

Be A Responsible Skipper

Giddy there,

Your long-lost brother Barry Slack beaming your way again through the wizardry of 21st century communications. Now read this. Don't argue with me. Do what I say. You look surprised. Is this my old mate Barry, I hear you cry? Well yes, it is. But for the purposes of this piece I've decided to make a few changes in style. Look, the reason I've taken to addressing you in this rather rude, perfunctory and downright mongrelly fashion is that this time around, we're talking about the responsibilities of the captain. We're talking about being a responsible Skipper.

Now I know a few of you out there are of the firm belief that the main responsibility of a Skipper is to make sure there's enough ice and tinnies on board and that the sharp end's facing up the boat-ramp, not down. Well, sorry to intrude on Fantasy Island, but if you're contemplating doing anything with a boat – short of trading it in on a washing machine or a new kitchen or underfloor heating or something actually useful that the wife wants – there are a few things you should be up to speed with.

Did you know that every boat, no matter how big or how small, must have a Skipper. Bet you didn't eh? You've been running it like a committee, haven't you? Well sorry, that's going to have to change just a little. Did you also know the Skipper is legally responsible for the safety of the boat and all the people on board? No? Another new one on you, was it? Well that's for real. That's law. Skippers are also responsible for complying with all the relevant rules and regulations and ignorance of rules and bylaws is not accepted as an excuse. So don't say 'I thought it had to give way,' as the Aratika runs over you. You're supposed to know.

As a Skipper there are a number of things you're obliged to do and you must do:

Safety equipment, that's a biggie. You have to have the necessary safety gear on board for the trip you intend to make. What's more, don't keep it a secret. Make sure everyone with you knows what safety equipments on the boat, where it's stowed and most importantly, how it works. As your friend the recent immigrant drifts off into the white-caps, it's a bit late to explain to him he was supposed to put the life jacket around his neck – not tie one of them round each foot.

SKIPPER RESPONSIBILITY

I'm a Responsible Skipper who will ensure:

- I have the necessary skill, knowledge and qualifications to safeguard all on board.
- my vessel & all its equipment are properly maintained.
- my vessel carries all the necessary safety equipment.
- we have a minimum of two means of communication: i.e. VHF marine radio, cellphone, flares.
- each passenger has a correctly fitting buoyancy aid.
- my passengers are briefed on the location and use of all safety equipment.
- the weather conditions and outlook are suitable for the trip planned.
- I always comply with the Maritime 'rules of the road'.
- my vessel is loaded within its limits and all equipment is securely stowed.
- someone ashore knows where we are going and when we'll be back.

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Jackets and buoyancy aids must meet NZ standard or have been otherwise accepted by the MSA. They've got to be the right size and type for everyone on board. Alright, you don't have to wear them all the time – though it's a great idea if kids do. It is a legal requirement, however, that life jackets are worn when crossing river bars, during emergencies, in rough water and at times of heightened risk. Hey, I don't mean to be a killjoy, but if you're having a few beers out there, it's a good idea to throw a jacket on. Non-swimmers would be stupid not to wear a life jacket at all times, and as I said, same with kids unless they're in an enclosed area like the cabin.

Now, we come to the way you operate your boat. You are bound not to endanger people or property and remember to look behind you regularly to make sure your wake's not getting up someone's nose, literally and metaphorically. The Skipper is responsible for what's on board – people and gear. Never overload your boat with either, and make sure everything is properly stowed and secured. The 30 litre chilli-bin can become a lethal weapon when you come off the top of a wave and it begins orbiting the cockpit.

Obviously you'll want to make sure everyone's sitting safely or holding on tight when the boat strikes choppy water, or when you've got the hammer down for whatever reason. Personally I can't stand a number of Skippers I know who regularly whack the power on without warning, with the slightest glance behind them, to see if everyone's holding on. Those Skippers can easily end up alone on the boat, cruising in circles to find the place they lost their mates.

If the boat's going properly, that's an enormous plus, especially if conditions turn nasty on you. Maintenance is a big responsibility: hull, motor, electrics and equipment. Check everything before you leave the ramp or marina. I've raved on about weather forecasts in the past, I know. I'm just about to do it again. You must have a reliable **marine** forecast before you head out, and you **must** listen for regular updates. Remember to check the tides; they're crucial, both for your safety and some intelligent sort of fishing. If you're in any doubt about any of these things, don't go out. Simple.

Someone knowing roughly where you are is a bit of a plus when you're drifting in the water, 5 kilometres off the coast, clutching that 30 litre chilli-bin for buoyancy. Tell people where you're heading. Leave a note with someone responsible – not that guy you met at 11.45 last night in the Brewers Droop – telling them where you're going, how many on board and when you expect to be back. '2 Minute Forms' are ideal for this, and that's how long they take. It helps if Search and Rescue at least knows where to start. Trip reports on your VHF radio are a great idea, as is staying in touch with Maritime Radio, the marine radio service or the local Coastguard. Having made sure other people know where you are, it's also a pretty cunning plan to have some idea of where you are yourself. A chart is a

The image shows a '2 Minute Form' for boat safety. At the top, there are logos for NZS (New Zealand Search and Rescue) and BoatSafe. The form is divided into two main sections: 'TRIP DETAILS' and 'IMPORTANT'. The 'TRIP DETAILS' section includes a header with the text 'Use this form to tell someone where you are going. Use a water-based pen and write clearly after each trip.' Below this are several input fields: 'Date', 'Leaving time', 'Leaving from', 'Going to', 'Return time', 'No Later Than', and 'Number of people'. The 'IMPORTANT' section has a header 'HAVE YOU?' followed by four checklist items, each with a checkbox: 'Checked the marine weather report?', 'Sufficient fuel and reserve fuel?', 'Told someone where you are going?', and 'Taken life jackets for everyone?'. At the bottom of the form, there is a small note: 'It only takes 2 minutes to keep everyone safe! For more pleasure boating safety information visit www.boatSAFE.org.nz'.

good way to begin this process. A chart will also give you a clear picture of rocks, tide-rips, cables, shipping channels, prohibited areas and other nasties you want to stay well away from.

Again, I don't want to labour the point, but don't go overboard with the fire water. Keep an eye on the booze. Alcohol will affect yours and everyone else's co-ordination and judgement. If you do end up in the water, heaven forbid, what you've drunk is going to significantly reduce your chances of survival. Food on board is a good idea. So are non-alcoholic drinks for when everyone gets thirsty. Keep an eye on what your mates are drinking. Better still, save it for back at the marina.

And finally, just one more thing. If you have an accident on the water you are legally required to report it to the Marine Safety Authority and the local Harbourmaster within 48 hours.



0800 40 80 90

If you're interested in finding out more on boating safety and safe operation, there's heaps at www.boatsafe.org.nz For information on a whole range of Coastguard Boating Education courses call

You're the Skipper remember? You're in charge and you're responsible. Here endeth the second lesson.

Let's be very careful out there.
Hooray.
Barry Slack.

