The focus must be on the client

Daniel Küpfer is considered one of the most experienced yacht managers worldwide. In HANSA Yachts, he shares why he decided to take his career in a new direction.


Daniel Küpfer

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HANSA Yachts: Throughout your career, you have overseen the construction of more than 15 large yachts and built an impressive management fleet, including yachts over 100 metres in length. After two decades as a senior executive and board member of a leading global brokerage company, what motivated you to start fresh?

Daniel Küpfer: I first joined a square-rigger as a volunteer in 1987. That was followed by time at sea on commercial vessels, yachts, and passenger ships, nautical studies in Bremen, obtaining my captain's license, further sea service, and a long tenure as a managing director at a leading yacht management and brokerage firm.

Like many others, I eventually developed a sense of what I do best and what brings me the most joy. After so many years in senior leadership, I realized that what I truly enjoy is working closely with clients and staying directly connected with colleagues in the maritime industry.

Where is the focus of your new venture, YANOVA?

Our primary clients are yacht owners facing complex challenges. We live in an increasingly complicated and highly regulated world that demands quick responses. Often, the issues we handle involve an interaction of governance, risk and crisis management, compliance, cash flow management, and controlling, as well as challenges of all nature related to the purchase and sale of vessels. We are also seeing significant uncertainty among yacht owners regarding what is achievable from an envoronmental point of view and what is socially acceptable nowadays.

That sounds more like crisis management. Do you still offer traditional yacht management services?

Absolutely (smiles). Of course, we are delighted when yacht owners come to us before problems arise - especially those that are predictable with the right experience. In addition to working with yacht owners and family offices, our doors are always open to brokers, shipyards, and other industry partners who often require specialized advice or ongoing support in specific areas.

What do you see as the biggest challenges for the future of yacht management?

I believe there are three key areas. First, we are witnessing a generational shift among yacht owners, with the new generation holding very different values. Second, we must tackle major environmental and sustainability challenges. And third, there is an increasing difficulty in finding and retaining qualified personnel with a strong service-oriented mindset, both on board and on shore.

What advice would you give to young yacht managers?

When a client entrusts a company with managing their yacht, they assume the service provider is competent—that's a given. So you won't impress anyone simply by doing your job well. The key must be on communication, as this is where the biggest mistakes are frequently made. The ability to explain complex matters clearly and concisely is crucial. Additionally, it is essential to develop and maintain an intuitive understanding of the client's needs to proactively manage their yacht or project. Regardless of the challenge, the client must always be presented with options, allowing them to maintain control of their asset and make informed decisions.

Looking back, what would you do differently, or exactly the same?

The focus must always be on the client. That has always been and will remain the guarantor of success in the business**.** As a qualified aviation manager, my niece has joined the company as a partner. She will not only take care of our aviation clients but also helps me every day to better understand the perspectives of younger generations.

We previously discussed the challenges of attracting and retaining talent. At YANOVA, we have prioritized building a solid company structure from the outset - one that is not only attractive to investors but also to talented professionals looking for long-term opportunities.

We are also committed to collaborating with companies focused on environmental protection and sustainability. The clients in our industry are among the most influential people in the world. By ensuring that they and their families have fulfilling, nature-focused experiences aboard their yachts, we can influence their actions toward a more sustainable future, utilizing the opportunity for a meaningful impact. ■