

JUNIOR SAILING ASSOCIATION OF LONG ISLAND SOUND

A Safety Playbook. “Building a Safety Culture Into Junior Sailing” 2/28/2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building and experiencing the joy of sailing begins with instilling the confidence that all will be safe. Everyone involved in the sport spends a lot of time thinking about safety. But, for many of us, safety is a “base to be covered”. It's checked off...and it's done. We rarely look ahead. We are satisfied when it's behind us. If we drove a car like that we would be constantly looking through the rear-view mirror and not ahead.

Not good.

This Safety Playbook invites you to join us in building a new safety culture. Not just the accumulation of best practices, policies, and checklists (we will direct you to plenty of those). Instead, the desire is to work together in collaboration: within your sailing program, with your Club or organization, with other Clubs, with the JSA and even with US Sailing to learn from one another to not just “stay safe” but improve our safety track record. To develop increased safety awareness on the way to building a Safety Culture.

A Safety Culture can't be built in one day. This Playbook will present an action plan for first, building a foundation and then adding layers to strengthen safety practices and, finally, to think more proactively about safety. The action plan has three levels:

- Level 1 - Covering the Basics for Your Junior Program
- Level 2 - Building Organizational Engagement
- Level 3 - Where Collaboration and Imagination Combine to Build and Sustain a Safety Culture

The approach outlined in Level 2 is inspired by “The 4 Disciplines of Execution” by Sean Covey, Jim Huling & Chris McChesney. In this book, the authors show us how, by applying apply "focus", "leverage", "engagement" and "accountability", one can create a permanent organizational behavioral change, also known as "culture".

THE INVITATION

This is an Invitation to Break Out of the "Safety Status Quo" - Shifting the Focus From the "Rear View Mirror" to the "Windshield".

The Rear View Mirror. When enjoying this great sport and thinking about safety, we tend to think in simple checklists. These checklists allow to prepare for the risks we have faced in the past. But not in the future.

When a safety issue arises, big or small, we look to a tried and a true action plan:

- “Something Happens”
- “Evaluate What Happened”
- “Come Up With Procedures So It Doesn’t Happen Again.”

Sometimes, we try to think “proactively”:

- “Someone comes up with a good idea. Let’s adopt that.”

Our approach to safety is reactive, not proactive. We are never “ahead.”. We are too often “behind” or “catching up.” The best we can do is learn from our mistakes.

Is that good enough?

What If Safety Could Become Truly Embedded? Since safety is always in the back of our minds, what if we considered an approach that was less reactive, instead involved an ongoing effort and commitment that could focus on continually improving on safety. The way we continually try to improve our sailing skills.

If we could get there, safety would no longer be “something to think about.” It would become a “culture.”

Building and sustaining a Culture means nothing unless it brings with it benefits. Since sailing carries more risks than card games (excluding high stakes poker?) it is not unusual to find ourselves outside our comfort zone. Having a Safety Culture would encourage a framework to be build that allows one to better anticipate such situations and prepare for them.

“Culture” isn’t built in a day. It involves an effort not unlike training for an Olympic campaign. But a Safety Culture could pay far greater dividends.

Culture is more than a checklist. More than a committee. It is an ongoing commitment to engage all members and participants to come together with a common mindset to achieve a common goal.

What follows is a playbook that we hope will guide your sailing organization along a path that result in safety and sailing peacefully coexisting so that together we can build a lifelong love of sailing.

The approach is inspired by “The 4 Disciplines of Execution” by Sean Covey, Jim Huling & Chris McChesney.

At first glance, the Playbook appears to be “overkill”. “We don’t need to have a Safety Committee.” We need to focus our limited time and resources on “House Committees”, Entertainment Committees”, etc. ????”

Another way to look at this might be: “Safety can and should combine with Fun and Joy to make this great sport one that all of us will joyfully participate in for our entire lives.”

This Playbook is not an Encyclopedia of Safety. Instead, this Playbook is a guide or methodology for any organization to continually improve on safety practices that, in turn, should only instill further confidence and enjoyment in sailing.

THE CURRENT STATE

When it comes to safety and sailing, many of the current generation of "safety manuals" can be summarized by the following:

1. Put together a list of current “best practices.”
2. Communicate these practices to coaches
3. Coaches communicate these practices to sailors.
4. Wait for something bad to happen.
5. Figure out why it happened and “lessons learned”
6. Add another practice developed from “lessons learned” to “best practices list”
7. REPEAT

This approach has contributed to sailing becoming safer. Yet, as the boats we sail in (and coach from) have become lighter, more sensitive and higher performance new safety risks have emerged. The ever-continuing evolution of sailing compels us to look ahead for “the next big risk.” To make this effort one that should be a commitment by all, and not just one.

