

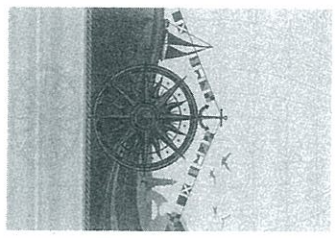
From Sailing: Catching the Drift of Why we Sail

Patrick Gooald (ed)

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CHAPTER 9 SAILING, FLOW, AND FULFILLMENT



We have all experienced times when, instead of being buffeted by anonymous forces, we do feel in control of our actions, masters of our own fate. On the rare occasions that it happens, we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like. This is what we mean by optimal experience. It is what the sailor holding a tight course feels when the wind whips through her hair, when the boat lunges through the waves like a colt – sails, hull, wind, and sea humming a harmony that vibrates in the sailor's veins.

Mihály Csikszentmihályi!

Csikszentmihályi's words are inspiring, and they remind us that the experience of sailing has many great qualities. In this essay I want to focus on one such quality inherent in that range of feelings we associate with an experience described as "flow." Csikszentmihályi describes flow as a state that arises in people involved in some skilled activity who become fully immersed in it; they reach a state of "intrinsic motivation" and loss of self-awareness; their actions seem to occur spontaneously so

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that they seem to become simultaneously a passive witness to their own highly skilled agency. There are skilled movements and maneuvers in sailing in which the equipment becomes, as we say, "an extension of oneself." Under these conditions the sailor has usually reached such a level of proficiency that the state of flow just described may obtain. Moments of flow are relatively rare, and are highly prized by those who know what to look for. Losing oneself in the activity in this way is one of its high points, a point that makes it thereby significant and meaningful. Excellence in sailing confers a kind of fulfillment we rarely attain. It is, for this reason, an ideal worth striving for.

I am going to unpack these concepts – sailing, flow, and fulfillment – but with a twist, for I am going to use as my central case windsurfing. How does it fit with sailing, then? Well, windsurfers refer to what they do as sailing, and to themselves as sailors. Windsurfing shares with yachting features such as the derivation of energy from the relative movement of wind and water, a common vocabulary of sailing terms, some common equipment, and a healthy respect for the elements. Techniques such as the extreme hiking in some catamaran and dinghy sailing classes are reminiscent of what takes place when a windsurfer planes. For my purposes the differences between the windsurfer and the yachtsperson sailing a large sloop do not matter. For, the kind of philosophical exploration I have in mind here of the experience of windsurfing will shed light on an important value of sailing insofar as this activity requires skill and concentration and bodily movement that can lead to a state in which one loses oneself in its doing.

The Key: Losing Oneself

I am standing atop Point Danger, a famous windsurfing site in Victoria, Australia. It consists of a narrow jut of land and reef extending through the breakers. If nature could have designed a windsurfer's playground, this place would be it, with flat water, waves, a bay on one side, and big ocean swells on the other. Its best asset is that on the leeward side of the reef smooth flat conditions prevail even in the biggest swells and the strongest winds, making for ease of entry through the breakers. The wind is cross-shore, twenty-five knots. I rig a 5.0 – in windsurfing this refers to a sail size equivalent to five square meters – and today I am using a 75 liter sailboard, relatively small, but the surf is running at



about five feet, so small and light is best. Soon I am down to the water's edge, my heart rate is up, and the adrenalin primes me for what's to come. As I walk the board and rig through knee-deep water, the wind swiftly fills the sail and I quickly ease off my back hand to release the pressure; then I slowly bring it back in to ensure the center of effort of the sail is balanced against the tension in my arms. All is ready. I bring the sail in closer, place my back foot on the board, push off, and I am away. Within seconds the board and rig are at full speed. I hook my harness to the rig and instantly everything is effortless. I am leaning back, the board is planing at twenty knots, and I take aim at the first ramp – a small shoaling wave. Just before takeoff I bear away to ensure maximum lift and thrust, and abruptly I am airborne. The jump is long and high, and I land cleanly and smoothly before the next wave is upon me. I am perfectly powered and perfectly in control.

