

Interview with Christine Lang, Mental Coach

(translation from <http://www.swisseventingclub.ch/Interview%20Christine%20Lang.html>)

You recently went freelance as a Mental Coach. Since when do you work as a Mental Coach and how did you come about it?

Sometimes things just fall in place... Last year, when I had to suddenly stop my Eventing season due to a shoulder injury before it really started, I suddenly had a lot of time on my hands because I couldn't ride or work. But I could still coach my riding students and so it was a good opportunity to start a formal education and turn my coaching hobby into a profession. I conducted a very intense education at the renowned Sport Mental Academy in Zurich, where I followed 3 courses in parallel. The topic fascinated and captivated me so much that I decided to become a self-employed Mental Coach. For a long time I had been looking for an idea to combine my passion for riding and sports with a profession that fascinates me, but does not put me in competition with experienced riding instructors. And because I myself have always had a desire for success, and also like to work with people who are also positively ambitious, I have briefly named my company "Lust Auf Erfolg". ("zest for success")

What is your motivation, what fascinates you about this profession?

Mental Coaching and Mental Training are the ideal complement to technical training, as the "brain of the athlete" is the main focus here. Without Mental Coaching, modern top-class sport would not be at the level it is at today. In many other sports it is already very common, but it is still a rather young field in science. In equestrianism it has not really arrived yet. When a test goes wrong, it is often easy for us riders to say: "My horse had a bad day". I have often asked myself what factors in sport are crucial to determine success or failure in the end. Mental Training has opened up a new world for me - our mental state as athletes and how we can positively influence ourselves if we are prepared to deal with how we function. From my own experience I also know how much we as riders influence our horse with our attitude. For example, a few years ago, when I had a heavy fall in the cross-country, our starts in the following season still suffered from it, because I simply couldn't go into the cross-country courses as light-heartedly as before the fall. Of course, this also affected my 4-legged partner. If I had called on a mental coach at that time, I would certainly have gotten over it faster.

Who is your target audience?

Mental Coaching - or Coaching in general - is universally applicable for individuals or teams, not only in sports, but equally at work or in life in general. Whether it is to deal with pressure, failure, illness or injury as positively as possible, to improve a current situation or to be optimally prepared for a point in the future. Mental Coaches can also make use of techniques from Mental Training, e.g. to improve concentration, to relax and cope with pressure or stress. There is a huge number of techniques to regulate ourselves mentally in order to get our psyche into an optimal state for performance alongside our physical condition. This is just as important for a test in sports as for example when I have to give a presentation to a large audience. I work with athletes as well as with professionals and managers, as I myself have worked for 30 years in small, medium and large companies. So I can manage the transfer of coaching from sport to work with years of experience in the balancing act between competitive sports and professional career.

My offer extends beyond individual Coaching. I also offer lectures, workshops or seminars on topics around Mental Training and personality development, directed at sports clubs as well as companies, universities and training centres.

How do you work - how should one imagine a session with you?

The sessions can be very varied, each lasting about one hour and preferably held 1:1 in a room. I always start with an initial meeting to understand the person and the issues they are concerned with and to determine starting points for our work. After that it depends on what is desired. If there is a rather short-term challenge, e.g. preparation for an important exam or the start of a competition, we meet more often and work on specific topics. If it is a longer-term development, a development plan with phases and intermediate milestones is worked out, which is then followed usually over several months, very similar to a project plan at work. Then we meet every 2-4 weeks. It is also quite possible that in the course of the collaboration, at a request of my Coachee, an "excursion" is made in between to learn a technique from Mental Training, e.g. a breathing technique for relaxation or to remember something important in critical situations. I work a lot in the room with tools like flipchart, cards, balls etc. on the floor, table and walls, because that way my clients become very creative and innovative, and walk away with real experiences.

Have you ever worked with horsemen? What were those experiences?

Most of my clients at present are riders. Everyone brings different topics with them. It has been a very valuable experience so far. One client came because she was very anxious before the upcoming jumping license test. We met 6 times in 3 weeks and worked very intensively on relaxation, concentration and competition preparation. Another rider had lost the fun of dressage, because her horse always ran great in training, but was almost impossible to move forward in the arena at the show. Here too it was a question of relaxation and concentration on her side. But we also worked on her self-confidence in general. She says that now things are easy for her that would have been unthinkable a year ago (e.g. performing in front of an audience at work). In another case a client would like to ride at a higher level but has problems jumping to 110cm. By working together for more than half a year she has visibly become more relaxed, which - as a very positive side effect - first had an effect on her job and then influenced her work with the horse, as she suddenly does not come to the stable so stressed out anymore. In another example we once developed a visualization technique for her riding a curved line at 5 gallop strides. We started in the Coaching room, then we set up obstacles in our riding arena and she was able to strengthen her technique in a different "dry" way. Since the brain does not distinguish between theory and practice, this kind of mental work is just a great complement to technical training.

At the end of January I am conducting a workshop with a junior group of riders on the topic of self-confidence. I am sure that it will be a very exciting event and that the youngsters will take a lot with them.

Do you also accompany them (mentally) on tournaments? What does that look like in concrete terms?

Of course, I also do Coaching at a competition if desired. The most important thing a Mental Coach can do at an event is to only be there to help and advise if the athlete explicitly asks for it – and stay in the background most of the time. It may be useful, if there is enough time, to walk the course or cross-country track together and let the athlete tell me how she/he will ride certain parts.

Proactively "coaching" or correcting in the warm-up area confuses the athlete and usually increases nervousness. The mental preparation in advance is much more important, so that the athlete can function at the time of the start and automatically recall what he has trained in his/her mind before.

On the pitch, the athlete's personal environment is critical. If he is mentally well prepared, the environment should no longer disturb him, but only support him positively. As a coach I often "coach" his environment more than the athlete himself.

Who would you advise to get mental coaching?

Basically anyone who has a current "topic", wants to work on themselves and/or has a short or long term goal in sports, work or life, even if it is only to make a decision. The prerequisite is a desire for personal success and the curiosity to get to know oneself better.

Besides bilateral coaching, what else do you do?

On various occasions in the last year I have already given very successful lectures on topics from Mental Training, in front of riders but also in my former professional world, e.g. how does our brain work, why Mental Training, The positive power of self-talk, visualization techniques, attention control. Further topics are under construction... resilience, ambition, change of habits, etc.

In addition, I offer workshops and seminars on these topics, as well as personality and team development in sports, education and work.

And of course I am still an active Eventing rider. I also have riding students in dressage, jumping and cross country, and I work with them mainly on basic training (seat, technique, safety). At the moment I am leading a technical jumping course at the riding club Gossau/Wetzikon, where I teach a theoretical part and let the riders actively reflect on their riding. I call it "alternative jumping lessons". So far the feedback is great, but my main focus will be on coaching and personality development going forward.

A varied offer and exciting times for me - I am looking forward to the success of my clients.

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