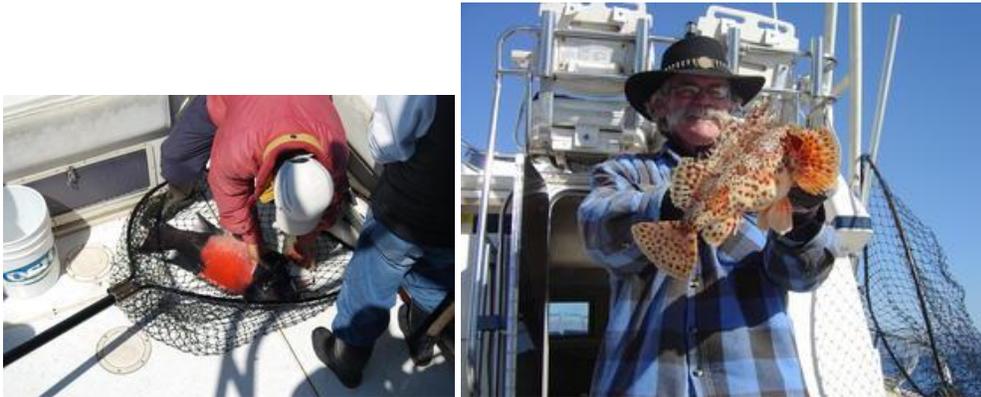


Fishing Mistakes That Lose Fish or Risk Injury



Fishing mistakes that will cost you

Fishing Mistakes That Cost Fish and Risk Injury or Death

By: Capt. David Bacon

A charter captain and crew see the same fishing mistakes made daily... some mistakes cost fish, some mistakes cost the perpetrator the respect of the crew and fellow anglers and some mistakes risk injury and even death. I'm going to share with you the mistakes my crew and I see most often. This could be a long list, however we'll keep it to the short list of the most common mistakes.

Many of these mistakes are made by people who come aboard private boats, charter boats and open party boats spouting about their vast fishing experience and expertise. How do you suppose professionals and careful private boaters feel about their experience and expertise when we see them making these mistakes? Respect goes overboard in a heartbeat. We may not say a word, but out of necessity we are watchful and we go instinctively into defense mode for the safety of the other passengers, the crew and the vessel.

Your assignment is to take these mistakes to heart and practice avoiding them. Accept this assignment and you will fish more safely and more efficiently, get bit more, land more of the fish that bite, gain the respect of fellow boaters and professional crews, and best of all you may receive more invitations from serious private boat fisherfolk.

Mistake: Come aboard a boat with dilapidated, malfunctioning equipment. This will lose you fish and lose you a lot of respect. If you won't maintain your reels and rods yourself, take them to a tackle shop or send them in to the manufacturer for refurbishing, leave them at home and rent or borrow working gear. Make sure your line is fresh and of the appropriate test strength for the intended fishing.

Mistake: Casting wildly without looking or warning others of your intentions. One reason I wear thick clothes and a hat is because I have been whacked by too many lures and baits by people making wild casts without looking. Whacking the captain or crew member is tantamount to mutiny and deserves a keelhauling at the very least. Other passengers may just toss you overboard. Seriously, look closely for people, rods and overhanging boat gear every time you plan a cast and then call out loudly to warn others.

Mistake: Pull hard and bend the rod deeply when the hook (bait hook, leadhead or lure) is hung up in kelp on or near the surface. When the hook pulls free, a high-velocity projectile with a sharp hook will be coming straight at the boat with potentially deadly force. Instead, reel in slack line, clasp your hand over the reel to stop line from paying out (better than cranking down the drag and ruining the drag surfaces) and pull straight back without bending the rod. New braided lines help mitigate this hazard because they do not stretch, however it is still advisable to pull the hook free as described above.

Mistake: Allow slack line when fishing structure spots for rockfish, lingcod, etc. Your line is slack because your weight is lying on the bottom where it will usually hang up in the rocks. Always keep your line tight. Drop back down to the structure a couple of times a minute and then quickly lift up about 6 to 12 inches. This keeps your baits or lures near the structure and minimizes the chance of hanging up in the rocks.

