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When the coach performs waving – Emotion Coaching with Wingwave

People in stressful and challenging performance situations need to be emotionally balanced if they are to make optimal use of their cognitive and professional capabilities at precisely the right moment. It may sometimes appear that this goal has been achieved within the relative safety of a coaching environment. But then the coachee faces a challenging situation and finds himself dissatisfied with his performance and his emotional reactions—despite the best possible preparation.

Managing Control of Emotional States

A manager is upset with his performance following a presentation at a difficult company meeting: “I got flustered by a few negative reactions from the audience and forgot my well prepared arguments.” This is where Wingwave coaching steps in. An essential prerequisite for this type of coaching is that the client be perfectly prepared and skilled in terms of content knowledge. Based on the client’s optimal preparation, the Wingwave coaching method focuses specifically on the client’s “managing control of his/her emotional states” in an actual performance situation. Wingwave is not a stand-alone coaching method; rather, it is a **coaching module** in a multilayered, performance-related development process. Business coaches use the method to address different topics:

- Career planning
- Management tasks
- Interpersonal or business conflict management and mitigation
- Performance preparation

Wingwave has been used regularly for four years by the **Volkswagen Group’s “Group Executive Program” (GJEP)** as a performance preparation methodology (see box). **Use at the Volkswagen Group’s “Group Executive Program” (GJEP)**

The Volkswagen Group conducts this development program jointly with an internationally renowned business school. Every year since 1993, approximately 30 of the company’s best executives with top management potential from all VW brands, regions and subsidiaries have taken part in this program. During four “live” phases of four to eight days—arranged over a period of nine months—participants meet and work together in person in project groups of four to six people on tangible Volkswagen related projects, in addition to their work at their regular jobs. The last live phase, conducted in Germany, is an outstanding experience for the participants. The teams present their projects, in English, to a high-profile, internal Volkswagen audience that includes members of the executive board and, often, even the CEO. For most of the presenters, this occasion marks the first time that they see these important executives in person, and they are doing so while speaking a language (English) which is not their mother tongue. These factors often combine to bring about reactions of slight to considerable stage fright in some of the participants. Therefore, in addition to content-related preparation and performance-related coaching, all presenters are given the opportunity to achieve optimal emotional stability via Wingwave coaching for a two-day period before their final presentation.



The Wingwave Method

The Wingwave method is an **emotion coaching** tool that noticeably and quickly **reduces performance stress** while simultaneously **increasing creativity, mental fitness and emotional stability** for the coachee. These profound effects are achieved through a deceptively simple, basic intervention: the coachee visually follows the rapid finger movements of the coach with his or her eyes, from left to right and from right to left. This exercise creates eye movements that could be described as “awake” REM (Rapid Eye Movement) phases, which humans otherwise experience only during nighttime dream sleep when we integrate the events of the previous day into our psyche. The Wingwave coach performs this intervention while the coaching client is thinking about a stressful, irritating or important event within a performance context that negatively influences his personal well-being. During the REM phases of the intervention, these limiting emotions disappear amazingly fast—and quite perceptibly—and are replaced by palpable feelings of relief, strength and ability to act constructively and positively in light of the challenging task.

Illustrative Model of the Mode of Operation

Several different models currently exist that illustrate the scientifically recognized positive effects on human performance of such “awake” REM phases. The major assumption, based on neurological test results from psycho-trauma research, is that **rapid eye movements coordinate the optimal collaboration of the two brain hemispheres. This reactivates the test subject’s ability to “self regulate” his or her mental state.** Similar examples of this phenomenon, known as “bilateral hemisphere stimulation,” have also been demonstrated through tactile and auditory “left-right stimulation”. The Wingwave coaching method, therefore, employs a corresponding training CD in addition to personalized, one-on-one coaching. The mental and cognitive resources that are newly released through this self-regulation help the coachee to integrate the stressful or complex events into his or her previous experiences, known conceptual views and personal worldview. Research on the brain has proven that rapid eye movement is closely connected to our capacity to learn and retain information. Content, once studied, is saved in the memory significantly longer when test subjects can acquire sufficient sleep after the learning process. Based on this knowledge, the Wingwave coach systematically “weaves” resources, positive conditions, thoughts and visualizations of goals into the client’s experiential world.

With Wingwave coaching, the emotions actually do what their name implies: they start to move again, they flow again. (The root “motio” means “movement.”) A Wingwave coaching intervention makes fears that once “turned one’s legs to jelly” disappear, and makes anger simply “blow over.” Additionally, the Wingwave method specifically “recharges” important performance-related topics, behavior patterns and the coachee’s inner state with powerful emotions. The emotions that are critically important to our performance behavior are **organized within the brain by the limbic system.** This “emotional brain” is located underneath the cortex—our “thinking brain” with the two hemispheres (See Fig. 1).

