



Illustration Mette Dreyer / Politiken

The executive coach's advice: Do as the captain says - and hold on to yourself.

If you want to keep your good job after the holiday, here are three tips from executive coach, Lars, H. Nielsen about having faith in your management, faith in yourself, and remembering to say "No", so there is room for a break.

DANMARK 18. AUG. 2019 kl. 07.51. 1. Sektion, side 4



PER MUNCH
Journalist

Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way
(Ted Turner, founder of CNN)

Storms have been raging for more than 48 hours, the 66ft sailing-yacht, the previous winner of the prestigious Volvo Ocean Race, thumps down in the huge troughs between massive Atlantic waves.

The 14-man crew, including executive coach, Lars, H. Nielsen, battle to bring the ropes under control, while the three men in charge gather around the rudder, discussing the position, the changes in the weather and how to change the sailing direction to get the most speed on the right course, while taking care of the crew and boat.

"In such a situation, there's no time for discussion. "Management" decides. We act. You can't talk, it's too noisy. It's a case of Teutonic commands. Do it, here, now, fetch that, quickly!"

So says Lars H. Nielsen, when referring to his totally physical experience of having full confidence in good captaincy on board the huge racing yacht two years ago. It's important to know when you should just click your heels and do as you're told, which he thinks is something that many Danish employees could learn from, following his experience of three weeks hanging over the water's edge.

"We were brought up with the idea that everyone has the right to an opinion. Many people think that management's decisions do not really apply when no one has listened to their unreserved input. But, in modern business life changes come rapidly, all the time. So, in some situations, you may just have to do your best without asking questions."

Lars H. Nielsen, who's original training and education was in sport and psychology at Copenhagen University, acknowledges that you cannot compare life on board a top-tuned racing-yacht with the often-bland working life, many of us return to after the holidays, where we have to sit, backs bent over a keyboard. But just because you're sitting there, with your hot coffee in your mug, he still believes that you, as an employee, can get something out of considering how strong the wind is blowing in your branch, and its timing.

"If you wish to manoeuvre safely and quickly, both on a boat and in the workplace, it is vital that everyone knows their place. In companies, everyone wants to be involved and be heard. However, there isn't always time for that. But of course - when the crisis is over - there must be time for reflection and suggestions as to how to do things better and smarter in the future, as well as time to recharge batteries."

Brought up to be egoists

The consultant, who himself has a background as an elite rower and bronze winner in the Olympics in Los Angeles, believes that throughout their lives, Danes have been encouraged to have an opinion and to express their own needs, loud and clear. On the other hand, this can make it difficult for the individual to listen and find his place in the team, which Lars H. Nielsen thinks is the most important unit in modern business.

"If we stay in the world of sailing, we start children and young people in Optimist dinghies and European dinghies, where they will have to perform all the functions themselves, and that means they may feel that they can fill any role, in any position. In New Zealand, they use boats that require a crew of five young people. They then have to learn to focus on their role, for example keeping an eye on the foresail or pulling in the mainsail. This is how they learn to take care of a well-defined task and to respect the efforts of others."

As Lars H. Nielsen acknowledges, Danish individualism and independence is, of course, also a strength but, for many, the requirement to be so unique and so creative becomes difficult to live up to in the long run. And here the individual can use his management to shield himself from the Atlantic Ocean of impulses washing over us.

"The world is full of opportunities. So saying "no" to some of them can be really, really difficult. It's much easier to say "yes" to everything. At some point, you lose track and lose yourself. You become stressed. This is where it's vital that the management steps in and asks: What is most important?" says Lars H. Nielsen.

He urges that you find the time to take a break. The time to ponder and consider what might be important in your working life right now, as well as in life in general.

"Of course we get knocked off course from time to time, but it is important to be able to feel when you are satisfied with yourself. When you value yourself, your self-esteem increases. The outside world will then have more reason to trust you, because then you are authentic - the real you ».

As the ingrained athlete he is, he reminds us that you should not try to win in too many disciplines in life all at once. That way everything becomes mediocre.

Say no!

"Think of the Decathlon in athletics. It's fascinating that they can do all this, but none of them come close to the results that people make when they focus on one event, such as the 1,500 metres or the high jump. If you take on too many disciplines, you will lose yourself and people may no longer trust you. If they feel that your words and deeds no longer match they lose confidence in you. "

However, Lars H. Nielsen does not encourage people to live resting safely by the bulwark with a clear view of the horizon and a perfect work-life balance.

"Balance, in itself, is static. If the see-saw in the playground is standing still, it's boring. If you are an ambitious person, you challenge your life. So I would rather talk about a deliberate imbalance. The good skier can seek out a bit of difficult terrain and try his hand at it because he has respect for what he does and knows that he has to take care. It's fine to search for something but you also need to know how to get home safely. Home for the break. If you are out of balance for too long, you become stressed."

The key word here is trust. Confidence that you, yourself, are able to keep track of life's compass and say yes - and no - to the right offers. And confidence that the management, despite howling gales and hurricane-strength attacks from competitors, is able to bark out the right commands.

"If you have no confidence in your management, then you should strongly consider taking the consequences that far too few "talking heads" are prepared to take." says Lars H. Nielsen, who has seen many companies and working lives from the inside.

"Can I live with this here? If not, then you should find a new job "