



Waving before the grand entrance

By Cora Besser-Siegmund and Harry Siegmund

In recent years, **wingwave** has become an effective tool for emotion management before exams, presentations and competitions. Our authors write about the principles and effects of this method.

What do a world championship, an interview and a declaration of love have in common? These are moments in a person's life that can mean gain or loss in a matter of minutes or seconds and can set the decisive course for the quality of the rest of life. These moments of transition occur more and more frequently in the life of modern man: Whereas in the last century many people could rely on a secure job for decades after passing their exams, today many experienced professionals have to reapply for their own job several times in order to demonstrate the quality of their performance. Many experience these recurring exam situations as stress or even as a threat to their job security.

Perspective and quality of life.

"Public speaking, as we know from numerous studies, induces social anxiety in speakers. Through the participation of an audience, however composed

The public and the audience's performance standards, which are not precisely known, can lead to a threat to self-esteem and a high degree of situational insecurity, ranging from mild stage fright to extreme anxiety and avoidance of performance situations," writes Marie-Luise Dierks, professor in the field of public health at the Hanover Medical School. The same applies to the non-linguistic performance context: it is known that many athletes perform better in training than in a publicly observed competition. The following list shows in how many - often all- daily - areas of performance in our society performance problems can arise. This makes it clear how important and useful a quick and effective short-term intervention can be for many people's quality of life and wealth of opportunities.

Performance situations with a potential stress factor can be:

- Speeches and lectures
- Presentations
- Interviews
- Assessment centre
- Conflict talks
- Exams and examinations in school, vocational training and university studies
- Performances in an artistic context
- Sports competitions

In the last few years, we have found through many practical examples that the wingwave method can be a suitable and quickly effective short-term coaching method for overcoming fears and avoidance behaviour in various performance contexts. The method has been used many times by students, pupils and professionals to achieve individual career steps.

In order to scientifically verify the frequently described positive and rapid effects, Nadia Fritsche, a graduate psychologist from Hamburg, investigated the influence of **wingwave** coaching on exam anxiety in students and on stage fright in professional actors for her diploma thesis. Before the study began, a series of tests were carried out one day before an official exam or professional performance to determine that all 13 participants were demonstrably suffering from anxiety and stage fright. All participants then went through an exam or performance situation "uncoached", whereby their speech anxiety, for example, reached the same level as before, as an immediate follow-up questionnaire showed. Afterwards, all study participants received an average of two hours of **wingwave** coaching, for which a total of six different coaches had made themselves available. Now the test persons went to another test or another performance and underwent the test procedure again shortly before and after. This procedure was repeated three weeks later in order to determine the sustainability of the effect. Three hypotheses were tested with this procedure:

1. The wingwave method helps to reduce test anxiety. There was a highly significant change between the test before and after the coaching. Fear, excitement and self-doubt decreased significantly. Confidence also increased significantly.
2. The method works independently of the user. The result shows no interaction with the factor "personal" with a highly significant main effect. "coach", the effect is thus attributed to the wingwave method.
3. Assuming sufficient preparation for the exam, the method works regardless of the cause of the test anxiety. Twelve out of 13 test subjects said they reacted to the

Self-doubt and fear decrease, confidence increases

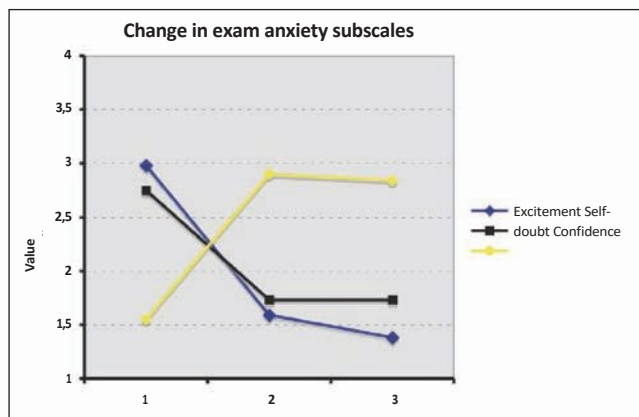


Fig.: Fear decreases, confidence increases

to have been well or very well prepared for the exams. Accordingly, the positive effect relates solely to the improved mental state of the candidates studied. Although the subjects stated different causes of anxiety, they were all able to benefit equally from the coaching, which speaks for the individual and precise approach of **wingwave** coaching.