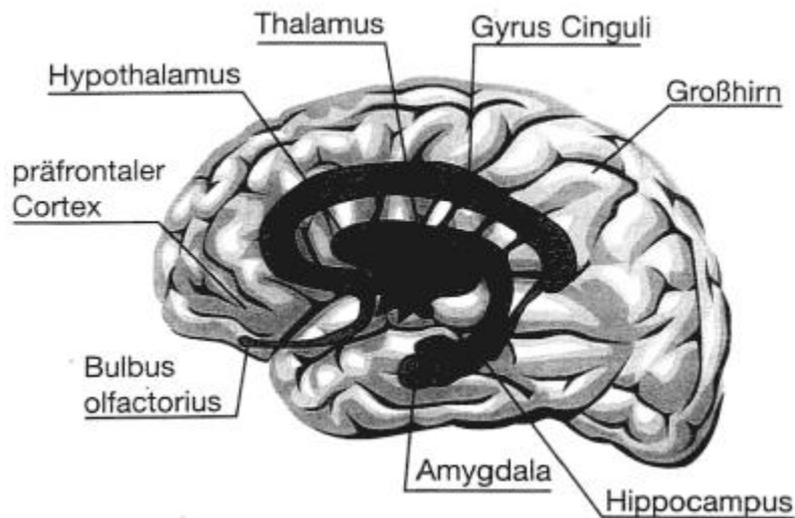


Fig. 1: The limbic system: all sensory perceptions are first evaluated "limbically."
 Gyrus Cinguli = Cingulate Gyrus
 präfrontaler Cortex = Prefrontal Cortex
 Großhirn = Cerebrum
 Amygdala = Amygdala
 Hypothalamus = Hypothalamus
 Bulbus olfactorius = Olfactory Bulb
 Thalamus = Thalamus
 Hippocampus = Hippocampus

Today we know that all sensory perceptions entering our nervous system are first evaluated by the limbic system (that is, they are emotionally evaluated). Here, the brain decides whether a sensory stimulation has uplifting, neutral or stressful consequences. Only after this preliminary limbic decision is made is the information forwarded on to the cortex, which serves as the "thinking brain." This, however, can lead to "state control" problems: if a person facilitates his or her self-management through thoughts and speech, this approach will hardly be successful in cases where the "limbic alarm" is triggered.

Distinction with Respect to Coaching Methods Based on Verbal Communication

For this reason, interventions that are not based on language, such as the Wingwave method, appear to be more successful and efficient in emotion coaching than methods based on language. The attempt to change behavior and feelings through language and cognition—as, for example, in cognitive behavior modification—far too often encounters neurobiological limits. Brain researcher Manfred Spitzer describes this dilemma using the following comparison: "It is exactly the same thing as if you were to type into your PC: >Please do not crash!<" his is why, from the neurobiological point of view, coaching should have a stabilizing effect on the mechanism responsible for emotional balance. In Wingwave, the coaching goal is not to fight the "limbic alarm" through self-control, but rather, to prevent it from manifesting in the first place when sensory impressions are entering the system. This effect occurs automatically through successful coaching: in the performance situation the coachee acts in a secure and relaxed way, and does so without conscious behavior or thought management. One coaching client described the effect this way: "Complete inner confidence is suddenly just 'there,' and it happens naturally." Because the limbic system is so crucial to achieving emotional balance, many Wingwave coaches also refer to their work as "limbic coaching."



