

Motivating the crew
at Hexham Regatta

PHOTO: ALASHAIR JOHNSTON



Talking tough

Rowley Douglas explains how thinking about difficult calls, and when to make them, can help you to get the most out of your crew



What you say is an important area for those in the ninth seat; you can really add speed by making some tough calls.

I have chosen to divide this into training and racing to illustrate the calls in context.

Training

During training it is important to know what things the coach is trying to work on while making sure that you are monitoring the execution of those areas. The tough call comes when you have asked for a change to be made and nothing has happened or it has not happened to the degree that it needed to.

But this is actually where you can add value. It is up to you to identify the reason for the change not happening. It could be

that you have not explained it properly or that the crew has still not understood the coach's focus area. Perhaps they have lost concentration or not enough of them have responded in the desired way. It could be that the conditions are preventing the change from being obvious.

Sometimes this means being tough and pushing the crew to raise their standards, especially hard (and important) if they are already very tired.

Knowing the crew and having them trust you is a key point here: they will be more likely to respond if they feel you are

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There are a myriad of reasons why the change might not be happening. So you need to use your experience to identify the right one(s) and then take the positive action of calling again for the change.

someone who can identify that things are not quite right yet.

You need to identify the change that has not happened, call it again and frame it in a positive manner. If still nothing happens, ▶



Call the situation as you see it

resist the temptation to 'scold' the crew, as this is not productive, but be prepared to be firm in your calls or, if it is an option, stop and agree a new course of action with both the coach and crew.

the training experience to quickly identify (a) what has not worked and (b) what call you can make to correct it. Speak clearly to the crew and give a very succinct command. If nothing happens you must be

wasted. Something to keep in mind here is the importance of the race - don't use the good stuff in a first round race that you are winning by two lengths!

“The tough call comes when you have asked for a change to be made and nothing has happened”

It is not an option to just not worry about it. If the desired effect is not achieved then every stroke taken after the call is one that is not of the quality that you and the coach are striving to achieve.

Racing

However, during a race you are going to have to take the above attitude but use all

immediately firm with your command and identify the likely result if the change is not made - *i.e.* we will not be on the pace we need to win the race. You will not have the luxury of a time out here so think through scenarios in your head long before you get to the race course.

Another aspect of tough calls during racing is those calls that will motivate the crew to go to the limits and push themselves harder still. These calls are again going to rely on your knowledge of the crew, their collective motivations and even their individual motivations. Choose a subject that means something to you all and use this as a rally point. This can be a particularly tough call because you need say it at the right time and in the right way or it will sound cheesy, and will then be

The final part of racing that can prove difficult in the ninth seat is what calls to make if you are behind when approaching the finish line. The race is only lost when someone crosses the line first so you need to frame carefully what you say to make sure that you are not lying, while still staying positive and racing to the finish.

Crews have won plenty of races from over a length down with very little left in the race. The reason they have won is because they have understood the situation and have interpreted it to their advantage - as cox, you can play a key role here.

If the opposition has already finished then, in my opinion, you should focus on what your crew is doing well and push them to the line in front of the remaining crews that you are beating, assuming it is a multi-lane race. Stay positive and do not say something that is not true - *e.g.* 'we are catching them', when you are plainly not.

In short, calling the situation as you see it and remaining positive, combined with really knowing your crew, are all key factors in getting this aspect of coxing right. ▀

Rowley Douglas

Rowley Douglas steered the GB men's eight to gold at the Sydney 2000 Olympics - Britain's first gold in this category since 1912. A year earlier, he launched his senior international career by coxing the eight to a silver medal at the Worlds. Rowley first learned to cox at Monkton Combe School, before studying technology management at Oxford Brookes University.