

SUE PELLING

# SAIL FOR A LIVING

FIND A JOB, START A BUSINESS, CHANGE YOUR LIFE

- Gap years
- Superyachts
- Marine industry
- Charter
- Sailing schools
- Racing and much more...

"A really useful aid to kick start your sailing career"

BEN AINSLIE CBE, Olympic Gold Medallist

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Sue Pelling



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# ***Introduction***

Many of us spend years and years in a job we loathe yet we are too afraid of quitting and escaping the rat race and the day-to-day predictability. Only those who've experienced it will understand how the daily commute and routine of a regular job can become oppressive in its land-locked security.

*Sail for a Living* will help those with an interest in sailing and the sea to escape that nine-to-five monotony and realise what options are available. There's advice from a wealth of industry experts who have learned the hard way and are happy to share their experiences. Information on career paths and qualifications are mixed with practical tips and words of warning. It is written by someone with personal experience of switching careers into the marine industry, and aims to give an honest insight in to how to make the change and to do so successfully.

While quitting a well-paid job for a more 'fun' occupation could, on the surface, be seen to be naïve and irresponsible, the long-term benefits – including health, lifestyle and peace of mind – often outweigh the reasons to stay. You need, however, to plan your new career carefully and avoid common mistakes which could jeopardise your success.

Changing careers is often sparked by a life event or feeling of discontent. It's often those who are forced into a situation such as redundancy and who have had to rethink their career structure, who have taken the plunge and been given the opportunity to exploit their free spirit. Interestingly, more often than not, they find it is one of the best moves they've ever made. It's also one of the bravest steps anyone is ever likely to take because it is the first move to recognising they need to be honest with themselves.

Because switching careers is such a huge life change, it's important to remember that the emotions that are likely to be experienced while going through a decision-making process will be immense and there'll certainly be periods of doubt in the mind, which is quite normal. When this happens, it is important to remember the reasons that sparked the move in the first place and ask yourself where you would rather be?

Because sailing careers often offer an attractive lifestyle many of them involve low pay and long hours. But as most who work in the marine industry will confirm, the key to success is all about balancing salary with job satisfaction.

We can all dream about sitting on the deck of a yacht sipping sundowners in our new-found glamorous career but in reality working in the marine industry is, like any hobby-led sport, probably one of the most demanding occupations to be involved in. Unless you are fortunate enough to land yourself a senior position, perhaps working on a superyacht and mixing with the rich and famous, the opportunities to enjoy the cocktail hour are generally fairly limited. That said, there's probably 100 per cent more chance of that happening than there would be while sitting in the office in your current day job.

## **A wealth of opportunity**

So what options are available? Because the marine industry is so diverse there's basically something for everyone. It is one of the largest recreational industries, with statistics from the British Marine Federation showing 2.9 million adults took part in boating activities in 2010. In the US the figure is greater than 70 million.

It is important however, to research the market thoroughly to get an idea of the area in which you'd be most suited to

work, and ask yourself a few questions that will help clarify your motivation and goals:

- Why do you want to quit your job and take up a career in the marine industry?
- What sort of service could you provide from your interests or current skills?
- Would you be prepared to take time out to build up qualifications?
- What sort of demand is there for the service you could provide?
- Who do you know who has a similar occupation within the industry?
- Are they successful in what they do?
- Can you see how improvements could be made in their particular job, and do you think you could do the job better?
- What sort of money would you need to earn to make the idea viable?

The marine industry values those with a wide range of skills, so the more you have to offer in the way of qualifications and experience, the more opportunities there'll be available. Whatever your skill is, there's a good chance you can use it within the marine industry.

If you are passionate about communications, there are plenty of openings in the professional arena of the world's many global yacht races, or pro regattas. If you have a particular technical skill you could perhaps bag a job aboard a hi-tech racing yacht.

An interesting yet highly demanding job for those passionate about fine cuisine is becoming an onboard chef. These jobs, many of which are based in the Mediterranean or Caribbean, can be fairly well paid but are often seasonal.

Teaching sailing can be one of the most rewarding jobs so, if you think you have what it takes to help others learn the skills of sailing, then becoming a sailing instructor is

definitely one to consider. To give you an idea, there are 2,300 Royal Yachting Association recognised training establishments including shore-based centres around the globe, which means there are plenty of opportunities for instructors.