SAFETY CULTURE - LEVELS OF COMMITMENT

Building a Safety Culture is a heavy lift. Learning to walk before you run is probably the best approach. What follows is a building block approach to building this culture.

The Three Levels of Safety Culture are:

- Level 1 - Covering the Basics for Your Junior Program
- Level 2 - Full Organizational Engagement
- Level 3 - Where Collaboration and Imagination Combine to Build and Sustain a Safety Culture

LEVEL 1 - COVERING THE BASICS FOR YOUR JUNIOR PROGRAM

Let's start with action steps that will pay immediate dividends.

1. Appoint a Junior Program Safety Officer. Your Safety Officer should be someone who is "on the ground" each and every day, witnessing what goes on both on the docks and on the water. The individual does not have all places at all time. But spends enough time throughout week both on the docks, on the water and even away at regattas to understand and appreciate what is going on. That individual could be your Sailing Director or another designated experienced instructor. Roles and responsibilities for your Safety Officer include:
 - a. Conduct preseason meetings identifying current risks and action plans for addressing those risks.
 - b. Running weekly safety meetings with instructors and a member Club Dock Staff to reinforce safety checklists, review any recent incidents and look ahead to following week for any changes in schedule/activities, etc. that might create opportunities for new risks to arrive. Attendees at this meeting should include all instructors, Sailing Director and Head Instructor.
 - c. With the assistance of others, be the source of of identifiable sharing safety information resources for use by others.
2. Create of Safety Checklists for use by sailors, coaches and others and the creation of a resource for sharing this information. I prefer to call them "pre-flight checklists".
3. Create an Incident Log documenting any situations where any medical intervention (even as small as a band aid) is required.
4. Partner with others to assign Regatta Safety Officers for any events hosted by your Club.
5. Create an 'End of Summer' Safety Review reporting on overall trends in compliance with safety protocols, Incident frequency and severity and other lessons learned in planning for the future.

**** Note: An excellent resource for safety checklists can be found in Gowrie's 'Burgee Program Junior Sailing Safety Manual'. The link to the manual can be found [here](#). (***Note: link not yet established)

LEVEL 2 - BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

In Level 1, the foundation has been built for keeping our junior sailors "mostly safe." But a junior sailing program does not operate in a vacuum. It is a part of a larger organization or Club.

At Level 2, organizational commitment is built. It is the opportunity to get everybody on board. It is the first step toward making safety part of your mission.

If building this Safety Culture is your commitment, that commitment needs to come from your governing bodies. That would be your leadership team. For a yacht club that could be the Commodore and the Flag Officers. For organizations with different structure, that could mean President, Vice President, etc.

Collectively, your leadership needs to buy into the reality that safety critical to the enjoyment of sailing. Safety can not be thought of as just "box to check" and be satisfied but, instead, an unending, almost relentless, commitment to improvement.

Your leadership team need not nor should not develop an action plan. It needs to accomplish three tough tasks:

- Convince your club or organization members of the importance of pursuing a proactive approach to safety (i.e. Building a Safety Culture).
- Build Your Safety Team.
- Define a Vision for how great things will be once a Safety Culture is in place.

Convincing your membership of the importance of a Safety Culture is on you. What follows is one example. We invite you to build your own.

Create a Vision

A critical part of getting everyone to commit to something this important is to create a Vision. Writing it down presents the opportunity for thoughtful consideration, for discussion, debate and, ultimately, consensus.

The following is only a suggestion as to start:

- “We envision an environment free from harm for all who are present and active on our property and out on the water.”

(You are cordially invited to craft your own.)

A Safety Vision Statement should be no secret. It should be openly shared and discussed. And then included periodically in your member communications and posted for all to see. If you have a Vision Statement but no one knows about it, then you have your own secret and no one else cares.

Build Your Team

Your club or organization’s leadership team’s role is to establish Safety as a priority and set the Vision. It is NOT to do the planning or set the policies and practices. Your leadership team’s next priority needs to be: build your Safety Team. And that begins with selecting your Safety Team Leader.

You need to find that person whose qualities include:

- Buying into the Vision.
- Sharing the Leadership Team’s commitment to making Safety a Culture.
- Possessing the energy and enthusiasm to “keep things moving.”
- Doesn’t know all the answers.
- Working well with people - particularly with those more knowledgeable than she/he.
- Being a good communicator.
- Has no personal agenda.

