



Steffen Chalupny, Managing Director of the Bevermann Group and the Bevermann Academy, is an acknowledged expert and value creator in Corporate Training. He places special emphasis on the method of Return-on-Enablement (RoE), i.e. enabling staff and organizations doing right things right – successfully.



Carlo Thränhardt, world record holder, national and European champion, Olympic contender, and a living legend of the high jump, now works as a mental and physical fitness coach, key note speaker, presenter, and writer on topics like motivation, eagerness for success, fair play, and the work life balance.

The constant pressure to produce results, mental stress, excessive demands caused by the extreme complexity of today's business world: quite often these make for overworked staff and burnt-out managers. And the demands keep on growing: once an ambitious aim has been achieved, it becomes the new de facto standard, or the new bar to be vaulted, so to speak. What business culture is required to promote both performance and a good atmosphere at work? How should managers and staff behave? There are obvious analogies between professional sport and the business world: competition, trying to achieve certain targets by implementing the *right* tactics. In both worlds, success does not come by accident. What kind of mental strength do you need? What does it take to become outstandingly successful? Steffen Chalupny talks to Carlo Thränhardt.

Steffen: You did professional sport for seventeen years, many of your records remaining unbeaten to this day, which is extraordinary. Your knowledge on things like sustainability, pace, motor coordination and discipline is simply inexhaustible – both from an athlete's and a sports and business coach's perspective. This said, I want to talk about yet another aspect: mental strength. Without mental strength, no success is possible. My question is: How do you attain mental strength?

Carlo: Let me start off with an example taken from sports. To me, mental strength is attained through the most expedient preparation during training, which is basically a simulated contest, and from which you draw the mental strength for the real contest, or, a neat little analogy here, for the day you have to give a presentation.

For instance: When I make mistakes in preparing for training because I'm not feeling any too well on a training day and I cannot seem to overcome my lazy inner self, then there is something like a small minus at the back of my mind. So my task is to try and muster all my resources, to make the most of my potential, in every single training, in every preparation, in everything I want to achieve on the job.

And that's not always easy. Nobody's ever said professional sport, or high performance in normal life for that matter, was easy. Yet, I'm obliged to try as hard as I can to get the most out of myself within the time span available. Only then it is possible to achieve mental strength, because then I can be confident. And I need that confidence for my actions to make sense in a sport contest, as well as in normal life when high performance is called for.

Steffen: Could you give us a striking example where mental strength, beyond athleticism and technique, decided a contest?

Carlo: I understand your question of course, but, frankly, it doesn't make much sense. Because it's a symbiotic relationship, you can't separate the factors. Suppose you're preparing for the world record, directly or indirectly, for three months. Physical training would be the most relaxing part. What is really exhausting, or even more exhausting, is the daily psychological struggle with your great goal: you're going to tackle the world record in the high jump on 27 February! Now, if you were to neglect one factor, even temporarily, you will fail to get the big picture right, and, on competition day, you will lack *the* mental strength that the big picture would actually require. In this respect, the factors are inseparable. Mental strength is *one* piece of the puzzle, maybe *the one* most important piece when it comes to delivering one hundred percent on the big day, and of course beating a world record always takes one hundred percent.

Steffen: Could you weight the factors, say mental strength 60 percent, other factors 40 percent? Or wouldn't that make sense either?

Carlo: Of course, you can, in order to get a striking, simple equation across. Actually, however, it's more about interdependency.

Only this morning, I trained with a young tennis pro who's just back from some very important tournament play at Indian Wells and who can make the top fifty in the next two or three months. I told him this morning, during each and every exercise: "*That was already good, but it wasn't excellent yet.*"





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When I do a paper, for instance, preparing a Latin exercise for my son, at some point I get a sense of satisfaction when I feel I've (or rather, my son has) worked/trained enough. But that is not quite the point yet... When, feeling I've worked well enough, I still add another 30 percent, *I get that excellent feeling. And then the result will be excellent also. That is what everything I want to do especially well in life is all about.*

Steffen: That's a brilliant transition to my next question! In an interview you once said: *"To become outstandingly good, you've got to do outstanding things"*, adding: *"Trust me, there is no other way. Only outstanding things will take you there."*

This terminology of extraordinary mentality and invincibility, I might add, inevitably makes me think of FC Bayern Munich. For a very long time they have been, not just *on a roll*, but on some kind of permanent *runner's high*, like a marathon runner, as though intoxicated with activity. Here is my question: How do you get yourself into such a mode? Can it be done by force or by training? And what do you have to do to reach that permanent runner's high and to keep it up for a very very long time?

