Crew Positions 101

Quite often I find myself explaining crew positions and duties on the way to a starting line. Most boats are laid out differently, and Step'nAnnie is no exception for sure, however, the tasks for each position are about the same in most keel boats over 30 feet. Your first time on a boat you usually get great positions like; Left out, Wrong Rail, and Assistant to the Gofer. Having the knowledge of what to do at mark roundings, tacks and gybes will greatly enhance your chances of getting a good position on a boat.
There are Seven Critical Positions on a racing Yacht:

Helmsman / Skipper
Tactician
Main trimmer
Port Trimmer
Starboard Trimmer
Pitman
Bowman

We usually have 4 to 6 crew members, so some of these positions are shared on Step'nAnnie. In sailing there are a lot of terms that describe the same thing, so I will try to standardize some of the terms onboard. On our upwind sails, it is best to refer to them by their numbers.

The number **One** sail is the largest upwind sail at 150%, has a wind range of 0 to 14kts apparent, and is used for light air racing.

The number **Two** sail is 130%, has a wind range from 8 to 18kts apparent, but still easily overpowers the boat in puffs, and is a bit heavy when the air gets light due to it's heavier weight sailcloth.

The number One, Two, Three C, and Four headsail sheets must be ran outside the shrouds to the aft, adjustable sheet cars, . Only the number Three R headsail sheets must be ran to the forward, manually adjustable Genoa sheet cars, (inside tracks) then inside the shrouds, And back thru the adjustable cars.

The number **Three R** sail is 100%, has a wind range from 12 to 24kts apparent, and offers a bit higher pointing angle into the wind due to it's inside sheeting car position, but is very sensitive to minor sheet adjustments due to it's lower cut foot.

The number **Three C** sail is 100%, has a wind range from 12 to 24kts apparent, and is a good general purpose sail, trims easier than the Three R. (R is for race, C is for cruise)

The number **Four** sail is 70%, has a wind range from 18 to 30+ kts. This sail is a partial hoist, and has a higher cut foot. This sail covers the highest wind ranges of all the headsails.

We currently have three downwind spinnakers, all are symmetrical. The all blue Quantum sail is our largest, lightest spinnaker, used for all light air races. The all blue North is older, nylon, and is a back up for the Quantum. The multicolored sail is a smaller, heavier sail used for higher wind conditions. We will call for either the **"Blue Quantum"**, **"Blue North"**, or the **"Chicken Chute"** respectively. I recommend taking a few moments to go below, find and identify these three sails (all are in box bags, with respective names on the bags) so if you are asked to retrieve a spinnaker you will know which one to hand up.

There are a lot of "strings" (lines, rope) to pull on Step'nAnnie, so here are some basic terms to become familiar with.
Halyards are what pull sails up, (main, jib, spin 1 and spin 2)
Topping Lifts are what lifts booms and poles, (mainsail boom, spinnaker or whisker poles)
Sheets are used to pull sails in for adjustment, (mainsail sheet, headsail sheets, spinnaker sheets) We have light and heavy headsail sheets, light and heavy spinnaker sheets, and a ultra light "shoestring" spinnaker sheet for those drifter days with the spinnaker up.
Downhaul There is only one downhaul on Step'nAnnie, used for the spinnaker pole, and is ran down the port side toe rail.
Cunningham Is used to pull down on the luff of the mainsail, a trim adjustment, located on the starboard side of the mast at the gooseneck.
Outhaul The outhaul is used to pull the mainsail foot back on the mainsail boom, a trim adjustment for the mainsail, located on the bottom of the mainsail boom near the gooseneck.
Boom Vang The boom vang is used to control the mainsail twist, the adjustment is located on the port side top of the cabin, thru the rope clutches.
Mainsail Traveler The mainsail traveler adjustment lines are located on the aft corners of the cabin top, the lines are multicolored red, yellow, referred to as "Salza line" they are used to adjust the mainsail sheet car, and are adjusted together, one is always eased when the other is pulled.
Genoa Travelers The Genoa Sheet Travelers are used to adjust the Genoa cars while underway. These control lines are ran to the forward cockpit combing at the back corners of the house on both sides.
"**Twingers"** or "**Tweakers**" (I have always called them Twingers, as I refer the other name, Tweakers to a person with a serious drug problem) Twingers are used to control the spinnaker sheets at various times, but always when the spinnaker sheet is used as a "Guy" thru the tip of the spinnaker pole, the Twinger should be pulled down hard to the toe rail, offers better control of the guy in that position. The Twinger lines are adjusted at the rear corners of the cockpit, for each side respectively.
Reefing Lines Step'nAnnie has two reef points in the mainsail, both reef 1 and reef 2 lines are located on each side of the main boom near the gooseneck at the mast.
Furling Line Is used to roll up the head sail, the line adjustment is located in the cockpit on the starboard side at the stern pulpit.
Back Stay Adjuster While not actually a "line" this is a manual adjustment located at the rear of cockpit at the base of the backstay. Used to tighten the forestay and flatten the luff of the headsails.