I am a windsurfer; windsurfing is part of my identity. Its value is, ironically, derived from the fact that, when I am immersed in the activity of sailing itself, I forget who I am, perhaps even that I am a windsurfer. For, especially at those moments of extreme concentration or (physical) effort, nothing but the experience itself is present to my mind. It is as if the memory cords linking me-now, carving across the face of a wave, to all else in the past, have been severed. My future self too seems cut off from the current experience – no room for thoughts about tomorrow's work day. And the focus of my current self on the complexities of the action at hand is total: nothing is left over for thoughts that go beyond it. Action and awareness have become unified, and during that period I forget who I am. For that period at least, I am thereby released from the stresses that come from the intrusion of self-conscious thoughts arising from the tedium of life or its worries.

The description above of sailing at Point Danger is not one of the phenomenology as it occurred then but rather of something salient now from memories of the event. My stream of consciousness at the time contained fewer words; it involved a loss of a sense of self as marked off against the action taking place in the scene described. From beach start to jump, and beyond, my conscious resources were pointed wholly toward the activity. As Csikszentmihalyi has put it,² in flow I am in a zone bounded by two alternative possible states: boredom and anxiety. When an activity has ceased to challenge me, I soon lose interest in it, but when an activity pushes me beyond the limits of my capability, my apprehension disrupts my performance. When bored, my self becomes visible – what am I to do with my self? When anxious, my self, again, becomes

visible – how am I to overcome failure? In the state between these points in the cases of interest I become *invisible*.

Windsurfing

The experience of flow is itself possible because of years of training. That training is aimed at achieving skilled action in which all the movements and adjustments made while sailing occur spontaneously, non-self-consciously, and without (mental) effort. In cases where the action involves a relation to a piece of substantial equipment, a special condition must obtain: the skilled action requires the equipment and the human person to act in unison. The skis become part of the skier, the racing car and the driver are fused, the violinist and her instrument play as one, and so on. When all is in flow, the windsurfer too does not mark points of distinction between sailor and gear. I am convinced that this point is vital to understanding flow in the case of windsurfing, or any sailing activity in which hiking requires straps, or trapeze, for leverage points to effect a better center of gravity. The more points on the sailor's body there are connected to the equipment, the more he becomes a part of the structure itself. This seems to enhance the sense of the merging of action and awareness.

In order to see how this works, it might be useful at this point to describe the windsurfer's equipment, or "kit," and provide a little more general background that relates it to sailing. Windsurfing is the modification of two kinds of watercraft: the rig of a dinghy and the board of wave surfing. The rig, when set up, comprises a monofilm and dacron-trimmed sail that is "downhauled" to produce a curved aerodynamic shape. When the sail fills, it creates an airfoil for extra power, speed, and stability. The sail is outhauled at the clew, which attaches to the end of a wishbone boom. The rig attaches to the sailboard on a universal joint, so that it then becomes a handheld single piece that moves in any direction. Boards vary in length, width, and volume as appropriate to the style of windsurfing and the conditions. There are now about seven recognized styles, but the fundamental distinction is between short boards and long boards. The former are typically used in wave or freestyle environments; the latter in flat water, for high-speed or slalom sailing.

Learning to windsurf takes skill, persistence, and a strong will to push through the disappointments. That is because it takes near circus-like



skills to execute even some of the basic moves well. *The* basic move is something called the *carve jibe*: a downwind turn through 180 degrees that, when correctly performed in flat water, is a tack involving no loss of momentum or speed. Most windsurfers cannot perform this basic maneuver fully correctly. When it is performed correctly it is pure joy. I have completed thousands of jibes and the sensation that accompanies a (relatively rare!) perfectly executed one performed in high winds is as rewarding now as it ever was.

In the late 1970s, windsurfers began to move from sailing in predominantly flat water and lighter winds to waves and stronger conditions, and this presented a problem: how to stay connected to the board and rig without getting hurt or too tired. The solution: foot straps that unite the body with the board, and a harness that unites the body to the rig (via harness lines attached to the boom). These additions formed the sailor and kit into a more integrated unit. The kit became an extension of the sailor. When learning, one has the sense of riding on the board and controlling it; in straps and harness there is more a sense of simply riding on the water. Let's call this idea "integration." Integration implies three things in relation to performance, psychology, and a philosophical point about what has come to be called "embedded cognition."

