

8 *You — the trainer*

People will expect all sorts of things from you — and if you disappoint them in their expectations, they will get the impression that you are not the ‘right kind’ of trainer. Clarify your role right in the beginning.

- What does your stable management expect from you?
- What does the vaulting club expect?
- What do the parents expect to be your job?
- What do the children expect from their trainer?

Your first and foremost job should be to teach vaulters correct and safe technique of the sport of vaulting. To further the children’s mental and physical development...to ensure they have fun...to be a moral example...can you feel how the ground is getting slippery? Have you given up smoking yet?

Being the trainer of a team also means that you will be at least marginally involved in a thousand other issues:

- The booking of shows
- The writing and constant revising of shows
- Procuring and taping suitable music for the shows
- Assembling information for your older vaulters who might want to compete elsewhere
- Arranging the transport, assuring stabling, lodging for vaulters
- Attendance lists, vaulting bills, club memberships
- Updating insurance status (you want to be sure your vaulters are properly insured *before* an accident occurs!)
- Design of uniforms, ordering of new ones for new members
- Ordering of new equipment or taking care of repairs

- Photo sessions and newspaper articles, general promotion
- Fund-raising events for team activities
- Vaulting newsletters for the club
- Calling parents' meetings, advising changes in training or show times etc.
- Representing the club within the provincial or national association
- Arranging fun events (BBQ etc.) for the team
- Arranging stable competitions

and this is not the end of the list! You can see how much time will be left over for training if you are expected to fulfil all of the above duties!

It is *not* the trainer's job to keep all of these things going. Call a parent meeting as soon as your club comes to life or at the point when you are taking over from the previous trainer. Then establish clearly which jobs you are willing to take on, and where you will only have time to help coordinate.

Don't underestimate the time it will take you to write your team kur exercises and to tape the music for your shows! With twenty years of experience it takes me approximately two hours to write a good and fair team kur (equal turns for vaulters with equal performance level), and up to six hours to find, choose, fit and tape suitable music, depending on the record library at hand! (I take pride in the fact that our shows are never the same, and never use the same music.)

The role of the coach

Get clear in your mind why you want to coach vaulters and how deeply you want to be involved.

- Are you a riding teacher and this is one more discipline you wish to be knowledgeable in? Are you an ex-vaulter yourself? On which level did you perform? Do you want to get the vaulters of your town into the picture? (task approach)

- Do you want to be a winning coach at competitions? Do you want to be ‘the boss’? Do you want to be the guidance and idol of your youngsters? (self approach)
- Do you want to help the sport? The community? Do you want to morally influence children through this sport? Do you like kids and want to give them a good time? Do you want to affect their minds through the learning of team spirit, discipline, responsibility? (social approach)

I think all of the above reasons are valid, if handed down in an acceptable way. But you should state to your team with which goals in mind you are taking over, to avoid later disappointments. I am personally not interested in running playgroups (so I don’t take on three and four-year-olds), but interested in good and ever-improving performance (so my club attracts ambitious vaulters). I am not interested in instilling in my vaulters the greed to win at competitions and am very strict on good sportmanship (although they win their fair part, when they give their best). I want my children to have a good time – but not at the expense of my weary nerves after a full day at work...

When I read books on what kind of human being I should be to make a good coach, I feel I should grow wings like an angel... No, I can’t always be polite, cool, positive, supportive and enthusiastic! I yell at them when they do dangerous things, although I have explained just *that* again for the hundredth time a minute before. And there are days when it is too cold and I am too tired at night to be encouraging for anyone... But on the whole it is easy to produce all these wonderful virtues, when your team is *with you*, when you see that they are trying hard and showing progress.