The Start
(Typical starboard approach)

Helmsman - Get a good position in the fleet with room to duck and come up
Tactician - Check wind shifts and determine the favored side of line and course. Call Time.
Main trimmer - Keep main trimmed fully unless told otherwise. Be ready to dump the entire sail if necessary. Trim hard and fast on final approach giving the boat full power.
Port Trimmer - Let Helmsman know of leeward boats, Trim gradually to full speed unless told otherwise. Call Genoa skirt on final approach.
Starboard Trimmer - Let Helmsman know of leeward boats while on port tack. Trim gradually to full speed, Call Genoa skirt only if we are going to stay on port tack, get to rail.
Pitman - Call Time, Double check all sheet stoppers, Get to Rail. Watch for kelp.
Bowman - On bow calling approaching boats and distance to the line, Don't forget Genoa skirting.

Tacking to Weather

Helmsman - Call "Tacking". Start to tack slowly to maximize weather gain. Then quickly find opposite tack angle after crossing head to wind.
Tactician - Look for a clear lane, Make sure there is breeze where we are heading.
Main trimmer - Ease main per boat stability to allow boat to tack easier. Then trim as the boat accelerates.
Exiting Trimmer – Make sure sheet will run freely, Cut Sheet (re, completely free the sheet) as boat gets head to wind. Get to Rail.
New Trimmer - Tail sheet. Trim in till sail is a few inches off the spreader. Trim as boat accelerates.
Pitman - Adjust traveler /vang / halyards as needed, call for Cunningham adjustment if needed. Get to rail. Look for kelp.
Bowman - Help Genoa across, Skirt Genoa. Get to rail.

Windward Rounding
(standard port bearaway)

Helmsman - Watch traffic. Find new course angle. Fill chute before bearing away completely.
Tactician - Look for a clear lane. Make sure there is breeze where we are heading.
Main trimmer - Ease Mainsail and it's controls.
Port Trimmer - Ease Genoa 2 to 3 feet. Over easing the Genoa causes problems for the spinnaker hoisting. Cleat, and then trim Spinnaker. Do not over trim as the chute is going up.
Starboard Trimmer - Make sure the Starboard Twinger is set to the rail. Pull back the Spinnaker Guy. Trim the Guy as if it is a sheet until the course is set. Most spinnaker wraps are caused because the Guy is late in coming back allowing the chute to twist behind the Genoa. Make sure the pole is square (perpendicular) to the wind. Roll up the Headsail. The helmsman may tell you to over square or under square the pole according to the wave angle. The angle of the pole directly affects the heading of the boat.
Pitman - Top the Spinnaker Pole and hoist the spinnaker. Tend the Topping Lift, and then adjust Mainsail controls.
Bowman - After Spinnaker setup; Top the Pole, Jump the spinnaker halyard, prepare for a gybe.

Gybing
(Symmetrical Spinnaker)

Helmsman - A book can be written on the subject of driving through the gybe. A good helmsman develops a feel for the boat in every sea and wind condition. If the helmsman can call the gybe in a puff, on the roll of the sea he can accelerate during the maneuver and gain time on his opponents during the gybe. The trip should be called by the Helmsman just as the boat rolls to windward.
Tactician - Look for clear air to gybe into. Make sure that you won't have to duck or head up around any boats just after the Gybe. On many boats, the wind speed is as important as the wind angle; so avoid holes if possible.
Main trimmer - The safest way is to bring the main to center and then ease it out on the other side as the pole is made on the new side. The fastest way is to wait for the trip call and throw it around as the boat rocks to windward. If done properly the boat stays at full speed the entire time.
Trimmers - The most common setup today is the single sheet with Twingers, for the sheet that becomes the guy. This is the setup on Step'nAnnie. It's important to keep the Spinnaker full and trimmed at all times. The pole should be squared before gybing so that the pole can come off the mast. Make sure the downhaul is eased. Trim through the gybe and give a slight ease of both sheets as the Bowman secures the pole on the mast. Remember to adjust the Twingers during the gybe. As the pole is tripped, pull a little on the new sheet to prevent the chute from darting to the new windward side. As soon as the pole is made, square the pole to the wind and trim the chute.

