

# Leadership auf hoher See

Erkenntnisse von der Segelregatta „Atlantic Rally for Cruisers“



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It is four o'clock in the morning. Apart from a spectacular starry sky, there is hardly anything to see. We know that other boats are nearby. Yet we feel we are at the mercy of the merciless ocean. Most of all, tonight I'm thinking of keeping the course steady so we can finally break the world record for Atlantic crossing in extreme sailing.

In quiet moments on land, I like to think about those nights and what we achieved together – my crewmates and I won the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (ARC), a sailing regatta from the Canary Islands to St. Lucia in the Caribbean, with no engine across the Atlantic, in just over eight days. And I often think of the topic of leadership culture. In my opinion, there are some important parallels.

Achieving Business Excellence requires strong teams whose members pull together. This can be challenging in the workplace under normal conditions, even when everyone feels safe and the level of stress is relatively low. Imagine what we can learn from an extreme sailing regatta: 15 people live on an area smaller than most executive offices and spend about eight days together, swinging up and down continuously at 23 knots per hour. They work in a rigid shift: four hours working, four hours sleeping. If only one member of the crew dances out of line, the boat can capsize within seconds. And because the conditions at sea can change very quickly, the team must always be agile and adaptable.

Given what we've experienced in this race, I'd like to share six insights on leadership culture on the high seas that translate into leadership in business. Trust plays a special role in both cases. On a sailboat, we not only rely on the confidence in the skills and judgment of the crew members, we literally put our lives in the hands of others.

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## **INSIGHTS INTO TEAM LEADERSHIP FROM THE HIGH SEAS:**

### **1**

#### **Take advantage of the energy created by stress.**

How will 15 people who are under severe stress become a high-performance team? Instead of simply surrendering to stress, consider how to use the extra portion of energy it releases. Focus on Collaboration: If you divert your attention away from yourself and back to the team, the natural need to avoid stress will disappear. So you can confront its causes and eventually turn it into a strong positive energy.

### **2**

#### **Give everyone the chance to take the helm once.**

To keep a boat at full speed, it must be controlled by rested crewmembers. The Atlantic Rally for Cruisers is not a typical regatta where a clever helmsman could win the race with a short sprint. Not a single person sets the tone here, but rather everyone takes over the role of leader or supporter. To stay on course, the crew is divided into small teams with their own responsibilities. Everyone is fully involved when it's their turn – at the same time, everyone takes enough time to rest, and when someone gets into trouble, he asks others for help. For heroes who do more than they should, there is no room here, simply because they would become too tired and less effective.

### **3**

#### **Communicate the really important at the right time. No more. But not less.**

If the leadership position is often changed, clear communication is essential. This is the only way the boat stays on track and only in this way can a consistent strategy be consistently pursued. Who takes over the steering wheel, wants to know everything about the wind and sea conditions, the course and other essentials. Do not think that others see what you see – especially when their eyes have to get used to the darkness. The handover should therefore be as effective and efficient as possible, and should not be disturbed by the superfluous.

### **4**

#### **Be attentive.**

Discipline plays a big role in every sailing regatta. To catch up with the mainsail, for example, several people have to take a series of well-rehearsed steps, none of which is expendable. Discipline also means being always attentive and responsible for oneself. For example, before any activity on deck it is necessary to put on protective equipment. It takes 15 minutes to put it on and 15 minutes to take it off – every four hours. Since these 30 minutes reduce the time to eat or sleep, it is tempting to skip this step. However, the team relies on your immediate commitment, as well as the adherence to the agreed principles.

## 5

**Try to properly assess the risks and consequences of your actions in advance.**

Auf hoher See hat man nicht immer die volle Kontrolle über die Umwelt, z.B. den Wind oder die Wellen. Die Geschwindigkeit des Bootes und die Effektivität der Vorgänge an Bord hängen davon ab, wie gut es gelingt, die Konsequenzen der äußeren Einflüsse abzuschätzen und danach entsprechend zu handeln. Liegt ein starker Sturm vor uns, können wir den Kurs halten und den Sturm durchqueren, oder ihm aus dem Weg gehen und dafür einen Umweg in Kauf nehmen. Der Weg zwischen Las Palmas und St. Lucia lässt sich nicht auf einer geraden Linie zurücklegen, weil minütlich neue Entscheidungen zu treffen sind. An Bord versuchen wir andauernd, die richtige Balance zwischen der sichersten und der kürzesten Strecke zu finden – auf Grundlage unserer Fähigkeit, vorherzusehen, was passieren könnte und wie sich jede potenzielle Entscheidung auswirken würde.

## 6

**Seien Sie bereit, die Küste aus den Augen zu verlieren.**

Nach einer Woche auf hoher See, mit salzverkrusteter Haut und dem Ziel noch immer außerhalb der Sichtweite, beginnt man sich zu fragen: „Warum mache ich das Ganze eigentlich? Ist es wirklich so wichtig, die Regatta zu gewinnen?“ Um dies zu verhindern, muss man sich auf seine eigenen Stärken und Werte rückbesinnen und diese reaktivieren. Wem bewusst ist, wie aufwendig die Vorbereitungen für dieses Rennen waren, und wer sich an frühere Strategien im Umgang mit ähnlichen Situationen erinnert, der spürt auch die Notwendigkeit, jetzt das Beste aus sich herauszuholen.



Rick Bomer ist Vice President Sales bei Coalesse (Europa, Mittlerer Osten und Afrika) sowie Crewmitglied beim TEAM BRUNEL, dem Gewinner der Atlantic Rally for Cruisers 2015.

**„Nur wenn wir bereit sind, etablierte Verhaltensweisen, Gewohnheiten und Umgangsformen aus den Augen zu verlieren, können wir uns gegenseitig voll und ganz vertrauen und als Menschen wirklich enge Verbindungen aufbauen.“**

Die wichtigste, bei dieser Regatta gewonnene Erkenntnis ist, dass es einigen Mutes bedarf, den Atlantik zu überqueren, dass man aber noch mutiger sein muss, dies mit so vielen anderen Menschen zu tun – auf engstem Raum und mit ihnen alle physischen und psychischen Bedürfnisse und Erlebnisse zu teilen.

“You will never be able to cross the ocean until you have the courage to lose sight of the coast,” Christopher Columbus once said. Transferred to the office, this could be worded as follows: Only when we are ready to lose sight of established behaviors, habits, and manners can we fully trust one another and build close relationships as human beings.

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