Changing the causes of test anxiety

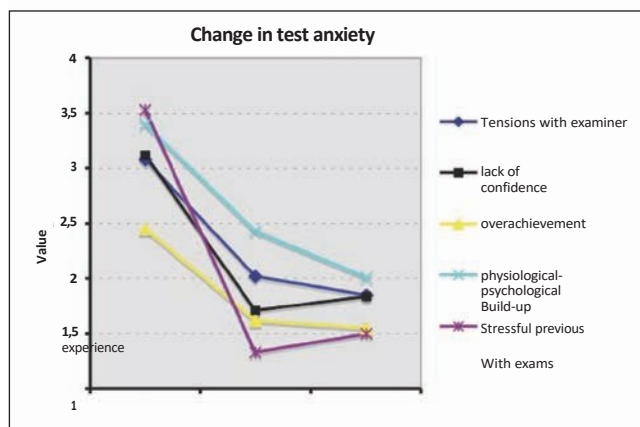


Fig.: Decrease in causes of anxiety

In autumn 2006, we also investigated the effect of presentation training on the participants' presentation skills under the scientific direction of public health professor Marie-Luise Dierks. The control group received high-quality, "classic" behavioural training, while the intervention group had three hours of wingwave coaching integrated into the course of the otherwise identical training. The aim was to investigate whether wingwave elements in such a measure improve the success of the training, or whether the mere fact that people undergo presentation training leads to measurable improvements. The following was examined



Fig.: Confident appearance, illustr. by Lola Siegmund

The results of the training were assessed on the one hand by blood pressure measurements and on the other hand by relevant psychological tests. Before and after the training, the test subjects gave a presentation in front of an audience of strangers.

The blood pressure measurements did not show any significant results in either group - interestingly, not even in those who subjectively felt better during their presentation in the second round, which perhaps speaks for the existence of so-called "positive stage fright". The psychological tests showed that both groups benefited measurably from the presentation training.

The "wingwave **group**" performed slightly better in reducing anxiety levels. Clear and significant differences in favour of the "wingwave **group**" were found in the measurement of positive feelings in view of an upcoming performance situation: joyful anticipation, fun, calmness and security. This result is also consistent with the study by Nadia Fritsche.

Marie-Luise Dierks: "The control group was clearly more positive at the beginning, but apparently even lost joyful anticipation and fun due to the behavioural training, while an increase was recorded for all positive emotions in the intervention group. People who have received wingwave coaching in addition to behavioural training go into a lecture with more fun, joyful anticipation, calmness and a feeling of security after the interventions compared to people who only take part in behavioural training; their fears and physical signs of stress are reduced. Moreover, according to the results of the qualitative final survey, they have

After four months, I experienced an increase in vitality, openness and cheerfulness, gained more confidence in my own abilities and also got positive impulses for other areas of life.

A survey in 2004 also showed that positive effects of wingwave coaching were still consciously perceived by over 70 percent of the clients six months later. It is interesting to note that many people state that they regularly use the method as self-coaching with the wingwave **CD**.

Wingwave has also proven to be an effective emotion coaching method in the field of top performance. For example, wingwave **coach** and sports instructor Günter Klein used the method for the German handball team in preparation for the World Championship final (see also K&S, issue 4/2007). And in the Volkswagen Group, the method has been used regularly for four years in the "Group Executive Programme" for performance preparation. This is an international one-year development programme for the best executives with top management potential from all brands, regions and companies in the Group, in which around 30 people take part every year in addition to their day-to-day work. An outstanding event for the participants is the final attendance phase in Germany, where the teams present their group-relevant projects in English to a high-calibre audience from within the group, including board members and sometimes even the CEO. For many presenters, this is the first time they have seen these important people "live", and for many of them English is not their mother tongue. These factors and the special nature of the event setting cause some participants to experience reactions ranging from mild to significant stage fright. For this reason, all speakers receive two days of content preparation and performance-related coaching before this important performance, as well as the opportunity to achieve optimal emotional stability during the "final presentation" through **wingwave** coaching.

As an introduction to such coaching, the coach checks the individual stress triggers in the performance context with the client on the basis of a "check list for stress factors" using the bi-digital O-ring test - a special kinesiological muscle test. At the same time, this test also shows which factors the coachee can cope well with using his/her individual resources. A weak test simply means that the resources are not sufficient, a strong muscle response shows that the client can literally cope well with the performance factor in question. Incidentally, the O-ring test described is considered to be very well researched and therefore also particularly reliable.

