



# WAYPOINTS

## AMANDA CALLAHAN

Head Coach & Waterfront Coordinator,  
Roger Williams University

*If you're feeling cocky on the race course, a quick glance at online videos of the college sailing nationals is a great way to get humble. And while some of those sailors have been in boats since they walked, there are some others who are only introduced to the sport freshman year. What does it take to build and mold a cohesive, talented team with a wide array of talent and experience? And are there takeaways that we could use in the business world?*

*To explore this a bit more, Sail America sat down with Amanda Callahan, head coach and waterfront coordinator at Roger Williams University in Rhode Island. She started with their sailing team, the Hawks, in August 2007, and since has steadily had one of the top 10 college sailing teams in the country. In her spare time, her team Silver Panda has won just about every team race title in the world, and she races sunfish and is an active women's match racer.*

**Q. Tell me a little about your background: Where did you grow up and when did you get into the water world? How did you get into coaching?**

***"Don't waste time with the people who don't care. It took me a while to learn the value of "addition by subtraction."***

A. I grew up sailing in Turnabouts at Wessagusett Yacht Club in Weymouth, MA. I didn't start formal sailing lessons until middle school, but prior to that, we did a lot of sailing/cruising as a family.

I got into college coaching by chance. Longtime Tufts sailing coach, Ken Legler, had a medical issue midyear and so the team was looking for a

temporary coach. Somehow they called me and I got the job. I was still sailing competitively at the time, but I'm still not sure how that all happened!



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**Q. How do you recruit new talent to Roger Williams and into your team?**

A. Recruiting in college sailing is difficult, considering you aren't offering scholarships like other college sports. So at the end of the day, you are selling your school, the virtues of your academic programs and the strength of your sailing program. You're sharing the story of your alumni and the various paths that they have taken.



When recruiting, I'm looking at youth and high school sailing results, and trying to meet with sailors and their families at various college night events around the country in an effort to cast a wide net. I love it when prospective student athletes reach out to me. From there I try and track down their coaches to get a sense of what those student athletes are like. I think recruiting is the hardest part of the job and an area [in which] I constantly try to improve.

**Q. Your team had a superb showing at this year's college nationals, placing 6th in the coeds and 2nd in team racing. And you had 10 percent of the country's designated All Americans and Honorable mentions. You are very successful at building a strong team. What team-building tips can you share that can also be translated to business?**

A. Recruit folks who are passionate about what you're doing (whether that is sailing, engineering, sales or building a start-up company). Invest time in them; teach them the skills necessary to be successful at whatever it is that you do. Spend time on leadership development. While it takes away from time on the water for us, it's worth its weight in the long run. People tend to keep the fire burning if they know they are being valued in some way. Their passion will help drive them personally and get your team to the next level.

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**Q. You are one of the few female collegiate head sailing coaches in the US. Any thoughts about this? What's stopping more women from getting involved?**

College sailing eats about half (or more) of your weekends every year. Understandably, some people aren't interested in that lifestyle. Additionally, I think that women interested in having a family would have a hard time committing that much time to a career in coaching. Also, there are much higher paying jobs in the sailing industry that might be more attractive. Finally, the world of competitive athletics isn't a warm and welcoming place, which might be off-putting for some.

Having listed all the reasons why it is hard to do, I'd really like to see more women involved in coaching at the college level, at the elite youth level, and hopefully one day at the Olympic level, because it is a really rewarding vocation. In college, I never considered coaching to be a career option. Most people still refer to coaching jobs as not "real"—i.e., "I'm going to coach sailing this summer, but then I'm going to get a 'real' job in the fall. And the more that young girls see women in higher level coaching positions, hopefully they will realize it is an option for them too.

**The sailing industry wants to retain existing sailors in the sport – for life. What are your students' perceptions of post-grad sailing opportunities and what are their concerns? How can we increase retention of avid college sailors post-graduation?**

A. It is so easy to show up and sail a lot in college. The logistics and funding are all taken care of in varsity programs. Graduating sailors have lost the skill set required to organize regatta travel, budgeting and scheduling and, to a degree,



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team building. Boat ownership among the college and just post-college demographic is way down compared to when I graduated college (2003) and the result is that the team race and fleet race circuits we used to compete in don't exist anymore. Because of all this, there aren't a lot of opportunities for recent college grads to get on the water.

Yacht clubs and sailing centers that have invested in fleets of boats (keel boats and dinghies) are attracting the post-college set because those folks can get out on the water without owning a boat, and everything is organized for them.

I've seen classes (Lightning, J24, Etchells, etc.) actively recruit college-age sailors through their boat grant programs. Those are excellent opportunities and a great service to the whole sailing community.

***Q. If you could go sailing with anyone (dead or alive), who would it be, where and why?***

A. I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall (helm?) of the Mighty Mary America's Cup campaign. Or perhaps go sailing with Victor Kovalenko in a 470 or a coach boat to observe his coaching methodology or perhaps Paul Elvstrøm in a Firefly.



*By Margaret Podlich, [mbpodlich@gmail.com](mailto:mbpodlich@gmail.com)*