If working in the sun is something that really appeals to you, then the charter and shore-based holiday industry is an option worth considering. Because these sorts of jobs are considered demanding, there's a fairly high turnaround of staff, which means there's often plenty of availability for qualified instructors and ground staff such as nannies and centre managers.

Whatever you decide, whether it be crewing on a charter boat or skippering a superyacht, it's worth obtaining qualifications. According to the Marine Leisure Association, nearly 50 per cent of yachts working commercially around the world are Red Ensign vessels, which means they are registered as British flagged vessels and you'll need RYA/MCA qualifications to get a job aboard them. If you are looking to work onboard a non-Red Ensign vessel, the regulations vary considerably depending on the country of registry so you need to check with the relevant Maritime Authority.

And a final word of wisdom from ocean racing sailor Pete Goss: 'Take the time to really work out: a) why you are thinking of changing careers, and b) what you want out of it . . . then go for it because life is too short.'

## **About the author**

Sue Pelling is a freelance journalist specialising in yacht racing, marine, lifestyle and travel, producing features for numerous titles including *Yachting World*, *Yachting Monthly*, *Practical Boat Owner*, *Classic Boat*, *Motorboats* and *Yachting*

*and Motorboats Monthly* and *SuperYacht World*. She is also the Vice Chairman of the Yachting Journalists' Association.

Sue spends 'another tough day at the office' as eighteenth 'man' aboard America's Cup yacht BMW Oracle.



Sue started her career as a horse riding instructor but switched careers and used her other passionate hobby of dinghy racing as the basis of her new career. She joined *Yachts & Yachting* magazine and worked as Dinghy Editor for over 20 years. This was followed by an eight-year stint working at *Yachting World* editing [yachtingworld.com](http://yachtingworld.com). Here she covered most of the world's major regattas such as the Olympic Games, Vendée Globe, Volvo Ocean Race, Mini Transat, America's Cup and had access to a wealth of individuals who sail for a living.

Sue is also a keen racing sailor with a particular passion for National 12 racing and classic yachts. Her spirited nature has also led her to the extreme side of the sport, including competing in the Mini Transat 200-mile, double handed

Demi-Clé race, the Fastnet Race, and crewing an Extreme 40 around the Isle of Wight.

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# ***Chapter 1***

## ***Working in the yacht charter industry***

### **What it's all about**

Working as professional crew on yachts used for sailing charter or flotilla holidays is relatively accessible and a great way to enjoy your passion for the water. Yacht charter is the practice of renting a vessel for travelling to coastal, inland or island destinations, and is a popular holiday choice for those wishing to explore the world and learn how to sail at the same time. Yacht charter destinations from the River Thames or Norfolk Broads to more far flung dream destinations such as the Caribbean, Far East or Australia, are hugely popular which means there are always plenty of exciting job options available.

Yacht charter is one of the most popular holiday pursuits because it gives the client the freedom to choose from a wide variety of activities ranging from bareboat charter (sole responsibility and use of boat), skippered charter (boat with a professional skipper), or flotilla (cruise in company with instruction).

**Working as a skipper of a charter yacht allows you to exploit your passion for teaching. Photo - Sunsail.**



You'll also find that most of the larger sailing holiday companies such as Sunsail, The Moorings and Neilson offer a mixture of shorebased watersports holidays, including windsurfing, dinghy sailing, and flotilla sailing, which means there's always huge demand for positions in the charter industry on and off the water.

Skippers, mates, sailing instructors, hostesses, engineers, sailing base managers and childcare experts are the sort of positions you are likely to find in this field (see page 14-16 for more about job opportunities). The beach teams are an integral part of the set up at most holiday centres so, even if you are not a sailing expert, but have managerial qualities for example, it could be a route worth pursuing. Shorebased beach holidays, however, are instructor-led so you'll need teaching qualifications if you decide that is the route you'd like to take (see page 64-76 for teaching qualifications and job opportunity ideas).