Pitman - Tend the topping lift through the entire process. Duck the boom during the Gybe. Double check the downhaul is made after the Gybe.
Bowman - Timing, speed, and agility are required for this daring maneuver. On the end for end Gybe, the pole should be tripped from both sides at once; freeing the pole to move to the new side. Step'nAnnie is a Babystay rig, so you need to bring the pole forward around the Babystay. Grab the new guy with your outboard hand and shove it into the jaw of the pole that you are holding with your inboard hand. Then slide the pole through your hands and push it outwards with all you have till you can make the jaw onto the mast ring. Call **"Made"** and prepare for the next gybe or mark rounding. Don't worry about the Genoa sheets until the final gybe to the mark.

Leeward Roundings

Helmsman and Tactician - It is critical to call the drop at the appropriate time. Too soon and you might lose a inside overlap, Too late and the spinnaker can be left flailing in the breeze as you're trying to go to weather. Once you have called for the Genoa rolled out spinnaker drop, the Helmsman should give all attention to driving properly around the mark. The Tactician must start looking up the weather leg before getting to the leeward mark or gate to determine what side of the course will be favored. If the crew work goes well the Tactician can sit back and do his job. If something goes wrong on the takedown, the Tactician becomes the extra hand to access the problem and help with the solution. There are no tactics when you can't tack.
Main trimmer - Set your controls before you get to the three boat length circle. Trim well because the main is the driving force during the sail transition.
Trimmers - Each boat and each rounding require different techniques for dropping the spinnaker. On the standard leeward drop, it is best to ease the pole to the headstay and then six more feet of Guy so that the chute can be pulled down either under or behind the rolled out Genoa. The sheet should be eased as the chutes starts to drop. On floater take downs, ease and tend the sheets. A sheet that is let go will try to go overboard and wrap on the prop or rudder according to **Murphy's Law**. The rule of thumb for trimmers is to trim the spinnaker to full speed whether the pole is attached to it or not. Make sure that your Genoa is ready to come in at the mark. Trim the Genoa to full speed through the entire rounding.
Pitman - You must go with the flow of the foredeck crew. Make sure that your spinnaker halyard is flaked and ready to run free. Lower the spinnaker halyard as fast as the crew can pull the spinnaker aboard. As soon as the spinnaker head hits the deck, slowly ease the pole topping lift to the deck. This allows the Bowman to start cleaning up the foredeck immediately for a tack. Once the pole hits the deck, get to the rail and watch for kelp. The leeward trimmer can help with cleanup if needed. On floater drops, the pole comes down before the spinnaker making your job easier as you approach the mark.

Bowman - Have the Genoa ready to unfurl. Make sure that the Genoa sheets will be clear for a tack. Get spinnaker lines ready for the drop. Grab the appropriate sheet and start bringing in the foot of the chute. Once you have most of the foot aboard, you can start pulling the belly and the leech of the spinnaker in at warp speed because it should be hidden from the wind behind the Genoa. It should take 4 to 6 seconds to pull down a spinnaker on any boat up to 70 feet long, if done properly. Once the spinnaker is down, secure the pole and do the minimum cleanup required to get the boat heading quickly to the next mark. Double check the windward Genoa sheet for tacking ability. Do the rest of the cleanup when the boat is in clear air and sailing at full speed.

There are different quirks on every boat that need special attention, these can be identified in a few practice sessions. Remember that boat speed is the key to 80 percent of racing. Boats with good maneuvering ability will be able to capitalize on smaller windshifts. Also, nothing read in a book can equal the time out on the water experiencing the maneuvers first hand.
It has been my experience that crews are the main ingredient in winning races, and it sure feels great when the boat is well sailed in a race, whether we win or lose, but the beer has a better taste when we win!

Satch