Performance, Psychology, and Embedded Cognition

First, with respect to performance, the straps and harness enable more control and stability, and more speed with control. The sailor is locked into, and so part of, the kit itself. Greater control is available because fewer mental resources are being devoted to staying attached to the kit. In addition, there is the mundane fact that sailing without a harness in strong winds is hard work and the pain of hanging on is a distraction. Csikszentmihalyi lists the steps essential to transform mere physical action from a mechanical process to one in which flow may obtain. Among these he cites the need to be able to concentrate and to make finer and finer distinctions with respect to the perfection of a skill, and that such skill development must be flexible enough to fit differing external conditions. In the present case, one needs equipment and techniques that eliminate "noise" – that is, those things irrelevant to achieving a performance ideal. Integration helps to eliminate noise, and with it in place one is much better located to achieve the final step

Csikszentmihalyi nominates: "to keep raising the stakes if the activity becomes boring"; or, in other words, to keep exploring new challenges as mastery of old ones is gained.³

Second, psychologically, the main effects of more closely merging the human body with the sailing gear are greater commitment and confidence. Commitment in this context is both metaphorical and mental. Although a windsurfer can exit the footstraps, or unhook from the harness quite readily, there is no guarantee of escape in all situations. Once hooked in, the windsurfer is then physically bound by those circumstances ("committed") to respond as one with the kit of which they are a part. Learning to sail in straps and harness is, needless to say, a testing and potentially dangerous time, and inevitably all novices at this point experience the dreaded catapult. This occurs when the off-balance sailor loses control of the powered-up sail to which he or she is attached, resulting in an often violent centrifugal action. Hence, there is a need for *mental* commitment. Once through these learning stages, however, when body and kit form a single unit, the result is less strain and pain and so more confidence to move up through skill levels.

The third point to follow from integration is one about cognition extending out beyond the mind traditionally conceived. The French philosopher René Descartes was a kind of early cognitive scientist interested in understanding the nature of the mind and its activities. Descartes famously concluded that minds were *essentially* different from the things in the physical world, but it did worry him that the distinction between mind and body was not straightforward. He wrote:

Nature likewise teaches me by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, etc., that I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but that I am besides so intimately conjoined, and as it were intermixed with it, that my mind and body compose a certain unity.⁴

There is sometimes an emphasis on keeping mind and body well distinct, but in the context of action this is unjustified even in the light of Descartes' own writings. Recent work in the philosophy of mind construes some mental aspects as neither purely in the head nor purely constituted by observable physical movements. Rather, the thesis of embodied cognition is that some mental processes are realized quite literally by involving parts of the body that extend beyond the brain and nervous system. An action, according to this view, is a cognitive act and the body is an essential element of that act.



There is, even more interestingly, a thesis in the philosophy of mind that takes this point further to regard elements of one's environment – such as tools, prostheses, or use-objects generally – as constituting an ineliminable aspect of one's cognitive activities. One version of this has come to be known as the “extended mind” thesis. In this view, a cognitive activity has to be thought of as embedded within a part of the environment that facilitates that activity. The idea, according to Clark and Chalmers, is this:

The human organism is linked with an external entity in a two-way interaction, creating a *coupled system* that can be seen as a cognitive system in its own right. All the components in the system play an active causal role, and they jointly govern behavior in the same sort of way that cognition usually does. If we remove the external component the system's behavioral competence will drop, just as it would if we removed part of its brain. Our thesis is that this sort of coupled process counts equally well as a cognitive process, whether or not it is wholly in the head.⁵

And so we might import these last considerations into our current question: a windsurfer's kit and a human sailor form a coupled system. Let's just call it a windsurfer. When windsurfing, the first person pronoun “I” extends its reference to include this coupled system. This is part of a normal pattern of language use anyway. For example, after a collision while driving my car I might say, “I hit something on the road today.” Similarly, after a day sailing, I might say, “I pulled off a perfect jibe today.” The referent of “I” now has windsurfer parts, and that is how I think about it, that is how it feels, and that, with respect to technique, is the best way to conceive of performing all of the windsurfing maneuvers.

Dant and Wheaton have discussed what looks to be a form of the embedded thesis. It is worth comparing their account with what Clark and Chalmers say.