The choice and size of charter yachts at these sailing bases will vary according to the type of work they are engaged in, but generally the maximum size of a charter

yacht – known as a Small Vessel – is 24 m (78 ft). Small Norfolk Broad/river-type charter boats are likely to start at around 7–9 m (20–27 ft). Because these sorts of boats are working on the relatively flat waters of inland rivers/waterways and therefore based in more confined areas you'll find they will have relatively low/shallow freeboard (depth of hull) compared with more ocean-going vessels that have to contend with the rigours of large waves crashing over the deck.

Flotilla yachts are those working as a fleet for some of the larger sailing holiday companies such as Sunsail, The Moorings, Nautilus and Neilson. A flotilla holiday is a popular way of cruising in company for those with little or no experience of sailing. Flotillas are often arranged to accommodate singles, couples and small groups who wish to sail together within a fleet of up to 14 yachts.

Some companies cater for special interest groups such as archaeology and culinary and, for those who like to bare all, naturist charter holidays are a popular option, as are companies such as [GaySail.com](http://GaySail.com) specialising in gay flotilla and charter.

Because flotillas are generally run under the guidance of qualified staff from the charter company, clients have virtually all the advantages of independent sailing, travelling from destination to destination knowing they have the support of safety back-up should anything untoward occur. The size and type of yachts depend on the location and can range between 13–20 m (40–60 ft), but generally on a Mediterranean islands flotilla-style holiday, yachts average out at 42 ft and are generally recognised designs such as Jeanneau or Beneteau.

Another sector in the charter industry is corporate yacht charter, which is a popular choice for the non-marine industry using sailing as a means of rewarding staff or entertaining important clients. Company teambuilding

events aboard charter yachts is equally popular with many companies finding the environment of being on the water, away from the office, the ideal place to develop strategy and ideas.

**Crewing a corporate charter yacht is a tough and demanding job but provides plenty of opportunity to meet new people. Photo - Sunsail.**



Charter companies, including Solent Events - corporate sailing specialists - and most of the large yacht charter companies, provide tailor-made programmes with specific activities to engage and reward staff.

Whether you choose to work for a privately owned small company, for one of the large charter businesses around the world, or even set up your own business in the charter industry, there's plenty of opportunities and numerous positions for a variety of different skills and qualifications.

The yacht charter industry is also a great way to gain experience in a fairly short period of time, and a great opportunity to decide what area of the market you would be

best suited to. Many of the large flotilla companies operate fleets of yachts during the summer holiday season in places like the Mediterranean and the Caribbean as well as the UK, so there are often plenty of opportunities to pick up seasonal jobs.

Yacht charter is also well worth considering if you are thinking of taking a gap year and already have the necessary qualifications. You don't have to be a university student to take a gap year. More and more adults are opting to take time out of their monotonous routine behind a desk and choosing adventure as an alternative. If it is possible to take a sabbatical, then this is an excellent way of seeing if you are cut out for life on the ocean waves.

**Getting a job in warm climates makes every day at the 'office' much more bearable. Photo - Sunsail.**



Yacht chartering has always been a popular way for clients to enjoy sailing in some of the world's most desirable locations and, as people discover the delights of charter and flotilla holidays, more job opportunities are created. Because most larger operations have a big turnaround of clients throughout the season, the fleets of yachts are updated on a fairly regular basis which means the standard is generally high, giving you, as skipper, mate, engineer or hostess, the opportunity to sail some of the newest, innovative charter yachts on the market.

Although jetting off abroad to enjoy the obvious incentives such as sun, sand constant breezes, and crystal clear blue water sounds like the perfect option for your new found sailing career, it's worth remembering that working in this sort of industry can be incredibly demanding. You'll find the novelty of working in the intense heat and the long hours associated with this career will probably diminish after a while, which is why this particular option can, depending on the sort of job you choose, have a relatively short-term 'life expectancy.'

## **Top Tip from James Stevens - former RYA Training Manager and Chief Examiner**

*If you are working in the City and thinking of throwing it all in to go yachting, the first thing you should do is have a medical. If you fail the eyesight test for example - maybe you're colour blind - then there really is no option other than to rethink your career option. It lasts five years, costs approximately £150, and it's worth every penny.*

*Photo — Sunsail*





**Paradise found . . . although the charter industry is demanding, it has its benefits particularly if you opt for a job in the Caribbean. Photo - Sue Pelling.**



The UK charter option may not possess as many attractive qualities as a job in the Caribbean or Mediterranean, for example, but gaining valuable experience where the industry is particularly buoyant is well worth considering. According to the British Marine Federation's latest Leisure Key Performance Indicators survey 2009/10, revenue from the Hire/Charter/Training sector reached £2.63 m - £1.60 m



of that from the Charter/Sea School sector alone. This equates to 8.9 per cent of the overall marine industry revenue.