It is not imperative for your Safety Team Leader to be a member of your leadership team or member of the Board. It is important that this individual check all the boxes on the qualities suggested above.

Once a Safety Team Leader has been selected, the rest of the team needs to be recruited. There are multiple approaches available to consider in this effort.

Option 1 would be to identify representatives from the different areas of the organization that would be potentially impacted by this effort. That could include a member from such committees as ‘Grounds’, ‘House’, ‘Sailing’,

'Race Committee', 'Junior Sailing'. Your 'Food', 'Membership' and 'Nominating' are probably of less importance. The Safety Committee should not be "members only." A strong Safety Culture is built with the staff's engagement as partners.

Option 2 could be a team comprised of people with the requisite skill sets to get things done. While members of an Option 2 team structure may be lacking as to "subject matter" experts, members of this type of team could have as one of their responsibilities the role of "liaison" with specific activities of your organization ("Grounds", "Safety", etc.).

Whichever option you choose, the existence and composition of this Team should be publicly acknowledged. And it should be agreed that the deliberations and actions by this team should be reported to the leadership team monthly and to the full membership at least quarterly. Regular communication keeps everyone engaged.

Again, why should safety be a secret?

It is impossible for any of us to "know if we are getting there if we don't know where we want to go". Any organization that seeks to build a Safety Culture needs to begin with a Mission.

Define Your Mission

With your Team built and inspired by your Vision, the next order of business is to define the Mission for your Safety Team. Your Team's Mission is different from your Vision. The latter is how the world will look to you once the Mission is largely accomplished while the Mission is best expressed in the form of a statement that answers four questions (according to Forbes Magazine):

1. What do we do?
2. How do we do it?
3. Whom do we do it for?
4. What value are we bringing?

Creating a Mission Statement for the Safety Committee should not be an exercise in essay writing. It should be short enough so that anyone engaged in this effort should be able to summarize it if asked "What is the Mission of this Safety Committee?".

An example of a possible Mission Statement for a Safety Committee might be:

- “We seek to nurture and perpetuate a Safety Culture through an ongoing review process of all our activities to proactively identify opportunities to reduce the risk of personal injury and damage to physical property that will lead to a greater enjoyment of our sport and related activities.

We know you can improve on this.

Time for Action

With your Vision and Mission set, now its time to act. Start setting goals and action plans to achieve those goals. The goals need to be “bite-size” or achievable. No matter how smart and talented your team members are, they haven’t worked together before. You should “walk before you run.”

What follows are recommendations found in ‘4 Disciplines of Execution.’ While this approach may seem too granular, in our information overload world where too many of us think we have mastered multitasking, our ability to focus on one thing at a time will mean what we get done will get done right and on time.

Setting Goals (Focus)

When thinking about setting goals to raise Safety awareness, nurture a Safety Culture and reduce the frequency and severity of “incidents” (to people and property), consider setting a Big Goal that would define success and then set smaller goals as steppingstones to get you there.

An example of a Big Goal:

- “This summer, there will be no incidents that result in required repairs to physical property or medical intervention of any kind to our members, guests and staff.”

This goal, by itself, is just too big to achieve. It’s almost like setting the goal: “Achieve World Peace.” You need to consider smaller and more practical goals to get you there. You need “Supporting Goals.”

When setting your Supporting Goals, consider the following:

- In order to achieve your Big Goal you will first need to have knocked off a number of Supporting Goals first. This would be a good time to list them all, almost in a “whiteboard” fashion.
- With all those goals listed, it’s time to prioritize. Choose no more than three of the most important ones that will allow you to make real progress toward the Big Goal. Now focus on those three.
 - (If you have too many goals, you will not be able to properly focus on any of them; you will become overwhelmed; and this effort will fail.)
- When defining your goal, begin with a verb that translates to action. If your goal begins with: “In order to...”, you have beautiful writing. But you don’t have a goal.
- Incorporate into your goal a “deliverable” that you can act upon. “Eliminating mechanical issues on coach boats.” isn’t a deliverable because no one can simply act upon “eliminating”. Instead, identify factors that contribute to concussions and focus on them
- Keep your goals simple.
- Focus on “what”, not “how”.

An Example:

A Supporting Goal might be:

- “Ensure that all coach boats are maintained in satisfactory operating condition.”

This goal doesn’t work. It is too vague. “Ensure” isn’t an action step. There is no deadline. The way it is stated, there is nothing to act upon. Let’s try again.

- Establish procedures and checklists targeted to monitor the operating condition of all coach boats to ultimately achieve the vision of no coach boats unexpectedly experiencing issues that compromise their capacity to function properly while in use. This goal ("establish procedures and checklists") is to achieved within one month.”