Check list for possible stress factors:

- | specific people in the audience/ specific communication partners
- | Audience size (also: "not enough audience", e.g. empty chairs)
- | one's own emotional response to audience reactions
- | the emotional response of the counterpart
- | one's own behaviour and state of health
- one's own appearance
- | Premises (size, lighting conditions, seating etc.)
- | utensils/technique (for athletes e.g. also ball, racket etc.)
- | Documents/Charts' at pupils and students:
 - Learning material
 - certain topics
- | Foreign languages and stress words
- Time factors (e.g. excitement five minutes before, here the sight of the time is tested).
- | physical constitution including clothing
- | Body control and gesture play (especially for athletes)
- | Dealing with unforeseen surprises
 - Disaster fantasies
- | limiting beliefs
- | Untrustworthiness of positive beliefs
- | the effect of one's own voice in internal dialogue

Many readers are now familiar with the other procedure: wingwave is a method combination of the aforementioned "bi-digital O-ring muscle test", elements of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), and interventions for bilateral hemisphere stimulation with the aim of coordinating the optimal cooperation of the brain hemispheres. The coaches predominantly work with so-called "awake REM phases" (REM: Rapid Eye Movement), where-

They wave back and forth quickly in front of the coachees' eyes in several rounds. They follow the movements with their eyes and thus awake in exactly that solution-oriented creative state that our brain usually initiates at night in the dream phases. At the same time, the clients focus on the found performance-blocking stress factors or on important target images, which are then obviously linked with emotional security and the subjective feeling of freedom of action through the intervention.

Over the last few years, wingwave coaches have repeatedly discovered through their many tests that there is no such thing as a stress factor for performance or exam nerves. Rather, the triggers are as varied and individual as the personality and learning history of the different clients: One person has problems with the size of the audience, the next struggles with his PowerPoint presentation, yet another experiences particularly great stress in rooms with high ceilings and the next is blocked by certain topics, technical words or a foreign language. In most cases, it is sufficient for a successful result to identify one or two stress triggers and to "wave" them without researching a possible personal history of their origin. Apparently, the deep structure of a stress problem is already sufficiently treated if only the reaction to the external trigger can be balanced. Only if the O-ring test then still reports weaknesses does the coach go further and also strengthen the background of the reaction, as the example of Barbara, a law student, demonstrates.

In contrast to many other coachees, Barbara was already aware of the stress trigger that would ultimately kick her into insecurity: "When I have to present something in a lecture hall at university, I am confident and full of ideas, but as soon as I give a lecture in a normal seminar room, I'm not so confident.

my knees shake right away - even with the best preparation," Barbara reported. With the help of the muscle test, we found out within ten minutes that the stress was triggered by a so-called deck memory from the client's school days.

Many still know the following maths game from primary school: all pupils stand, the teacher asks them to do basic arithmetic and each pupil who answers a task correctly is allowed to sit down. This is a great feeling for the children who are already seated - but extremely embarrassing for those who remain standing until the end. Unfortunately, the rising discomfort causes so much stress that the "stand-ins" concentrate less and less and consequently calculate less well.

can. The whole thing ends in a mental impasse when the game is repeated several times.

How can an embarrassing maths game in primary school develop into adult performance insecurity? To understand this, you have to look at the logic of the psyche, which can be deduced from the way our brain works. The limbic system in the human brain plays an important role here, because this is where all incoming information and emotive experiences land first - on the hippocampus. The brain researcher Manfred Spitzer compares the hippocampus very vividly to an email server: here "parks" the incoming message until we transfer it to our "computer", the cortex, i.e. the thinking brain, "download".

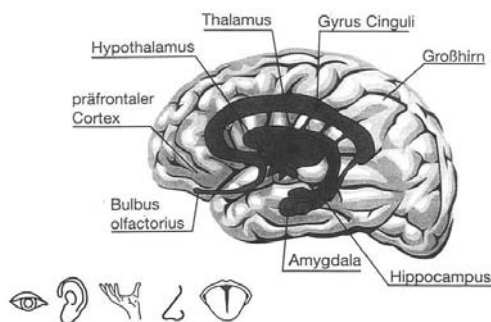


Fig.: Brain and limbic system

In the process, small green boxes build up like pearls in the download indicator, the so-called "loading bar". If the bar is filled throughout, the download has been completed.

