

*Moving aboard
a catamaran...
without quitting
the day job.*

BY KRISTOFFER STEWART

The *Mobile* CEO



Most people planning to set forth across the world's oceans to explore different cultures and discover new shores see their ambitious goal set aside while the daily rigors of life take on increasing priority. Raising a family, paying the bills and commuting to and from a place of employment to sit inside an office week after week are hardly conducive to realizing "the dream." As a result, sailing away usually waits until after the kids

are grown and gone, the house is sold and retirement begins.

Others however, choose to plot a different course to reach the dream, preferring instead to cast off the dock lines earlier in life. Weaving the experiences of blue water cruising into the fabric of their young children's lives is as much a part of the dream for Scott and Mandi Leonard as the lifestyle change is. What it took to get this adventurous family of five out of the doldrums of routine and on the water was a wife's support, the ability for Scott to reliably telecommute with his successful business from the other side of the world, a little courage and of course, the right boat.

Scott Leonard, 42, left a job in corporate finance at the age of 28 to start his own wealth management firm, [Trovena LLC](#), now one of the top wealth management firms in Southern California and currently managing more than \$400 million in assets. He has no plans to retire just yet, even as his family prepares to set out on a three-year circumnavigation aboard *Three Little Birds*, their 2008 [Lagoon 500](#), along with sons Griffin, 10, Jake, 8, and Luke, 4. [Click here to read the Leonard's blog.](#)

Scott and Mandi's search parameters for a cruising sailboat began with catamarans because of their unmatched living space — essential for a family of five.





“We wanted something that was blue-water capable, big and comfortable,” says Scott. “If you categorize catamarans like an automobile, you can either get the Ferrari or the SUV, depending on where your priorities are, and we were looking for the SUV. You still want something that’s going to perform well under sail but the reality is that most of the time you’re not sailing, you’re at anchor, so we wanted a comfortable cat.”

Try before you buy

Chartering several catamarans in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) allowed the couple to test sail different makes to determine which they really liked. The first was a crewed Lagoon 500, followed by a [St. Francis 50](#). “We liked the potential for semi-customizing the interior of the St. Francis. Plus, it’s a proven blue water boat.” The couple disagreed with some of the aspects of this cat’s design, however, such as the size of the salon and its angled windows. “It felt like a small space, not at

all the size of the Lagoon’s salon.” They also found the maneuverability around the deck of this cat was a bit more difficult than moving around the deck of the Lagoon. “You have to step up in some places on deck, and step down into the boat when going from the cockpit into the salon, whereas on the Lagoon you can walk right in. The Lagoon’s deck perimeter is big, flat and easy to walk around.”

Another charter, this one a bareboat [Privilege 495](#), took the Scott and Mandi around the islands of St. Martin and St. Barts by themselves. This allowed them to experience what owning their own boat might be like. “We had to clear customs four different times going to the different islands, which is a learning process. I’m really glad that we had that experience by ourselves because it was a huge confidence builder.”

There was a lot about the Privilege the couple really liked. However, they felt the amount of sunlight let in through the angled windows in the salon created too

much heat for comfort. “This boat also felt small inside to us, and the berths were all side-entry meaning we’d have to climb over each other to get in and out. The rest of the boats we looked at were at the [Miami International Boat Show and Strictly Sail](#), which we attended three times. Finally, we said, ‘that Lagoon 500 is the one.’”

Best seats in the house

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Lagoon 500 is its revolutionary fly-bridge, an elevated deck space located above the traditional cockpit area and the salon which includes the helm and generous bench seating.

“What we really like about the fly bridge is that when people are feeling a little sea sick or they want to be up in the breeze, it’s a great place to sit. With so much great deck seating and easy access going forward and aft, and even having additional bench seating up at the bow, it enables people to easily see the horizon,

participate in the sail handling, steering or navigation.” Scott also appreciates how the fly bridge creates a separation from the stern lounge area, creating another living space in a way. “You can fit a lot of people up there and it’s great for just hanging out.

“Initially,” Scott says, “I think we closed our minds too quickly to the fly bridge concept and it took us going and spending time on these other cats to fully appreciate it and all of the other benefits of the Lagoon. The size of the main cabin and the salon, the flat entry from the stern lounge to the salon, along with the positives of the fly bridge, just makes so much to love about this boat.”

