

Pick a pocket or two!

Chris Menlove-Platt helps runners stay ahead of the field

By Caitlin Collins



Confirmed sportophobe that I am, I am lucky to live far from the madding crowd of an Olympic-obsessed London. However, even on lovely lonely Exmoor I cannot escape UK sports mania completely. Not only is it all over the national media, it is also featuring here in events such as our annual Iron Man contest, in which competitors travel from afar to swim like mad round a local lake, then leap out like wet Labradors to run panting over the moors for miles, then bound onto bicycles to hurtle over yet more moors – while sedentary locals like me observe their exertions with varying degrees of bemusement.

However, while sporting competition does not thrill me, being out in the countryside walking, and occasionally even running a little (just for fun, when nobody's looking – to please the dog, who as a natural enthusiast is easily pleased) thrills me greatly. So does coaching: facilitating others to bring out the best in themselves is another passion of mine. So I was delighted to have an opportunity to interview Chris Menlove-Platt, an NLP Trainer who has a particular interest in running. Chris is a UK Athletics qualified coach in Running Fitness for any distance – and here is the exciting bit – 'on any terrain except a track', which

“ Solutions to problems often come up after a run ”

means that he and his runners get out and about.

Based in Plymouth, Chris has access to some wonderful countryside to run in. 'I get out on Dartmoor several times a month,' he says. 'I'm passionate about staying fit and healthy, both physically and mentally, and I find the longer runs are great for clearing out a lot of rubbish and resolving issues; I often find solutions come up after a run.'

Chris is also passionate about coaching. 'I love helping people to help themselves,' he explains. 'I love helping them to find the confidence to get out and do it, and, for the competitive ones, to improve their race-game.'

Chris works with adult athletes who join running clubs for various reasons: many for health purposes, including relaxation, weight loss, and stress management; some to achieve a charity goal; some for love of a sport that is not a contact sport; while even those who are attracted by the beauty of being alone sometimes need the

company of other runners to maintain their enthusiasm.

Attitude

It will come as no surprise to NLP enthusiasts that, in running as in so many things, attitude is at least as important as aptitude. 'In NLP terms, we're talking about state management,' says Chris. 'I find we need to take a holistic look at what's going on with an athlete both physically and mentally. Right from the start, while introducing some basic techniques, we'll work on improving their confidence. We go at their own pace, affirming their successes as they make positive changes. We also discover their goals for joining the running club and check on the ecology of those goals in the wider context of their life and their state of health.'

Chris himself runs distances up to the half marathon (just over 13 miles). He draws on his own experience as a runner to model state management for his athletes. 'It's vital to get to the start line in the right state. You need to be confident, knowing your goal for that race, knowing you've done the right training, knowing you've done your pre-race practical check list, and knowing where the toilets are! You also need to be enthusiastic, energetic, and calm while also



Chris Menlove-Platt

slightly apprehensive – if you're running 13.1 miles you need to be on your toes! And, for me, there's a competitive element to my personality and I set standards for myself. So, for example, in addition to wanting to be in the top 50 per cent in any race, I also want to meet certain personal time targets, such as completing a half marathon inside two hours, or 10 miles in under one hour 20 minutes.'

As part of working with state management, Chris sets great store by establishing End State Energy. It is a new term to me. 'This is a term used by [American coach] John Overdurf,' he explains. 'The concept is along the same lines as the second of Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, the one that says "Begin with the end in mind". You identify the evidence you'd want to have that would let you know you'd achieved your goal. What would you be seeing, hearing, and feeling? Bringing this into your present moment experience gives you a source of energy within you; it's a great motivator. So, for example, you practise experiencing now how it will look, sound and feel as you're coming through the finish line and you're looking up and seeing that you've achieved your target time and you're feeling fantastic at having done that. It gives you a tremendous surge of energy when you need it – which is at the start and while you're running!'

Technique

Chris recommends the great Paula Radcliffe as a model of technique for long distance runners. 'Paula is the formal technical model suggested by UK Athletics, so I'll get people to watch how she runs; plus I'll use whoever is around during a training session to demonstrate good technique for my athletes. Good technique would include particularly effective physical action, such as more or different movement of the arms or better lifting of the feet. The challenge comes when we try to change a running style the runner has developed over many years! For example, arm movement is important. If you watch the arm movement of any runners you come across, you'll see that most of them run with their arms

“Attitude is at least as important as aptitude”

crossing the front of the body, with little or no back drive. A runner with good technique will move the arms with a large back swing, which helps to push the body forward. It's not easy to break an established habit and instil a new one! The new movement feels uncomfortable at first, and it takes time for the runner to reach unconscious competence. [Athletics coach] Steve Endacott has a great method of auditory/kinaesthetic synaesthesia that I use a lot: getting the runner to move their arms with a back swing, as if picking their own pockets, while simultaneously repeating the phrase "Pick a pocket or two" like a mantra as they're running.'

Beliefs

Once the runner has begun to change their physical running technique, as well as improving their state management, the next step is to start working on any unhelpful beliefs that might hold them back from achieving their best. 'Many people have limiting beliefs such as "I can't run up hills" or "I'm not very fast",' Chris finds. 'I don't really have the opportunity to work through long NLP processes with individual runners, so I need to come up with quick solutions that can be applied with a group. So, to take the very common belief about hills, for example, I get them to imagine a rope attaching them to an object they can see ahead of them, such as a lamp post, that's drawing them onwards. Then as they pass that object, they cast the rope towards the next object they can see that can draw them on. Another method that's quick and easy to use with a group is something I call a chi-ball. It's a sort of three-dimensional version of the classic NLP circle of excellence. They throw it out in front of them and run through it, taking up the positive states it contains and leaving the vacated circle behind them.'

Results

Chris is currently running a modelling project to assess key elements in the race preparations of elite runners; with the project still under way, the data is not yet in. Meanwhile, what results are already apparent with his own current coaching methods? 'Well, there are some good results emerging,' he admits. 'Some of my runners have reported that they can hear my voice in their ears during a race, reminding them of their pocket-picking

mantra – and their speeds have improved! And I coached one woman to break the two-hour barrier on the half-marathon; we really worked on creating End State Energy for that goal, and she got her time down to one hour 58 minutes. Then there was the London marathon runner who used the chi-ball to great effect – he completed the race in just over three hours. And recently I worked with a woman who found a great "away from" motivator in imagining that an athlete she particularly wanted to get away from was chasing her during the race. This rather unusual strategy worked so well for this woman, who wouldn't normally have expected to get a prize, that she achieved first place in her age group!'

What of Chris's most memorable moments of his running career? It turns out that one event that was particularly memorable was actually a walk, not a run. 'I did a Midnight Walk for Breast Cancer Awareness; it was a full marathon walk with a huge number of people taking part – 17,000 women and 100 men, and all of us wearing bras!' he remembers.

Now that is an idea to liven up the Olympics; it would certainly lend colour to our Exmoor Iron Man contest – the spectators would wonder if they had been over-indulging in the Somerset scrumpy! ■

End State Energy

This is a way to gain the energy you need to achieve your goal, going to the end state of achieving the goal in order to find it.

- 1 Decide what it is you want to achieve.
- 2 Take yourself into the future to just when you complete your goal.
- 3 What would it be like to achieve your goal? What would you be seeing? What would you be hearing? How would you be feeling?
- 4 Notice the tremendous surge of energy that accompanies your elation as you imagine experiencing your achievement.
- 5 Anchor that energy rush with a word, a phrase, a gesture, a physical posture.
- 6 Now fire off that anchor whenever you need that end state energy along the way towards your goal!