to unload some of his responsibility, taking the opportunity to have an ally and support in the boatyard getting decisions made and work completed. Project managers should be looked at as a partner and an asset to the vessel and an integral part of the crew, facilitating a smooth operation in the boatyard. They should also be a buffer between the vessel and contractor or boatyard if required, as they are both the "go between" and "fall guy".

In most extensive refit/build periods tempers can on occasion get a little frayed. The project manager has an overall understanding of the works taking place and is in the best position (and on site) to deal with most eventualities. This will help insulate the owner and captain in their relationship to the yard and craftsmen. Obviously some areas will need input from the owner, designer, captain etc. but having the project manager there should ensure less stress, hassle and interruption, which will consequently give the owner and captain a more enjoyable and, in the case of a new build, exciting experience.

Remember, as ever, changing something or adding to the worklist can lead to increased costs and time.

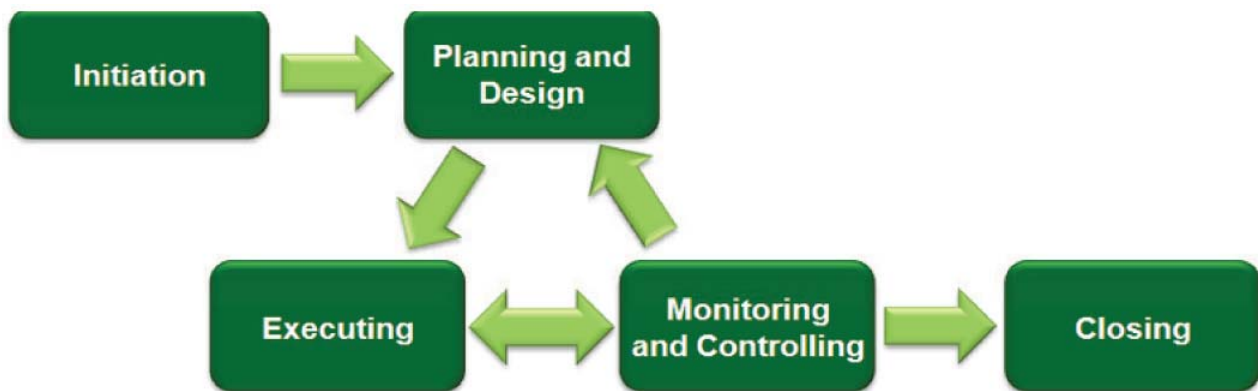
If the relationship with your project manager or management company is not good; if you feel you're not getting the attention you are paying for; you never see your manager; you are organising and making decisions and getting more involved in areas out of your expertise; you are not getting progress or budget updates; the companies that have been presented or thrust on you are not performing to the standard required, do not waste any time, you are on the downward spiral to an unfortunate ending and all ties should be severed immediately with the project manager and, if needed, the management company.

Likewise, the relationship between the owner/captain and project manager must be tolerable; all have their own individual characters and their own thoughts on the way things should be handled. This is where trust must be given to both sides. Some individuals are certainly more demanding and harder to get on with than others, some have more experience than others, but if things are getting particularly unpleasant between the client and project manager it is better for both sides to be able to terminate contracts for the sake of the project. Nobody wins when it becomes a trial to serve, and ultimately the project loses. However, you must remember that as project manager you hold a professional responsibility. Yes, relationships with owners, captains and yacht managers should be good on a professional, amiable level, but you must keep the necessary distance too.

Many yard periods have too short an allocation of time by the client. This means the chance of getting the preferred and necessary works completed on time is unlikely. Issues crop up from what might have been a simple project, taking more time and affecting the schedule and budget. Even getting orders and supplies delivered can affect the project's duration. This in itself can be the cause of irritation between project manager and client.

Simple early communication, planning and trust of your project manager can relieve the majority of this.

Project management is essentially a simple five-step process:



Initiation

Early communication and planning are vital. This might mean a visit to the vessel by the project manager before the yacht arrives in the yard to determine the nature and scope of works, the ability of the yard and available craftsmen's skill levels and its environment. Timeline and budgeting are assessed and items with long lead times discussed and ordered.

Planning and Design

In-depth planning helps to determine whether the works can be concluded within the time constraints, from scheduling of tradesmen, project execution, ordering and delivery of parts and supplies, to even a preferred spot in the boatyard to facilitate ease of works, whether it is out of the water with extra space required for cranes or berthed side-to as opposed to stern-to.

All this is part of the planning process and should be done with input from the project manager of the yard where you're going to have the works undertaken.