Unlike, say, formula one racing where there are mechanical controls, the control of the sailboard is wholly achieved by fine-tuning the orientation of the body to the object. At speed, this ability to achieve control must become as if it was intuitive; it must happen without conscious thought so that the equipment becomes like a prosthetic extension of the sailor's body. The sailor must perceive and respond to the environment of wind and water through the equipment of board and sail. Touch and proprioception must work through the various bits of equipment rather than on them.⁶

Windsurfing and Flow

I arrive at the site full of anticipation. A sea breeze is building, and already – it's still only midday – there are small white flecks standing out against an azure sea. At the peak of summer there are only ever a handful of days like this. The wind is going to be strong and smooth. I rig a 5.4, knowing full well it will need to be changed down; by four o'clock I'll be in 4.2 territory since by then the wind will be blowing at over twenty-five knots. I'm rigged up and at the water's edge. I don't hesitate. I ease the board into the water and jump on. It's a perfect beach start, and within seconds I'm hooked in, feet in the straps, and I'm planing. It doesn't take long before the troubles at breakfast and the traffic snarl encountered on the way to the site are forgotten; it's as if a lid has snapped shut on the past. Everything moves into the present. I'm surprised by the strength of the wind and the acceleration reminds me of a fairground ride. I can afford a brief smile, but now it's time to concentrate. As I emerge out of the chop, the first swells rise up ahead of me and I have to focus for the first big jump of the day. The start of the day's sailing is all-important to gauge the temperament of the elements. I take off, and it's a big jump. Automatically I tuck my back foot up under my torso and draw the sail down toward the board so that I am now configured into the shape of an arrow. It's an exhilarating jump and landing, perfectly executed. By now I am completely consumed by the need to concentrate. As I continue through the activity, my sense of what is taking place oscillates between feeling like an active participant and feeling like a witness to an action taking place under my care.

Csikszentmihályi has described the components of the phenomenology of enjoyment gleaned from studies involving “thousands of individuals from many different walks of life.”⁷ In simplified form, he says that optimal experience is possible, conditional on there being a challenging and skilful task viewed as achievable through an act of control and concentration with clear goals and feedback. The involvement in the activity has a time-altering quality, and leaves no room for worries about everyday life so that concern for the self disappears, yet, he says “paradoxically the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over.”⁸ This last point is a crucial focus for this essay, and I shall address it in the final section. I won't consider all of Csikszentmihályi's components, but it will be worth considering skill, concentration, goals, and feedback.

The intensity of a flow experience is partly a function of the skill level required, built from years of effort, together with the merging of action



and awareness. It is a common observation for those in the midst of a highly skilled performance that as soon as one pays attention either to the *collection* of the technical elements of the action or, worse yet, to oneself performing those elements, failure is not far away. This is one reason why some musicians, for example, take beta blocker drugs to screen out the noise of self-consciousness. Flow requires two features that appear in tension: great skills about which one must avoid thinking in a direct way. The hint of paradox is dispelled once we recognize that the skills themselves are “buit into” the agent who performs them, much as the complex behavior of a sophisticated machine, such as a jet airliner, is built into it during the design phase. Sometimes this is called muscle memory, but much more is at stake than that suggests. (After all, sleepwalking can occur because of muscle memory.) In flow, automatic action is accompanied by monitoring of the movements as they occur. The monitoring self during the period of flow is “checking” to make sure the action lives up to an ideal it recognizes. So long as the action being performed maintains the ideal — or something that reaches a threshold for it — the self in flow remains volitionally inert, but always ready to step in and make corrections if needed.

I am construing flow as applied to sailing as something essentially phenomenological, and this raises a question about what counts as a single flow-infused experience. One way into the question is to consider the role that one’s goals play in deriving the goods that come from the flow experience. Csikszentmihályi says that “the reason it is possible to achieve such complete involvement in a flow experience is that goals are usually clear, and feedback immediate.”⁹ He goes on to cite the examples of tennis and chess. Competition games such as these are heavily rule-governed and so goals are very clear. In non-competition windsurfing, and sailing generally, the lack of such rules means that the goals of the activity are subject to the creativity of the participant. Nevertheless, such goals are indeed present. It is useful in the non-competition cases to distinguish between synchronic and diachronic goals. Synchronic (or at-a-time) goals are those for which the end of the activity is perceived within the space of working memory, a period of time no longer than about thirty seconds. Thus, hurrying toward the shoreline, some fifty yards away, I form the intention to jibe at its edge. This now becomes the focus of all attention, and the jibe is duly executed. Diachronic goals (those involving an extended period of time) cannot, in all their specific detail, be fitted into working memory. Thus, my plan to windsurf in and around this particular site for the next few hours is nebulous. There can’t

really be any particular piece of feedback from executing the plan that the goal has been reached. So, flow is not a quality that attaches to the diachronic case.