Now you have a viable Supporting Goal. Time for....

Action Plan (Leverage)

Your goals each represent a finish line. They don’t tell you how to get there. You need an Action Plan and Action Steps.

Here are some examples of Action Steps that could get you closer to achieving your Supporting Goal related to coach boats:

1. “Within one week, develop a list of Top 10 mechanical issues that prevent our coach boats from performing as expected.”
2. “Within two weeks, develop a list of preventative maintenance practices to address the identified mechanical issues that prevent our coach boats from performing as expected.”
3. “Within three weeks, assign individuals responsible to performing the preventative maintenance practices noted in Goal #1 and perform training as necessary to ensure that those responsible know what to do.”
4. “Within four weeks, develop and implement a preventative maintenance log procedure to document that preventative maintenance practices are being performed.”

Put all of these Action Steps put together and you have your Action Plan.

Ownership (Engagement)

Action Steps without people assigned to pursue them will never be completed. Action Steps needs to be “owned” with someone given lead responsibility to ensure it gets done.

Acknowledging the importance of accountability, the value of having a team means that the “point person” on any task has the support of others to help solve the problem at hand. The point person should be encouraged to consult with their team members (or others) as needed to help solve problems or test alternative solutions.

Tracking Compliance (Accountability)

Of the Action Steps listed above, #3 calls for a new practice to be implemented: a preventative maintenance log. Once implemented, how will you know if the practice of filling out the log is being followed and how will you know if issues identified are being followed up? You would need a reporting mechanism.

In his book, Covey calls for a “scorecard” but whatever reporting mechanism suits the situation is fine, so long as it is continually updated and prominently available to all who are impacted by it.

One should consider carefully how to handle compliance. Whatever tools are chosen, they should prove to hold high value relative to the amount of effort required to put into them.

And those tools should be enduring.

Mission, Values, Goals, Action Plans, Action Steps and Reporting Mechanisms are all great. But people need to be held accountable. In a mutually supportive way. How to make this happen? With a regular schedule of meetings where everyone reports out. If there is a team member is encountering a challenge with their designated task, the team pulls together to help them solve the problem.

There are no individual "winners" with this. There are only "team wins" through real progress made to fulfill the Mission.

Reporting Progress.

The nature of your goal will drive both frequency and methodology for reporting progress. A goal with a very short term time horizon may call for a different reporting schedule than one that is longer term. But the reporting out should be of sufficient frequency that issues can be addressed as they arise and not linger.

As we aim is to instill an ongoing commitment and engagement by all to nurturing and perpetuating a Safety Culture sharing the results of our efforts are important. A Safety Team could consider a schedule of reporting to the Leadership Team, to the Board, to Staff, and finally, to your members. A Reporting Schedule could be a mix of monthly, quarterly, etc., depending on the constituent.

LEVEL 3 - WHERE COLLABORATION AND IMAGINATION COMBINE TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN A SAFETY CULTURE

At this point you have people policies and procedures. You have goals, action plans. You have established ownership and you are tracking compliance.

The intent is good and positive. The energy and commitment are high.

But at some point there runs the risk of all this becoming stale. What is missing the opportunity achieve more by building new relationships to

make all this work better and unleash some creativity to encourage you to truly look ahead.

"Achieving more my building new relationships." Let's call that collaboration.

"Unleashing creativity to encourage you to truly look ahead." That would be imagination.

Collaboration

(The following is inspired by practices put in place at Pequot Yacht Club by Jeffrey Engborg, the Club's General Manager)

The easiest trap for any organization to fall into is or the creation of "silos", where a group of people engaged in a common activity or responsibility will seek to better their group's standing or performance at the expense of others. Yacht clubs and sailing programs are not immune to this.

At Pequot Yacht Club, over the past decade, there has been a concerted effort to build and strengthen the concept of Team Pequot. Team Pequot was originally moniker developed by their junior sailing program but has, through an evolving positive shift to a Club-wide culture that has sought to break down silos and seek opprtunities for different teams to work together to achieve common aims.

In junior sailing programs, it can be easy for the instructor staff and the club staff to feel "culturally separated." But if a strong junior program is important to the long term viability of a yacht club, then an effective working relationship between club staff and instructors is important is important for the success of the junior program.

Policies and procedures are good, regular meetings are better. A commitment to collaboration reinforced by the Commodore (or equivalent leader) and the General Manager will go a long way toward building an environment of mutual support.