Mistake: Take a conventional reel out of gear without first putting a thumb firmly on the spool to control overruns. During our instructional talks aboard my charter boat

we repeatedly instruct passengers to always put a thumb on the spool before taking the reel out of gear. Yet when anglers get hung up on the bottom and the rod is bent deeply, people reach down and take their reel out of gear without first controlling the spool. The result is the worst possible kind of backlash. Another related mistake is to take your thumb off of the spool when casting. Even after repeatedly instructions to always keep a thumb on the spool, people make this mistake and then comment they thought it would be okay when casting. Wrong.... now the deckhand or more experienced angler spends precious fishing time unraveling a horrible tangle. Here are the simple rules.... 1) Always, always, put your thumb on the spool before taking a conventional reel out of gear. 2) Never, ever, take your thumb off of the spool when the reel is out of gear.

Mistake: Set the hook at the wrong time and miss fish. This really is an experience thing. People ask me when to set the hook and the only real answer is a humorous one, "...When the hook is in the fish's mouth." But here are rules of thumb to help you out: 1) when using natural baits, give the fish a moment to take the whole bait in its mouth. Wait through the initial tap-tap-tap and set the hook when you feel a steady pull. A caveat is applicable... different fish bite in different manners, so consult with an experienced angler in any given situation. 2) When using artificial baits or lures, set the hook at the first hint of a bite. Fish will often drop a lure quickly because it doesn't feel natural and yummy.

Mistake: Pump the rod like crazy when bringing up a fish. When I see people doing this I tell them to slow down and bring that fish in smooth and easy. Many fish have soft spots in their mouths. Every time a rod is pumped wildly, the hook hole size increases, making it ever-easier for the hook to pull free. Pumping hard may be necessary to lift up a very large tuna that is swimming a tight death-circle, but for most fish it is best to gently lift the rod and then reel down, keeping the fish as docile as possible. When that fish gets to the surface and sees how cute you are, it will surely try to leave, so you know you've got a wild moment ahead. Minimize the pressure on the hook hole as long as possible to prevent the hook from pulling free.

Mistake: Leave a fish floating on the surface – with your line slack - while waiting for help getting it aboard. Slack line allows a fish to float off of the hook. Pulling the fish partway out of the water while waiting for help puts too much pressure on the hook hole and a hook can easily pull free. It really hurts to lose a good fish that has been so close you can almost touch it. To prevent these heartbreaking losses at

boatside, keep the fish just below the surface of the water and your line taut (but without pulling to tightly).

Mistake: Reel a fish to the rod tip and swing it aboard. This ranks as one of the most scary mistakes. With the fish near a pliable rod tip it is nearly impossible to bring the fish aboard safely. It is at head-height where a fellow boat mate or deckhand is at risk of getting poked in the face, head, or upper body by the sharp spines of a fish. I've seen it happen with sculpin and the result is sudden hatred, near violence and great pain. Here is the rule. Never reel a fish to the rod tip. Stop reeling when the fish is several feet from the tip of the rod and then lift it by holding the line just above the fish... unless the fish is large enough to warrant a net or gaff.

Mistake: Bounce a fish aboard. I've seen legs and arms sliced wide open by sharp teeth, I've seen people poked with spines and I've seen rods broken. Do not bounce fish aboard a boat. I'm referring to bringing a fish to the surface and then loading up the rod and causing the fish to fly aboard the boat to land (hopefully) on deck. Lift it safely aboard by holding the line above the fish unless a net or gaff is used.

Mistake: Leave a rod unattended, leaning against a rail with the line in the water. I've seen too many rods lost when a fish bites and the rod launches through the air like a lance.

Mistake: Put a rod in a rod holder with a weight or lure swinging freely. Once the boat rocks or gets underway, the weight or lure will swing wildly, risking a knock on the head at the very least and possibly an imbedded hook. Always secure your terminal rigging before setting down your rod.

This list of mistakes could go on and on and on. Avoiding these mistakes will be a good start to becoming a more efficient, safer and respected angler. Oh, I'll add one more very important mistake to the list. On a charter boat, neglecting to reward the hard work of the deckhand with a generous gratuity is a dastardly mistake.