Carlo: FC Bayern Munich is indeed a fine example. Of course, it's down to many factors. Let's not go back twenty years, but Uli Hoeness' marketing and management made very good sense. From very early on, Uli Hoeness handled club management in a way that probably has not yet been adopted by all first and second tier clubs even today. He was the one who laid the foundations, and he had a knack – and that's vital! – for bringing in just the right people – *predestined people*, so to speak – to fill the crucial positions.

In a sports business, that's just as important as in any other business or in the various segments of a personality. And that is why it works! Because FC Bayern Munich managed to achieve 90% perfection at this – as always, you only get approximations to perfection. And that's why they are so far ahead of the rest, even though they're leading the Bundesliga by a mere seven points¹ on Leipzig, yet they've got that immense competitive edge because everything they do, down to the smallest segment, makes sense...

this brings us back to the pieces of the puzzle... which FC Bayern Munich have always made perfect use of..

Steffen: Ok, I see. Now we've already touched upon the world of business, Bayern Munich being an enterprise, albeit a truly outstanding one. Let's mentally walk into a company, an industrial enterprise. How can the transfer be achieved? Can it be done par for par? Or, to be very specific: How could we help a sales pro who's afraid of the customer's NO at the start of a sales talk? For instance, when a big strategic deal is at stake, and he's all negative mentally, going *"Oh dear, that's all so big and complex and strategic, and so much depends on it. If I fail now, that'll be the end."* How do you help this guy?

Carlo: First of all, fear is a meaningful part of an individual's psyche. We are all afraid of failing. Yet, to accept fear as an actual fact, and then, by means of preparation and training, to take the edge off fear, so that it becomes less intense, and even becomes a factor in motivation, *that* is my challenge and my art.

And if I want to achieve outstanding things, be it in sales or in professional sport, I've got to face my fear of failure and reduce it by preparing myself with honesty and sense and, yes, with all my soul actually, to conquer my fear and to generate (that particular) success.

That is the job. And no one's ever said that outstanding things happen just like that or accidentally. It's not going to happen just like that. There are requirements I have to meet, and if I don't – though this may sound a little harsh – I can still be good, but I will not be exceptional.

Steffen: A very powerful statement! I admire it.

Let's talk about executives. As a manager, you have to perform numerous roles, either imposed from outside, or self-imposed: you are a mentor, or at least you should be. But you also have to be demanding, setting targets etc. and you have to meet demands yourself. And then there are a lot more roles a manager has to perform, of course. In principle, how do you help executives to live up to all of their roles?



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Carlo: A complex issue, of course. We are supposed to live in a very communicative society that's all about e-mail, social media, the internet etc.

Yet, I still believe in the spoken word, conservative as this might sound. People have to talk to one another in person, because that's the only way that makes you feel your interlocutor. I cannot feel a person through their messages on twitter or anywhere else on the web.

I have to get the feel for a person, that is absolutely key: What are their gifts, fears, potentials, or maybe there is a dormant talent hidden somewhere? And in this talk – just 20 to 30 minutes – these are the things I try to find out, in an honest, meaningful conversation.

It's only when I've had that kind of initial feel and experience of a person that I can start to communicate with them in a meaningful way.

And that's the basis from where I, as a leader, can guide the person in need of help on their way, by finding out, in my role as a coach, what parameters could be changed, and what approach looks the most promising.

And that's something that's done too little, I still cannot help thinking.

Steffen: Absolutely, yes. I couldn't agree more! To conclude our talk I'd like to give you a number of concepts that are commonly considered to be part of what makes a good executive.

Please, select three that you would call "really important, a number one priority, ahead of the rest which do have their place, of course, but are kind of subordinate." Which ones would it be? Here are some concepts: inspiration, enthusiasm, emotional intelligence, confidence, a willingness to take risks, the ability to say no, to accept and admit mistakes, to have fun (at work), to practice/train, to be positive.

Carlo: Being positive can only be a result. If I recognize and implement the first five concepts you named – in a meaningful way, which brings us back to the issue of face-to-face communication – combined,



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and that's absolutely key! - with a definition of targets that makes sense.

That's the be all and end all, having clear-cut, reasonable targets that can actually be reached. Otherwise I will automatically cause demotivation that I will never be able to translate into anything positive.

What you've got to achieve is an analogy to the so-called *arc of suspense*, an *arc of motivation* that spans, not just a week, but the whole year, and it's done by means of communication and by setting targets that are at least checked up on every week. That way I can create an *arc of motivation*, combined with the empathy you mentioned, getting people inspired, which, to me, means getting them intrinsically motivated. Then, all of these things (concepts) gain equal, balanced significance and, fortunately (if you're lucky), this leads to an excellent performance.

Steffen: Right! Awesome conclusion!

Thanks a lot, Carlo, it's been, in equal measure, an outstandingly enriching and useful talk! Truly exceptional, just like you.