The Mobile CEO

In preparation for the voyage, Scott is structuring his business to enable him to step back from the day-to-day operations of the firm and informing clients of his plans to prepare them for his absence. “Over the years, I have created a whole system for keeping in touch with the office in the most cost-effective way,” he says. Scott will continue to advise clients and manage the firm as needed utilizing communications equipment that will allow him to teleconference from the far side of the world.

He’ll have the usual communications tools aboard to support his new Mobile CEO concept — laptop, phone and Internet access — during the circumnavigation, and Leonard also is looking into finding an airtime sponsor for more robust gear such as satellite communications systems. “At this point, I have not determined exactly what technology I will be using on the trip. In the meantime, I’m using a Wi-Fi antenna to extend my reach to shore based Wi-Fi hot spots. I obtained the equipment and software from www.Wi-Fi-for-boats.com. This antenna allows me to access a Wi-Fi hotspot up to a mile away. We have been at anchor picking up the Wi-Fi from a beach bar nearby and had two iPhones, an iPad and a laptop all accessing the internet at the

same time. On our last trip in Bimini, we were on the hook outside of Cat Key Marina, and we were able to piggy back off a mega yacht’s Wi-Fi at the dock, and watch the Lakers game on my lap top!”

Still, sometimes there’s just no substitute for the old-fashioned human face-to-face sit-down, so the mobile CEO expects he’ll fly home quarterly, for a week or two, depending on where the boat is and the safety of her surroundings.

Expanding Horizons

Perhaps most importantly, in addition to making a home and an ocean-going business office, the Leonard’s Lagoon 500 will serve as a floating classroom for their three boys. The kids will stay in touch with their local schools and do a combination of online schoolwork and homeschooling, while social networking sites like Facebook will allow them to keep in touch with their friends back in the States.

Scott and Mandi plan to correlate their curriculum to the voyage, teaching American History subjects such as the American Civil War while the family sails down the Eastern Seaboard of the U.S. for example, when they plan to stop at places such as Gettysburg for history lessons. “One of my concerns about where

we live is I don’t think all of our kids, in general, understand how extremely difficult it is to live here, how expensive, and how lucky most of us have been to succeed enough to live in a place like the United States,” Mandi said. “We take it for granted. Our kids live in a nice bubble. We thought, ‘what a great adventure — to teach them the world firsthand, and show them how lucky they really are.’”

Scott believes his own work may even benefit from the perspective he will have not being in any way tied to the day-to-day grind of office life. “I think what we’re doing is certainly not groundbreaking in any way except for the fact that I’m going to continue to work during this three-year trip, whereas most folks are already retired by the time they sail away,” he says. “We haven’t had the quality of technology readily available up to this point to allow someone to run a multi-million dollar business effectively from a remote space. And for us, our adventure is largely about finding the work/life balance that everyone seeks. Although I’m probably not going to be working much less, I certainly won’t be in the car as much commuting. Nor will we be driving the kids all around to their various appointments, so I think it will slow the lifestyle down quite a bit.”



The Float Plan

Scott and Mandi's plan is to start next year in the Northeast, near Boston, where they'll spend part of the summer. By late summer and early fall, the family should be working their way down the Eastern Seaboard until November, 2011, when they make the jump into the Caribbean for some extensive cruising. "By May or June of 2012, we'll go through the Panama Canal, before beginning our first major crossing, toward the Galapagos Islands and then on to Tahiti," — approximately 25 days on the open sea. Then, cruising around the South Pacific will bring them to November of 2012, and sheltering from Typhoon season. "Then, we'll drop down into New Zealand, sail over to Australia, and around March or April of 2013, as typhoon season is ending, we'll be working our way back up the northeast coast of Australia and the Great Barrier Reef." Afterward, it's back into the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean; Sumatra, Indonesia, Micronesia, until April of 2014. Approximately three years after they begin, if all goes according to plan, it will be time to set a course for home.

"Our culture is still doing things the way of the 20th century where you have to travel to work and physically be there. But with technology you don't. You can go off and do so many other things in your life once you free yourself from that outdated model. Hopefully, we'll be an inspiration because people do have dreams to be on a sailboat with their family. Many people have dreams just to get away from the day-to-day routine. We say, 'why wait? Do it now!' Work remotely for a while and enjoy more of your life. You can do it with the right technology... and the right boat!" ■■■

Kristoffer Stewart is web editor for MULITHULLS Magazine: Kristoffer.stewart@multihullsmag.com