Be qualified

- educate yourself on vaulting matters: take time to study the books and the videos available

- try to arrange clinics with knowledgeable coaches if possible when you feel the need for the ‘next step up’
- plan your training from easy to complex (know the difference!)
- if you don’t know how to do an exercise, don’t pretend. Make it a goal to find out in a safe way together with your vaulters. If you are not an ex-vaulter – how should you know? (read this book again. . .)
- take the time to learn the rules and regulations, so you can train and answer questions competently

Be positive

- set realistic goals for your vaulters – especially for beginners! (It is safe to say that *no* beginner can do the scissors correctly – they’ll feel better, when they know that off hand!)
- praise the effort, as well as results
- give encouraging feedback, take things step by step
- be attentive enough *always* to note improvements and mention them immediately. Ask if the vaulter can feel the difference, if s/he understood what s/he had done more correctly this time and why it worked out better
- note and mention desirable behaviour around the horse, the team etc., the voluntary responsibility taken on, the hand lent without being asked to

Correction to mistakes

- use careful and intelligent observation (if you have not *seen* where the mistake lies, how can you correct it?)
- give clear and specific information in corrective statements

- give corrective instruction in a simple and positive way to minor mistakes
- adjust your explanations to the age level and mental development of the vaulter
- give encouragement immediately and take the time to explain how to do better next time
- if you shouted: it should be warranted by the occasion. Explain the dangers and the possible consequences of dangerous habits, the seriousness of mistakes. Explain why you must *insist* on your instructions being followed
- if you demonstrate: don't use that situation to show off!
- otherwise: use your sense of humour! be reassuring

How to gain respect

- set an example and *earn* that respect!
- don't take your eyes off the vaulter on the horse. They are training with you to get your input – you must watch!
- be honest: a praise must mean the performance or the effort was good, or it becomes meaningless
- give your vaulters credit for brains, if they have any! don't preach to them, explain things briefly, but in a way they can understand (depending on age level)
- If you demonstrate: show courage, before you demand it!
- show that you are a competent and willing teacher
- be fair and considerate – don't favour anybody
- don't pretend to know what you don't know: always diffuse awkward situations by using your sense of humour

- never pressure children into something they are afraid of doing. Never ridicule their fright. There is *always* a better way to get them where you want them! Don't force them to say that they are afraid: observe it and overcome it by helping.
- A frightened vaulter causes accidents
- let them play trainer from time to time — to get to know the frustrations and the responses that might trigger! (to better understand your not-so-positive reactions sometimes...)

Deal with parental pressure

- try to communicate with the youngsters directly
- communicate with the parents aside
- if you feel pressure from home: emphasize safety and fun!

Be a good listener

- make your communication (verbal and non-verbal) meaningful
- ask for opinions, share concerns, get suggestions, show genuine interest and acceptance of their feelings, paraphrase and ask them for clarification if you don't understand what they mean. Don't forget: *they* know what it feels like to be way up there and not to trust the grip of your undermen... you may have never experienced it or long forgotten! Their comments are valid and necessary to good training; it's not a thing you should just do to make them feel better!

Maintain discipline

- establish clearly what is expected
- explain clearly *why*! (safety, impression of the team, your aching throat if you have to shout too much)

- establish clearly how lack of discipline will be dealt with
- establish a balance between freedom and structure
- emphasize the *team* aspect and responsibility

Deal with violations

- allow them to explain, and listen to, their side of the story
- if punishment is necessary, use the *restriction* in involvement of something which is desirable. Explain the dangers, and why it would be stupid on your part to take on unnecessary risks for their fun. (Most North American children *do* understand the concept of getting sued!)
- don't lecture or embarrass a single child, or if lecturing is necessary, do it aside
- be consistent and impartial in the enforcement of your rules

In competitions

- set the example for the behaviour during the event:
 - don't show nervousness, spread reassurance: 'you're well prepared, now just do your best, don't worry about the others or winning', 'get into the event, enjoy the excitement and adrenaline, but take care you don't lose that honest smile!'
 - emphasize that participation is more important than winning
 - be the first 'good loser' and the most gracious good winner
 - express your training philosophy by showing it honestly:
 - what is your response to a poor performance in competition?
 - live* good sportsmanship in front of them
 - don't let them brag or verbally abuse other teams!

show them the politeness you expect them to show towards competitors and officials!

- teach them acceptance of rules and rulings in good grace... even if they sometimes seem unfair. 'Learn from the experience and the marks. Learn what the judges want to see, let's discuss their comments', etc.
- show them that *you* are able to accept their mistakes (even if it damaged the team) if they were not intentional (which they almost never are!)