

"In some cases, influencing skills are so strong that others will so warmly embrace a particular solution that they will often believe it to be their own!"

# It's the final countdown!



**Andy Milner celebrates a return to dry land with overall second place, as the Clipper Round the World Challenge concludes** ■



Broken mast in Qingdao



Prizegiving

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What I've tried to put across in previous articles – apart from the analogies between management in sport and management in local government – is the emotional roller coaster that we have experienced on the Round the World race. The highs of winning, the frustrations of losing and the morale sapping near disasters that stopped us racing. It's all memorable, albeit for very different reasons!

**Race 10 from Jamaica to New York** was no different and saw us once again leading the fleet as we approached the Bahamas. All the weather files indicated a westerly approach, and the rest of the fleet agreed with us until we became becalmed. Whereas in earlier races it was us who benefitted from watching the fleet ahead of us, the rest benefited from our misfortune, and sailed east into good winds. We never recovered from that set back and finished seventh coming into New York. The next race saw us approaching **Cape Breton** in second place, but in the last 24 hours of the race, in extraordinarily light winds, we took our eye off the ball and slipped to sixth. It was a bit of a wake up call.

Many of us had by this stage become quite accomplished sailors, which gave us a lot of strength in some ways, but when everyone has a view on how the race should be run, it can work against you. We had a long team meeting in Cape Breton where roles and responsibilities were hammered out, and a common set of objectives for the last three races were signed up to.

We left Cape Breton with strong winds to send us across on our final ocean crossing. All the boats were getting high speeds, so it came down to strong helming and trimming to decide the winner. We kept our spinnaker up as long as possible despite the large swells and strong winds, and somehow managed to keep it in one piece, whilst no less than four boats around us managed to shred theirs. Throughout the whole race, nine of the ten

boats were rarely more than a few miles apart, but it was our **Team Finland** that pushed home to secure their first win in seven races and return to second place overall. We also won the penultimate race to Ijmuiden in the Netherlands before sail damage ruined our race back to Hull. By that stage, we had already secured second place overall and had five gold (first place) pennants – more than any other boat in the fleet.

**50,000 people turned out in Hull to welcome us back.** It's been one hell of an experience for me personally. One that I would not have missed for anything, although a year in some of the most basic conditions imaginable is more than enough for me, thank you very much!

I return to work a little wiser, with a number of important lessons secured. There are three areas that stand out for me – and they are all inter-related. The first concerned the people that I sailed with, and the challenges of getting on with each other 24/7 in the confines of a 68 foot racing boat. The second concerns leadership, with good sailors not always making the best leaders... and vice versa! The final lesson concerned team dynamics, and in particular the role of the influencer in such teams. The influencer is not always the obvious choice, but often the one that can make the difference between winning and simply competing.

The **Clipper Round the World Yacht Race** sees people of all ages and from different walks of life putting their lives on hold for the best part of a year. Half of them have never sailed before. Some expressed concern about an ocean race that involved complete novices, not actually appreciating that this is the whole point of the race. In truth, the novices were often the most effective members of the crew, outperforming some of the more experienced sailors who thought they knew it all, but in reality had a lot to learn about how a 68 foot racing yacht differed from a



Coming into Australia

38 foot leisure craft. What everyone had in common, though, was the understanding that we had ten months ahead of us living together in close quarters. **We had to get on.** There were inevitable minor disagreements, but we all learnt the motto, 'leave it on the last wave'. It is a testament to our strong team ethic that **Team Finland** was one of the few boats (possibly the only boat) not to see any crew walking away half way through the race.

Leadership was a different kettle of fish altogether. We had two skippers on our boat. Eero Lehtinen skippered the boat to Australia securing three wins out of four, backed up with a second place. You honestly cannot argue with the effectiveness of that. We played to our strengths – focusing on the more experienced helms and trimmers. This meant our skills were spread quite thinly, and there were question marks about how long we could sustain that degree of specialism without the individuals concerned getting exhausted. Our second skipper, Rob McNally, focused more on developing skills across the team, delivering more helms and more trimmers, and an opportunity to spread the load under challenging conditions. It took some time to convert that into race wins, but we did eventually secure back to back wins crossing the North Atlantic (in record time) and rounding Britain to our penultimate stop in the Netherlands. I honestly believe it was the **combination of the two leadership styles** that secured us second place overall. Not a bad result for a team that only really competed in 11 of the 14 races.

The other three races saw us rescuing Cork, who had run aground, rescuing ourselves after we lost our mast, and catching up with the

fleet that had raced to California without us.

The third and final area of interest was that of team dynamics and, in particular, the role of the influencer. There were others in the crew apart from the skipper who had some leadership qualities, and it was interesting to observe these skills being developed over the course of the race. There were without doubt three or four very accomplished sailors who were appointed watch leaders and who won the respect of the crew with their sound sailing knowledge. What some team leaders will find though (be it in local government or sailing) is that whilst relevant experience is helpful in gaining 'street cred' amongst your peers, lack of communication and interpersonal skills will inevitably restrict their ability to truly influence the successful running of the team. If they can't get their ideas across to the crew and people do not understand the task that is being asked of them, they generally fail to perform very well. Sometimes team leaders have difficulty in selling their ideas to their line manager and can become frustrated when their ideas are dismissed or ignored. On our boat, very occasionally, the competitive streak became so strong that watch leaders would disagree amongst themselves as to the best strategy in a given situation. Whilst this could be entertaining for the crew on deck, it was never going to help us win races.

The skipper always has the final say in these matters, but even he needs sleep sometimes, and these differences were still apparent even when he was not around to arbitrate. This was when the influencer emerged from within the crew – people who under different circumstances may have served as watch leaders themselves, but who (at least,

in the beginning) did not have the sailing knowledge to confidently articulate a solution. **Influencers play a significant role in local government**, and often emerge as the potential future leaders within an organisation. Arguably the skill is to harness that energy and cultivate it before development opportunities emerge and the person finds themselves in a position of responsibility anyway.

These influencers will be the ones that spot a situation arising and, rather than complain or criticise, set about seeing what needs doing and getting it done. They understand the impact they have on other people, so are able to adapt and modify their personal style to suite different circumstances. In some cases, influencing skills are so strong that others will so warmly embrace a particular solution that they will often believe it to be their own!

Our watch leaders were generally superb, and with the help of one or two influencers ensured that a competitive team also became a winning one.

They say the **Clipper Round the World Race is the challenge of a lifetime.** For us there were so many incidents that fell into that category, we lost count. We were very fortunate indeed to arrive back in the UK in one piece, and with no personal injuries. I enjoyed every second of the race – even the difficult times which, in reality, only made the team stronger – but a year away from friends and family is a long, long time, and I was delighted to reunite with them in Hull at the finish. In addition, I am very pleased that I am well on the way to achieving my target of £10,000 for the **Rainbow Centre for Conductive Education** in Fareham.

Don't forget, you can still contribute to Andy's charitable cause at [www.justgiving.com/andymilner](http://www.justgiving.com/andymilner). And do remember to check out the charity's website, at [www.rainbowcentre.org/](http://www.rainbowcentre.org/).