However, it is arguable that flow does not appear to obtain in the case I have described because a vague or nebulous plan can’t thereby generate the feedback that would signify the reaching of the goal. However, Csikszentmihályi discusses cases from solo ocean cruising in which a plan might extend for weeks. He writes:

Jim Macbeth, who did a study of flow in ocean cruising, comments on the excitement a sailor feels when, after days of anxiously scanning the empty reaches of water, he discerns the outline of the island he had been aiming for ... [one legendary cruiser said,] “I ... experienced a sense of satisfaction coupled with some astonishment that my observations of the very distant sun from an unsteady platform and the use of some simple tables [had] enabled a small island to be found with certainty after an ocean crossing.”¹⁰

What should we say here? Is this just a case of someone deriving a lot of satisfaction from a hard-won goal? Or is there real flow involved here? I think we should be reluctant to claim these as cases of flow. First of all, true flow experiences are relatively rare, but deriving satisfaction from a goal completed is relatively common. Second, the feedback one receives in flow must be directed back into the action with which one is involved, and that feature is absent here. Third, flow experiences involve skilled actions, but in these cases the agent is experiencing the end point of a set of skilled actions. Finally, flow involves the loss of self, yet in the case we just saw the self is present to the self: the ocean cruiser is engaged in some well-earned self-celebration. Now, this is not to underplay the value of self-recognition within the circumstances of a great accomplishment. But it is to underscore a distinction between the components of enjoyment on the one hand and the components of flow on the other.

Sailing, Flow, and Fulfillment

In this final section I present some brief reflections on the connection between flow and its value. The claim is of course not that sailing is peculiarly enabling of flow. Any activity in which flow may obtain is potentially valuable. And the aim here is not to identify a set of causal factors linking flow with the values it brings. That is a job for psychologists. The task is to identify the conceptual links between flow as described



in the context of sailing and some features of human happiness. To do this we need to return to the experience itself. What is it about the structure of agency within flow that makes it a valuable experience?

Csikszentmihályi says:

A typical day is full of anxiety and boredom. Flow experiences provide the flashes of intense living against this dull background ... [A] person in flow is completely focused. There is no space in consciousness for distracting thoughts, irrelevant feelings ... When a person's entire being is stretched in the full functioning of body and mind, whatever one does becomes worth doing for its own sake; living becomes its own justification.¹¹

Though I would want to qualify this in many ways, it does convey an important insight about human fulfillment and action *as its own end*. Those who become habituated to passive activities – such as watching television, or more generally being a lifeless consumer of leisure – typically do so aiming at hedonic pleasures causally downstream from the activity. If pleasure is the ultimate aim, paradoxically it never really comes. If the mediating source is something as banal as watching television, it too is unlikely to deliver the goal.

Thus, the claim has to be that we derive value from an activity when the activity itself is its own end. Flow activities of course have this quality, and, though speculative, I would want to claim that the level of value at stake varies commensurate with the level of challenge and skill involved in the activity. The main point is that flow activities generate such value because they focus the agent away from herself and “into” the action itself (an embedded cognition), and they can do this with great intensity. Another way to describe the way our selves can become immersed in the action is in terms of *intrinsic motivation*. What does this mean? It needs to be understood in connection with the notion with which we began this essay: losing oneself in the activity.

Csikszentmihályi quotes the words of a famous long-distance ocean sailor: “So one forgets oneself, one forgets everything, seeing only the play of the boat with the sea, the play of the sea around the boat, leaving aside everything not essential to that game.”¹² In moments of flow like these, the motivational structure of the agent might be thought mysterious. Is the concept of an action performed by an agent who forgets herself even intelligible? I think it is. We need a conception of motivated action that is neither that which an animal performs (such as a stalking cat) nor that performed ordinarily by a person focused on what he himself is

doing (e.g., shaking a person's hand while being introduced), but somehow combines elements of both. David Velleman gives a characterization of the difficulty of what we are seeking to describe. He says:

The more conscious we become of a motive, the more it becomes the object of our thought; and the more it becomes the object of our thought, the less we think from the perspective of its subject; and the less we think from the perspective of the motive's subject, the less engrossed we are in the activities that it motivates.¹³

In flow we are in a state of effortless action while simultaneously remaining completely engrossed in what we are doing. Because we are engrossed, we are not thinking *about* what we are doing; we are just doing it; we are, as they say, “in the zone,” a bit like the stalking cat. Yet we seem simultaneously to be *watching* the action, and in flow this is different to becoming conscious either of ourselves or of our motives. Rather, we partially dissociate into a pleasant state of watchful readiness in which the disposition to correct ourselves isn't triggered. Flow states are pleasant partly just because we do not need to correct ourselves. The best sailing days involve great, often highly technical, accomplishments that are effortless.

