

ONE HAND FOR THE BOAT

Well it sometimes takes sad news to snap us back into reality. Today I heard just such news and it struck the old familiar chord of “that could have been me”. Sunday morning November 30th we lost a good man off Block Island. He was well known as an avid outdoorsman and skilled angler, devoted father and champion of nature in general. This man could wring more salt water of his socks than most people will ever see. And yet he dies this week from a freak accident that could happen to any of us. The story goes that conditions were rough; he became fouled in some ground tackle and was dragged overboard. Brutal. It’s my job to make sure this sort of thing doesn’t happen to any of you.

As far as handling ground tackle or any long loaded line always use a cleat or bit. Take one turn around the cleat and gather slack as it becomes available. The action of using a bit or cleat changes your stance to side ways and lessens the chance of you standing on piled rode. It is also a safety net of sorts (however painful) because you can’t pull your foot through a bit. When at all possible use a second crewmember to tail the line and keep the foredeck clear.

Do you know how to tie a cleat? Sure but do you do it correctly? Answer this; with the current and wind pulling on the boat can you untie the cleat with one hand? How about the simple act of putting the spliced loop end of your dock line on a cleat. Are you doing that correctly and with safety in mind? Probably not. I have a client whose wife is missing three fingers because the loops were put on the boat the same way most people put them on.

I will try to describe the proper tying of cleats as best I can. If you need more help call me and I will come to your boat. No charge.

OK with the line in your hand bring it under the leading ear of the cleat and wrap a single circle around the trunk. Now do two figure eights over the ears. Finish by wrapping another full circle around the trunk. Give it a good pull and the last trunk line will bury itself under the figure eight wraps. No half hitches? Why no half hitches? Half hitches are fine if you are tying up for a hurricane. Other than that there is no need and once half hitches get pulled tight it takes two hands, and maybe a screwdriver or even a knife to get them loose. I think I finally broke one of my yacht owners of that frustrating habit. Do it my way and you will have one hand for the boat and one for the line. Remember that old adage? “One hand for the boat at all times” Learn it and live.

As for loops. The most common practice of attaching them to cleats is to put the loop through the center of the trunk between the legs then pull the loop over both ears. Great, it is very secure right? Secure yes and dangerous yes. The natural instinct to remove that loop is to grasp it broadside to the cleat by taking all four fingers over the loop and pull the slack out then loop it over the ears and pull it out of the trunk. The problem with that is that if the wind blows, or the current rips or the captain bumps the boat in gear or in my clients case a passing boat throws a wake, the line becomes very tight very fast. Many fingers have been lost in this fashion. The correct method is to only place the loop over one ear after running it through the trunk of the cleat. In this method it is much less instinctive to wrap your whole hand around the line before it is removed from the cleat.

Is your engine running while crew and guests are boarding or offloading? Please don't do that anymore. Warm them up early if you must but turn them off until everyone is aboard and situated.

Do your navigation lights work? Are the lights configured to correctly describe your boat? Those lights are not for you or for the cops. They are for me and my friends and everybody else besides you so we know how big you are if you're coming or going.

Do you run down the canals at night with your spotlight sweeping the water ahead looking for markers? Come one, admit it. I boat the family over to Cold Stone Creamery at night all the time and get blinded every other trip. Somebody must be doing it. It can be very dangerous to lose ones hard won night vision so please just light up the next marker, remember where it is and turn the light off until needed again.

It always seems to be the little simple things that take no thought that seem to hurt us. So learn good habits and safety becomes first nature. Be safe and have fun. And remember: One hand for the boat!