Physiologischer und kognitiver Wechsel unter der Intervention innerhalb von 6 Minuten: „Das Mathe-Spiel“

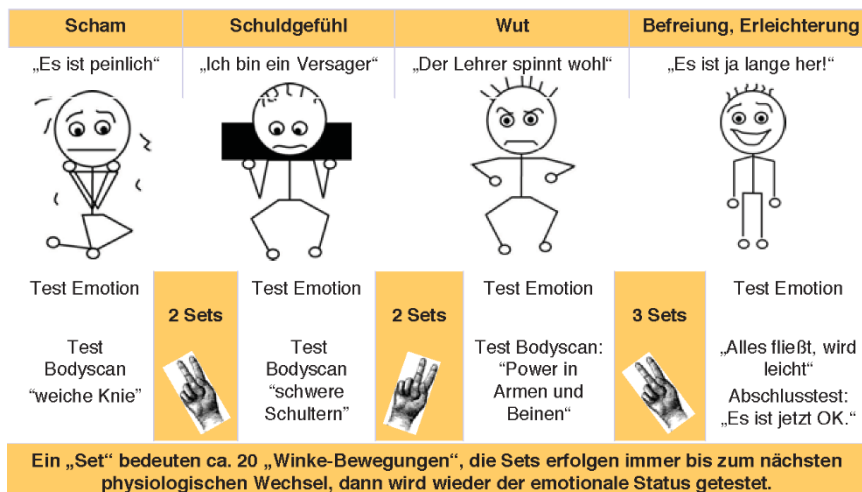


Fig.: The different emotions in the intervention process (maths game). "Emotions-Manekins" by Lola Siegmund

message has been successfully "fetched from the server" and can now be edited as desired: either we save it, edit the attachments or delete the message because it is not so important to us.

Download



Fig.: Loading bar

However, it can happen that someone sends a message with too much data to the server, which leads to a stagnation in the download. The small green squares in the loading bar do not increase, the process stagnates and the message remains on the server. In the same way, the amount of data of an experience that is rushing at us can be too complex and overwhelming for an orderly "downloading" into our cerebrum. The experience remains on the hippocampus in the limbic system and thus becomes a permanent part of the short-term memory. For this reason, people remember unpleasant experiences even after years as if it had happened yesterday: with intense images, sounds and above all with an unpleasant subjective bodily sensation. The unprocessed event "worries", is still "in the bones" after years, acts "like a thorn in the flesh" and thus becomes a "sore point".

The modern seminar room with a flat floor actually turned out to be the trigger for Barbara's lecture-lamp fever. The presentations are held here standing up, while the

the fellow students and the lecturer sit at tables. In this way, the lecturer looks down on the heads of the audience. This optical sensory impression was obviously accompanied by a "flash-around" in Barbara's limbic system with a stress reminder: "Oh how awful - everyone else is sitting, you're the only one standing!!!! As we know from the maths game, this can only mean one thing: 'You're the only stupid one in the room and you're about to make a terrible fool of yourself'". Of course, this associative recognition is not linguistic, but automatic and emotional - limbic. The speaker suddenly feels "switched off" and does not know what is happening to him.

During the wingwave intervention, the coach tests which emotion is associated with the blocking memory. It is crucial for the precise procedure that not only a diffuse discomfort, but the individually occurring sequence of "stuck" emotions with the awake REM phases is treated. Even within a minute, after short "beckoning sets", the emotions can change. In Barbara's case, this happened in the order: shame, guilt, anger, release and relief. Interestingly, the emotion "fear" did not play a role in the blocking process. The stress emotions cause completely different body sensations in the so-called "body scan" test, so they must be tested precisely and brought into motion with pinpoint accuracy through the awake REM phases. If this "limbic" sequence of blocking emotions can then be "woken up" relatively quickly in their rapid change under the intervention, the wing-wave method brings about clearly noticeable improvements almost by leaps and bounds. It seems to be very important for high effectiveness to proceed "rapidly" with the intervention in order to initiate the rapid processing of neurological data, which also takes place in the REM phases.

The overall pinpoint approach enables fast and simultaneously lasting positive effects with as little method effort as possible, which is also reflected in the name of the wingwave method: the wing beat of the butterfly stands for a small effort that can lead to great effects. The important thing is that the "wing beat" must be applied at exactly the right moment and in the right place in order to achieve the decisive effects.

To evoke "brainwaves", i.e. the "flashes of inspiration", which lead to the release of blockages and to increased creativity and well-being in the clients.



Cora Besser-Siegmund and **Harry Siegmund** are psychotherapists, educational trainers and business coaches. Together with Marie-Luise Dierks, they wrote the book "Sicheres Auftreten mit **wingwave-Coaching**", which will be published by Junfermann in November. They developed the method together at their institute in Hamburg.

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