How do you Train a Productive Deckhand in 48 hours?

The answer for many with experience is, “Just go do it, keep your eyes and ears open, pay attention and do what needs to be done, and oh yes, don’t get your feet in the rope!” This was the challenge MCCF signed on to with a startup grant from SEA Maine to provide some basic training and awareness for persons interested in working either on a commercial fishing vessel or at an ocean based mariculture business. Planning how to make the training as succinct and relevant as possible, without throwing people into the deep end, presented a challenge. Conveying the fathoms deep skills that are acquired to be a productive and valued crew member in a marine business, along with the attitudinal mindset that this is a time honored profession in often dangerous and bone wearying conditions, is at best, an overview and orientation within a 48 hour time frame. But with the help of Pat Shepard and others in our MCCF network, we settled on some essential skills to demonstrate and practice to prepare individuals for working on the water and in the seafood harvester/grower sector.

Basic orientation and instruction in limited outboard and inboard boat operation and maintenance, near shore navigation and operating rules along with safety training and seafood product handling became our four main focus areas. It really was an exercise in distilling all the collective knowledge and experience around the vague but pointed general expectation of “do what needs to be done” into hopefully some digestible and useful entrance to arguably one of the oldest professions in history. As one of our participants stated while being bounced around on a rather crappy day practicing boat handling and navigation (Thank you John Williams and the F/V Khristy Michelle), “This would make a great May term or short summer course for students attending Maine’s higher education institutions”. Astutely put and a great idea worth pursuing. Exposing the next crop of marine scientists, researchers and policymakers to the plethora of skills, responsibilities and decision making that goes into the daily grind of making a living in the capture/culture fisheries can only benefit everyone with shared perspective and respect, not to mention being prepared for what to do, if the unthinkable should happen and the guest aboard should have to participate in dealing with an emergency.

While volumes have been written, and hours of YouTube has been filmed “to teach” people seamanship, safety and maintenance, hands-on experience will always be the best method. This project has definitely reminded me of the Will Rogers quote, “Good judgment comes from experience and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.” Therefore, in my “experience”, good education, along with learning, really just boils down to how well you communicate what it is that “needs to be done.”

Do you have a question about our fisheries? Send it to info@coastalfisheries.org or call 207.367.2708.

Prices to Harvesters
Lobsters (select): $8/lb.
Lobster (run): $7/lb.
Fuel (diesel): $4.30/gal.

Disclaimer: these figures were collected on 5/8 in Stonington

Oceanographic Buoy I-01
44°6’10”N, 68°6’44”W - Frenchboro
Bottom Temperature (50 meters): 6.29°C (43.32°F)
Source: www.neracoos.org