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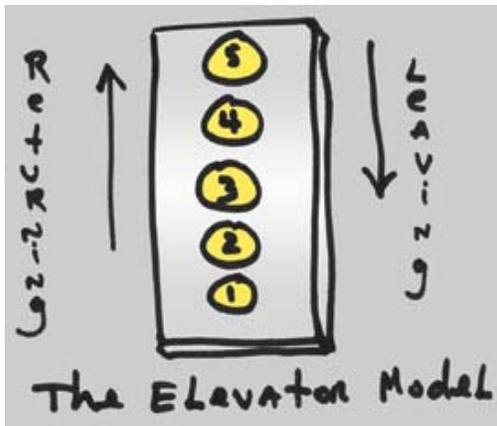
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Which Side of the Buoy Do I Go On??

By Vincent Pica

Two of the great mysteries of boating are 1) How do I dock this thing in front of all these people and not look like a land-lubber? And 2) Good Lord, which side of this buoy do I go on?

We will address the first mystery in a later column. We will address mystery #2 right now and forever!



Imagine this: you're on one of those reality TV shows and you've won! In addition to the big job and the big bucks, the host throws in a beautiful penthouse apartment in a brand new 50-story condo overlooking the marina and harbor. You get so excited that you faint straightaway. You wake up in the elevator and you see the elevator numbers flashing by...

If the numbers were going up, would you be leaving the building or returning to our new home in the penthouse? If the numbers were going down, would you be returning to your new home in the penthouse or leaving to go to work? Clearly, if the numbers are going up, you're returning home. If the numbers are going down, you're leaving the building.

The same holds true for the buoyage system in the entire United States. While certain pearls of wisdom work in local waters ("Keep the reds and the ocean on the same of your boat"), they don't work everywhere, and they also fail to educate you as a mariner as to how the system works and why.

Of course, many of us have heard and used the old saw of "red, right, return" – meaning when returning from sea/to your harbor/home, keep the red buoys on your right. But when you leave Seatuck Cove to starboard, you are entering Tuthill Cove almost immediately. Are you returning to Tuthill or leaving Seatuck? So, let's extend the old saw and get it right forever more.

"Red, Right, Return; Left, Leaving." Keep the red buoys on your right when returning and on your left when leaving. If the numbers are going up, you are returning (to your penthouse in the sky!). If the numbers are going down, you are leaving (to that great job you just won!).

Be wary of one thing: "discontinuous numbers," meaning big jumps between buoy numbers or the numbers starting to go the opposite way. This means you have entered a new seaway or road and you need to recalibrate the direction of the numbers. For example, if returning from sea via the Moriches Inlet and heading through the West Cut towards Forge River, you'll see the following: You will pass red-4W (to starboard), red-6W (to starboard – see, the numbers are going up) and green-

7W to port. Then you will see green-MOR-15. That's a big jump! If you were in the same channel, you should be seeing #8 or #9 – not #15. Now, which side? Quickly checking your chart, you will see that red-MOR-14 is about 1,000 yards ahead. The buoy numbers are now going down! You are in a new seaway which says that despite the fact that you're heading back to your slip up the Forge River, you are leaving, as far as the buoyage system is concerned! Take green-MOR-15 to starboard (so that you can take red-MOR-14 to port (left leaving!). Never fails (in North America).

Want to know why our reds are on our right when returning from sea and not the other way around, as in Europe? Well, when we were at war with the mightiest navy in the world 230 years ago, the colonial revolutionaries turned all the buoys around so that the English men-of-war would run aground – and we just kept them that way ever since!

"Red, Right, Return; Left, Leaving." If the numbers are going up, you are returning as far as the rules of the road are concerned...always.

About the Author: *Vincent Pica is a coxswain and the Commander of Flotilla 18-06 East Moriches. He was a navigator in a brown-water and blue-water sailboat racing crew for eight seasons. From the "iron sails" side, he is a licensed US Coast Guard Master of Steam and Diesel Powered Vessels, carries a Radar Observer endorsement, Unlimited, on his license and is certified in Marine Diesel Engine Operation and Maintenance.*

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