Vaughan Smedley – former Army Major and more recently Telecoms Manager for a global investment company in the City of London – said moving his career to work as a charter skipper in the UK for Sunsail was a great move. Smedley, who was made redundant at 58 years old, said he was in a fortunate position of having paid off his mortgage, and having a very supportive wife. ‘It’s not the sort of job where you are going to make a fortune by any means but I now have a very enjoyable working life because I have no pressure. I think I came to the conclusion that at this stage in my life the chances of getting another similar job in London were fairly slim, and because I had such a passion for sailing, skippering a charter yacht seemed the obvious choice.’

Managing to gain his qualifications to skipper commercial yachts during his previous jobs, was a real advantage too because it meant Smedley was in a good position to market himself as a qualified skipper. He now finds himself deeply involved as a corporate hospitality charter skipper covering many of the larger events such as Cowes Week and the Round the Island Race but like many charter skippers, he does confess to having to do the occasional yacht delivery or bit of teaching to subsidise the salary.

## **Part-time option**

Because many positions in the charter industry are seasonal and therefore are run on a freelance basis, you may find it necessary to subsidise your earnings in the low season with another job. Employees of some of the big charter companies which offer holidays for a variety of sports other than just sailing find taking a job in a skiing resort for example is a good substitute.

If you are happy to travel, and want to really apply yourself, then ideally you should consider going for a job within a British-flagged company that also runs charter in places like the Caribbean. These companies often employ crew to carry out transatlantic charter crossings, and offer the option to work the season running the yachts at the holiday destination.

With this in mind, it pays to have at least one skill other than skippering a yacht in order to make it work. One of the best options, particularly if you have a flair for good communication, is to become an instructor. Charter skipper Vaughan Smedley said he would have done better to have concentrated on getting his teaching exams earlier. 'I seriously think I spent too long actually sailing rather thinking about alternatives. I now realise the more instructor certificates you have, the more employable you are. Now I have my instructor's certificate it allows me to sail in the summer and teach in the winter months. Teaching theory such as navigation is also a good winter option.'

**Companies such as OnDeck are keen to attract crew for transatlantic crossings as well as corporate charters in places like Antigua Sailing Week. Photo - Sue Pelling.**



## **Do you have what it takes?**

If you think working long hours in the intense heat is something you could cope with, what about your views on dealing with the general public and your customer care skills? Are you a good communicator, and do you have an everlasting supply of patience? If you answer yes to all the above, then you could possess some of the qualities needed to work on charter yachts at home or abroad. This sort of client-led industry is all about imparting knowledge through good communication, and being someone who can stay calm in difficult situations is also an asset in this sort of job. Because you'll invariably be working in such close quarters with clients and associates, an ability to remain tolerant is also crucial.

Annie O'Sullivan - Director of [girlsforsail.com](http://girlsforsail.com) - the successful UK race training/charter company that was set up at the beginning of 2000, says one of most important

attributes is being able to really like people and enjoy their company.

*'If you are a bit of an introvert and have spent years working on your own sitting in front of your computer in an office, you will not appreciate having six people sitting right next to you for a week on your boat. Thankfully I love having people around and I really don't like being alone so it worked for me, but I would say you need to be naturally sociable, have lots of patience and tolerance, and ideally be naturally enthusiastic. Working in this sort of business is extremely hard work.'*

**Annie O'Sullivan (second from left) set up her own company [girlsforsail.com](http://girlsforsail.com) in 2000. Photo - Girlsforsail.**



You could find yourself working on a 10-20 m (35-60 ft) yacht based in the Mediterranean or Caribbean but there'll generally be a high turnover of guests which means a fast turnaround at the end of a charter period. The usual period is one or two weeks, which means you'll be in charge of making sure the charter guests utilise and enjoy the time they have aboard.