From Psycho-Trauma Therapy to a Coaching Method

Wingwave coaching employs – amongst others - discoveries from psycho-trauma-therapy, made by American psychotherapist Francine Shapiro [3; 4] and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) instructor Robert Dilts at the end of the 1980s. Both practitioners directed their clients' line of vision using hand movements in front of the eyes to help them mentally overcome catastrophic events such as earthquakes, violent crimes and accidents. Ten years ago the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* dubbed Shapiro's new procedure "Wave bye-bye Therapy." Some people were alarmed and concerned about the possibility of a clinician being able to simply "wave away" mental blocks. Today, however, this **"Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing" (EMDR)** method is scientifically recognized as one of the best-researched procedures for the effective treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the world. For subjects who were mentally stable before a devastating experience, it often takes only two to five sessions before they feel mentally and physically liberated from the "burden of memory" that is the root cause of their PTSD symptoms. **With Wingwave, we developed the EMDR approach into a coaching method for performance contexts toward the end of the 1990s** (see sidebar). Stressfactors for professionals in high-performance-related fields are largely of a social, economic or health-related nature. In addition to managing an ever-increasing flood of information, executives today must process a huge number of sensory, cognitive and emotional experiences—be they successes or setbacks—within a short time. To adapt to this new pace they must be able to develop fresh energy resources more and more quickly. This is why they need particularly effective strategies for maintaining a healthy performance-regeneration rhythm. Even though they may experience no external catastrophes such as an earthquake, the inner world of such high-intensity professionals can nevertheless "collapse" or "shake." Experiences can start to create psycho-emotional wounds that cause "cracks" or "fissures" in one's performance foundation. Wingwave coaching is capable of providing specific and fast emotional recovery in such instances.

What does the name "Wingwave" mean?

"Wing" alludes to the wing beat of a butterfly, which is capable of changing the global climate if it occurs in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. In Wingwave coaching, the **myostatic test** guarantees such precision in establishing a starting point for the coaching process. The wing metaphor also illustrates the importance of optimal collaboration between the two hemispheres to support intellectual flights and to secure successful landings. **"Wave"** conjures up the term "brainwave," which is in turn associated with concepts like a "brilliant idea" or "flash of insight." Exactly these kinds of brainwaves are triggered by targeted Wingwave coaching. "Belief Coaching" is an important topic in the Wingwave methodology, because it supports the coachee in identifying and reappraising his or her own values. If, for example, a dedicated employee works industriously, driven by the belief that "one day the company will thank me for this," that kind of thinking will turn out to be a recipe for disappointment in most modern organizations. A new motivating belief cannot be established through cognitive insight alone, but rather only in combination with emotional awareness. Effective emotion coaching is the remedy in such an instance.



Wingwave as a Combination of Methods

At Wingwave, the previously described elements of “bilateral hemisphere stimulation” are combined with two other components:

- _ **Coaching methods from Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP)** (such as timeline work)
- _ **The Myostatic or “O-ring” test from kinesiology.** This well-researched muscle response test is considered highly reliable. The coaching client forms a ring with his thumb and forefinger (an “O”), and the coach briefly tests the muscle fibers’ response to motor strength. The coaching process is carried out along with muscle response tests (see box overleaf). The goal is to obtain a continuously strong response to all the experiences that are part of the coaching topic.

After the **myostatic test**, the coach has the client estimate the adverse effect on the client’s “scale of subjective experience.” Using the “**Body scan method**,” the client locates **exactly where he or she feels the emotion manifesting within his or her body**: a sluggish stomach, tightness in the neck, pressure on the ribcage, etc. At this point **the intervention begins: a “wave sequence” of about 24 backand-forth movements that is referred to as a “set.”** The client not only concentrates on a mental image of the negative emotion or event but also on how it manifests physically. After just six to eight sets, the client begins to feel liberated from the unpleasant emotional reaction, even when thinking specifically about the previously stressful situation or challenge that triggered it. The shoulder and neck muscles loosen, the stomach begins to feel pleasantly warm, and the muscle response test shows complete strength: The client’s muscle fibers easily withstand the coach’s motor strength. Now the coachee identifies his strongest, most pleasant bodily sensation with the help of the body scan method. He then concentrates on this identified bodily sensation while thinking about the future performance. Subsequent sets reinforce and intensify this positive “resource” feeling. The process takes one to two hours per coachee and generally results in the desired outcome.

Who uses Wingwave, how much time does it take, what are its limits?

Currently, about 400 Wingwave coaches are practicing within the German speaking countries of Europe. They are professional trainers and coaches, and for most of them Wingwave is one of several training components they employ to help their clients achieve optimum performance and personal success. Wingwave is not limited to the business environment; it is also used by athletes and artists. Wingwave should be perceived as a module within a coaching process. Its potential is limited when it is used as a stand-alone coaching method because it conveys neither knowledge nor skills to the client. Two to five coaching hours are needed for each coaching topic; these sessions can take place either weekly, in two-hour sessions or as half days. If the coachee does not see a noticeable improvement in his performance experience during this time, Wingwave simply may not be the ideal method for that particular client. A recent survey of 897 Wingwave-coached clients showed that more than 70 percent achieved their desired coaching goals using the method. For 71 percent of these clients, the successful results were maintained for more than six months. Within a coaching context Wingwave can also be learned as a self-management tool - for example, through use of the specially developed CD that promotes “bilateral hemisphere stimulation.”