Executing

This stage involves putting all the planning into action to accomplish the project's goal. The execution process involves the coordinating of resources and scheduling of various individual jobs and tradesmen in the correct order as they could have an impact on other works being completed. This is known as waterfall scheduling.

Monitoring and Controlling

Monitoring and controlling are imperative to obtain accurate feedback regarding the progress in all phases of works and ensuring the works carried out conform to the standard and specifications required. If needed, assess and identify any additional jobs necessary that might not have been included or anticipated in the initial plan and assess what effect they will have on scheduling, budget and timeline.

Also, determine any corrective or preventative measures necessary to ensure the project stays as close to the original program as possible. Monitoring is also used to give precise feedback on the progress of works, cost of works to date and to provide an estimate of remaining costs, duration and how the project conforms to the initial plan.

Closing

Finalising all work activities in all phases of the project. It is also the acceptance that all works have been completed to the standards agreed and the settling of all payments due. It is a time to reflect and assess if, what and where issues arose, what effect they had on the overall cost, scope of works and time and how that could have been avoided.

Stages 2, 3, & 4 (planning and design, executing, monitoring and controlling) will be visited numerous times throughout the project's duration as progress changes and the scope of works changes, all requiring constant monitoring and updating.

*Communication is vital in
all projects; it's the lifeblood
of any work – period*

These five steps are the fundamentals of project management and they directly relate to the basic triangle of Quality, Time & Price. Naturally, the ideal is to get the best possible quality in the shortest possible time for the best price. I say the best price because going cheapest is, in most cases, not the best. The old adage of “you get what you pay for” is generally correct. Likewise doing it in the shortest time could result in corners being cut, a shoddy job being done, which will lead to further time required and additional costs later on. You have to be realistic with the budgeting allowance, especially as greater sophistication and regulation impact are becoming the norm in the marine industry. Compromising on price will inevitably result in poor quality. If this happens and changes need to be made to regain quality this could also result in increased time in the yard and consequently additional yard costs. Getting a more capable company to carry out the works in a better timeframe could have spent those extra costs more wisely. These are all things that the project manager must juggle to find the most acceptable compromise to give the vessel and owner the best possible job for the best price in a sensible timeframe. Remember, as ever, changing something or adding to the worklist can lead to increased costs and time.

In addition to the five fundamentals, a professional project manager will be visiting the boat frequently and have a work/change order book at hand to record any requests and changes required that deviate from the original plans. This is critical; each order requires agreeing and signing off by the authorised person, as during the works the chief stew, deckhand, engineer etc. will all have their own requests. This documentation will help protect both the vessel and contractor later whilst explaining where additional time has been taken and additional costs may have been incurred when it comes to finalising payments.

A constant log should be kept of works being conducted. The progress and performance, tradesmen on board and their hours, discussions, their relevance to the work and the results of them along with lists of attendees should be noted. The log should be updated daily. Additionally

a photographic record of relevant and critical stages along with milestones achieved should be dated and kept as a visual reference.

These logs are imperative for three reasons:

- a) To ensure all works are noted and correspond with the original plans and any additional work orders. This will act as a timeline of actual works undertaken and can be used as a reference for monitoring where delays (if any) have been caused; moreover, to ensure that payments being requested for work completed are justified.
- b) The visual log is to record critical and contentious events for discussion and analysis.
- c) Furthermore, if for some reason your project manager is ill, or unable to continue with the project, then a replacement can step in and after reviewing the logs will be immediately up to speed with your mission.

Communication is vital in all projects; it's the lifeblood of any work – period. Whether it's delivering to the contractor/tradesmen clear, concise instructions or updating the owner, it also helps to identify in advance any areas that could have a negative impact on the project and the opportunity to rectify those areas before they become an issue.

Regular formal meetings should take place with all essential decision-makers where possible, with designers, owners, captains, yard managers, project managers and lead contractors all having the opportunity to air and discuss any thoughts, changes, ideas, budgets etc. and view GAs or amendments of the on-going works. These are the times to be signing off change orders, phases of works and payments. If necessary, this can be conducted via conference call or video link. These more official discussions should be minuted and distributed to all attendees and relevant parties.

More informal daily contact with the captain and lead contractors/tradesmen gives both the project manager and captain time to relay observations, thoughts, instructions and brief updates on progress and if additional areas need to be viewed more closely. Finally, an authorised signatory must sign off completion notices for job acceptance and rejection. This ensures all parties know exactly where the stage works are at throughout the project.

Do your homework diligently; it's worth spending time on the selection of a project manager – ask as many questions and references of him as if you were taking him on as a member of crew. Some project managers can be your biggest foes, but remember good project managers can be your best friend and asset throughout the project and beyond.

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