

Canoe Responsibility Basics

These traditions insure respect and harmony in the boat.

Seat 6: Steersman

The Steersman is in charge of the boat. Responsibility for the crew's safety is of primary importance. Before going out s/he should:

- 1. Check that the boat has 2 bailers
- 2. Check the rigging is tight, fore and aft plugs are in and there is no puka in the ama or canoe..
- 3. Do not take the boat out if you are not sure that your skills are up to safely handling the weather and sea conditions! (Unless you have a more experienced coach or steersman to help.)
- 4. Assign seats. Be sure to rotate seats so that each paddler learns each seat.
- 5. Tell the crew what the plan is. (Where they are going, etc.)
- 6. When the wind is up, hug the shoreline and stay with the other canoes.

During paddling, the steersman should encourage the crew, reassure the crew (e.g. "I see that wave, we're fine", "ama concious, please") and correct the crew (tactfully!). It is better not to tell an experienced crew to "pull hard" since they already are and this will irritate them. Although the steersman has both ultimate responsibility and ultimate authority, s/he must take care to serve the crew in a way that makes the experience fun and rewarding.

Novice steersmen must strike a balance between their own imperfect knowledge of technique and their role as a helper coach for their crew by asking the Coach what to say in correcting their paddlers.

A rule of thumb in any type of training situation is that the ratio of your positive comments ("That's it!") to corrections ("seat 3: you're rushing") should be about 10 to 1. If you are finding yourself doing more correcting than encouraging and praising, it might be good to be silent for a while. Some experienced crews paddle in complete silence except when the steersmen guess them to catch a wave.

Seat 1 Stroker:

Seat 1 sets the pace and should strive to paddle at the same rhythm throughout unless catching a wave or doing a racing start. #1 can feel the paddlers, the waves and the conditions and experiment with the pace until the crew syncs up. It is the job of everyone else in the boat to imitate the stroke, rhythm and body motion of the stroker whether they think s/he is doing it "right" or not. By definition, the stroker's way IS the "right way". However, good stokers can feel the crew and conditions and adapt the stroke and pace to get the best out of all 6 paddlers.

While going upwind the stroke rate will be slightly slower than downwind. Pick up the stroke rate when going downwind or with the swells.

Seat 2:

#2 talks to #1 but only if #1 wants it. Before starting out ask #1 how much and what type of talking s/he wants. Some #1's just want encouragement. Some want to know when they are not reaching enough. Some don't want any talking. Find out. Seat #2 is one of the more important seats since if #2 is out of time, half the boat will be off. Seat #2 is also responsible for leaning on the 'iako when the boat is at rest or about to huli. Otherwise is silent.

Seat 3:

Calls the changes (Hut, Hu). Otherwise is silent. When the canoe is in surf, 3 should call changes when the nose of the canoe comes up and it wallows behind the wave. 3 should not call when the nose goes down and the crew is trying to catch the wave. You may call once the canoe is solidly being swept along on the wave. In the open ocean, the waves usually come in a regular pattern so that 3 can find the optimal number of strokes per call so that the crew is not changing when trying to bring the canoe down on the wave. Don't stubbornly call on 15 when the waves are coming on 18. In irregular surf, shorter (12 count) calls leave some room to hold the count longer (up to 20) when catching an unexpected wave. Try not to space out and leave your crew on one side for 25 or 30 counts. Tahitians call on 9. In Hawaii we call between 12 and 20.

Seats 4:

Seat 4 is responsible for leaning on the 'iako when the boat is at rest or about to huli. Is silent.

Seats 1-5:

Except as noted above, seats #1-5 should be silent. It creates friction and makes an unsafe canoe for seats #1-5 to correct other paddlers, argue with or contradict the steersman, give advice, or give orders. If you think a steersman is wrong, obey him/her anyway with a respectful attitude and talk to the coach once you've reached shore. On no account should you stop paddling unless the steersman calls "lawa" since the steersman cannot control the boat if the crew isn't paddling. This is of utmost importance in challenging conditions such as a wave about to hit the boat, the boat needing to make a sharp turn or when coming into shore.

To repeat: Crew should NOT give advice or orders, argue with the steersman, or stop paddling!

The safety and cohesiveness of the crew depends on the steersman being obeyed exactly and immediately. Do not weaken the trust of the crew by undermining the steersman's authority. Don't think that just because you have more paddling years than the steersman, that makes it OK to talk. It doesn't! A divisive boat is an unsafe boat. Traditionally, the steersman has the right to throw any paddler out of the boat (anywhere -- even offshore) if s/he is not cooperating.