Velleman also warns of the need to avoid becoming conscious of our motives. And this is a critical part of flow. To put it another way, the trick is to avoid becoming aware of what we are trying to do while we are doing it, since that is an extraneous thought that interferes with the doing. The right motivational structure, then, is a balancing act between the doing itself and an awareness of the doing that omits the reason for it.

In this essay I have applied the concept of flow to windsurfing (sailing). My motive has been to understand how it applies, and the sense in which flow-in-sailing may constitute something of intrinsic worth in a meaningful life. Because sailing at this micro level involves the close connection between sailor and gear, we see that flow is the result of both working as one. This integration idea is essential to the success of flow, because in correctly performed windsurfing maneuvers a single action occurs and is carried out in one seamless “arc,” not in two separated movements. I suspect also that integration partly explains the loss of self-awareness that accompanies flow and is integral to what is valuable about that state. In this connection it is worth recalling the concept of embedded cognition – in “prosthethically” enhanced skilled action we lose ourselves into the world, to speak loosely. This has a beautiful, uncanny feeling.



I have characterized the value of flow-in-sailing in terms of the experience itself, as an activity involving intrinsic motivation. The key to this idea is that the activity constitutes its own end, and so the value is always within reach, unlike the many meaningless actions we must perform as mere stepping stones to something else (filling in some tedious form, for example). In flow we are in that valuable state of realizing an ideal we have strived for, while at the same time acting out movements that constitute that very ideal. When contemplating the things that make for a fulfilling life, a sailor may count states of flow among those that significantly contribute to it.

NOTES

- 1 Mihály Csikszentmihályi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), p. 3.
- 2 Csikszentmihályi, *Flow*, p. 74.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- 4 René Descartes, "Meditation VI." In John Cottingham (Ed. and trans.), *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 13.
- 5 Andy Clark and David Chalmers, "The extended mind," *Analysis* 58:1 (1998), p. 13.
- 6 Tim Dant and Belinda Wheaton, "Sailing a board: An extreme form of material and embodied interaction?" *Anthropology Today* 23:6 (2007), p. 10.
- 7 Csikszentmihályi, *Flow*, p. 4.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 11 Mihály Csikszentmihályi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 30–32.
- 12 Csikszentmihályi, *Flow*, p. 63.
- 13 David Velleman, "The way of the wanton." In Kim Atkins and Carriona Mackenzie (Eds.), *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 180.

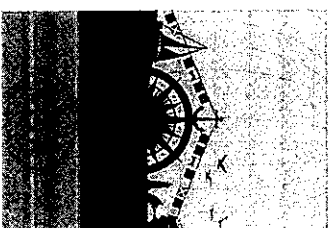
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CHAPTER 10

ON THE CREST OF THE WAVE

The Sublime, Tempestuous, Graceful, and Existential
Facets of Sailing

Ahoy!



There is an old French proverb, "he who would go to sea for pleasure would go to hell for a pastime." Proverbs let on more than the popular "wisdom" with which they are often credited. They serve as heuristic shortcuts to more or less successful common-sense solutions. They also reveal the communal psyche of a people and their culture. In Japan, where the *katana* was the samurai's soul, the sword terminology and maxims dominate Japanese expressions. In seafaring nations such as England, Portugal, or Spain, nautical idioms command the helm. So, while the Japanese speak of the final and decisive stage of an endeavor as *tsuba-zeritai* (from a phrase meaning a dogged fight to the end where sword guards – *tsubas* – hook), we say that things come to the bitter end. We needn't get overly dramatic: We're still moored! So, let the French saying unfurl for a bit, and allow its implications to huff in your mind. What does it say about us sailing-obsessed people? It intimates a certain lunacy, and, indeed, heading out to sea does