"Mutual Support" is important if true collaboration is to work for something as important as safety. It is one thing to work together. For everyone to believe and act: "I've got your back." is what is needed to maintain the energy and commitment to collaboration.

Applying the Team Pequot concept might look like this:

- “Partners” - refers to individuals from different areas of the sailing organization along with suggested ways they would engage in building a safety culture.
 - o Club Staff
 - Collaborates with other partners to ensure that physical resources and assets (boats, buildings, etc.) are maintained in a manner that contributes to achieving a “safety culture.”
 - Assign one member to be on the Safety Committee.
 - o Junior Sailing Committee
 - Adapts Mission Statement to suit junior sailing program.
 - One member of the Junior Sailing Committee assigned to be on the Safety Committee and as a liaison to the coach team.
 - Determines how to handle communications with parents regarding safety culture and protocols.
 - o Sailing Director
 - Collaborates with a designated Safety Officer on the coach team to adapt safety protocols and reporting mechanisms developed by the Safety Committee to “real world” situations.
 - Collaborates with Regatta Event Chair adapting safety protocols for regattas and identifies potential Event-specific safety protocols.
 - o Head Instructor
 - Assigns a member of the coach team as Safety Officer.
 - Collaborates with Sailing Director to develop a Safety Officer job description
 - o Safety Officer (Coach)
 - Collaborates with Sailing Director to communicate/implement safety protocols and reporting mechanisms.
 - Communicate with coaches on safety protocol implementation and gather feedback on the “real world” implications of following these protocols.
 - Conduct Incident Reviews as appropriate.
 - Convene weekly meeting of coaches to review safety protocols and lessons learned from any Incident Reviews.

Imagination - "Imagining Forward"

With all of your partners pulling together to fulfill your Mission, an opportunity for a big win might be found by "imagining forward."

What if, monthly or quarterly, your Safety Committee were to set aside a time to look ahead with an eye on what events, activities, etc. might create an environment for new safety risks. It could be a regatta (see below). It might be sailors being given the opportunity to sail a type of boat that would be new to them. It could be planned social gathering. These situations can change the safety landscape and require a whole different assessment.

ONE MORE THING - REGATTAS

Hosting a regatta at your Club potentially disrupts normal activities and routines. But it also presents an opportunity to apply your Safety Playbook with a shorter time horizon to create a safer and better regatta experience.

Things to consider:

- Creating a separate Safety Committee for the Regatta.
- Assess the impact of visiting boats, sailors, parents and coaches on your facilities and plan accordingly.
- Review all safety plans and protocols and develop a synthesized version that can be easily communicated with all visitors.
- Schedule pre-briefings or other communications with your partners, both internal and external.

RESOURCES

There is something missing from this Playbook: an exhaustive list of safety plans and resource to guide you and spare you the effort of having to "re-create the wheel."

Below you will find links to presentations and resources on the issue of safety that are recommended to become a part of any "safety library."

If you are starting at Level 1, you will want to review the following items:

- Gowrie's 'Burgee Program Junior Sailing Safety Manual'.
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cfFAd911LDeVC0WveG5tv8u-aIxBgLf/view?usp=drivesdk>
- Pequot Yacht Club Safety Policies and Emergency Action Plan.
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-ts-YrDNrQ7DTQWd1GF6iZZH5mjQr9vapfetoL5RfxI/edit>

Other resources include:

- Safety Topics at Past JSA Event. A summary document referencing past presentations on Safety at JSA Meetings, along with a relevant slide deck (LINK)
- "Junior Program Risk Management" Zoom Panel Discussion (from 2021 JSA MidWinter Meeting) (LINK)
https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/QRtc9fgVHtPj3_4N1MIeXZQS5gs3kz_Pq-x94avsh6epVl8dV-hN6-8tdGPyYsqtiW0Zma6I4BZOmCY.BniM0tG9WuMy-0Ob?continueMode=true&_x_zm_rtaid=cx6RICn6RJWWGrWQsmpvTg.1677595954255.ecfd3b90f5290d0d38f2894db3287a56&_x_zm_rhtaid=101

CLOSURE

When it comes to safety, there is no closure. The only option for each of us, all of us, to be relentless in our effort to get better, be better, and improve.

We invite you to join us in trying out this approach. But not just try it out or even push to Level 3.

We would like to hear from you. What is working. What is not. What questions you have.

Please share your thoughts with us at info@jsalis.org . We will try to answer your questions quickly. And your suggestions will be considered and possibly adopted.

This playbook will continue to evolve in response to your experiences and your feedback.

We look forward to making this journey toward instilling a Safety Culture together.