

# How kiting changed my life

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I was recently asked how kiting had changed my life, and for the sake of a short answer, I replied: “It set me on a journey in which more dreams have come true than I could ever have wished for, a journey that showed me that whatever you dream of you can achieve.” The truth though is that I could write a book about how kiting has changed my life. It has taught me more about myself and the opportunities we are given in our time on this planet than any university or personal development book ever could.





I was born in landlocked Vienna, into a conservative war-generation family, but as a little girl, I dreamt of windsurfing, surfing, and living alongside the rhythms of the ocean. Caught up in the expectations of society, that dream was put on hold during my teenage years, throughout university, and afterwards as I climbed the career ladder to a top management position in London and Hong Kong. In my early twenties I had an office on the 25th floor of an impressive piece of modern architecture, an apartment with a spectacular vista over the skyline of Hong Kong, a decent salary and a secretary twice my age... In Hong Kong, you live to work. I was drawn into the mentality that often comes with success: more, higher, faster. Life was intense and exciting; I can't deny enjoying it for a few years, but eventually I kept waking up with a nagging feeling every morning.

I came to realize that regardless of my success in business I felt unfulfilled, empty and unhappy, fully engulfed in the rat race and trapped in the career that I had worked so hard for. Realizing I had created an existence that did not resonate with me was a difficult insight and an interesting, yet confusing and challenging time in my life. Instead of surrendering I took the bull by the horns, stepped into the unknown, and have never looked back. Kiting had only just come on the scene back then – it became the catalyst for me to break free and commit myself 100% to the new sport. It has come a long way since then, however the lessons I learnt on my journey are timeless and independent of any industry or career path.

♥ **1. ALLOW YOURSELF TO DREAM, AND FOLLOW YOUR HEART**

When I quit my job in Hong Kong, I had no plan B. I knew I had to get out of the city and I wanted to learn to kitesurf. A two-month stint in Morocco followed in which my kiting progressed quickly and I came up with a new master-plan for my life – to see how good I could get and to compete in the World Cup the following year. So I did. And came seventh in my first event! That was the beginning of my journey in a pro kiting career and ultimately of me living out my dreams. Fast-forward 17 years and I'm still doing what I love, albeit in an adapted version as a freerider and writer. Following my heart and turning my passion into my profession was the most daredevil and frightening thing I've ever done. However, it has also been the most rewarding and fulfilling step in my life.

👣 **2. DARE TO STEP OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE**

Modern society teaches that it is best to stay in your comfort zone. Outside that zone life gets risky, scary and uncertain. But is it really worthwhile choosing security over personal fulfilment and happiness? Without doubt, change and the unknown feel daunting, yet that's the very place where life's magic happens.

😬 **3. DON'T LET FEAR HOLD YOU BACK**

Why is it so hard to step out of the comfort zone? Primarily, it's fear

that holds you back – fear of failure, change, or what your peers, family or society will think. Fear is mostly self-created – it's an illusion and an emotional reaction to thoughts about losing or not getting what is important to you. As such, fear is the catalyst for inaction. Freeing your mind from your fears is crucial when you embark on your journey of fighting for what you want. Nobody approved of me quitting my career in Hong Kong – I was declared a total nutcase by friends and family who suggested I was ruining my life. Not one single person supported me in my decision. Looking back, I sometimes wonder how I had the strength to take the leap. One thing I know, is overcoming all sorts of fears (existential fears, fears of losing in a comp, fears before a trip to remote corners of the planet and so on) have been a crucial part of my journey. So, feel the fear and do it anyway!

🍀 **4. THINGS IN LIFE DON'T COME DOWN TO LUCK – HARD WORK WILL GET YOU THERE**

I often hear "oh wow, you're so lucky" from people when I tell them what I do for a living. However, I consider luck a minor factor in achieving your goals. The only part that was luck on my journey, is that I was born healthy, in a developed country – everything else I created. I've had to accept huge risks, was on my own for most of the way, and have fought with sheer determination to achieve my dreams. I've faced victories, defeats and burnouts, as well as major injuries that could have meant the end of my career, but I never gave up.

🗨️ **5. DON'T ACCEPT 'NO' FOR AN ANSWER – PERSISTENCE IS KEY**

In my first World Cup event, I had it mapped out in my head: I was determined to secure sponsorship with my favorite kite brand. They were already market leaders and I wanted to ride for them and no one else. I knew I was good. I had a promotional video on a VHS tape that I'd produced in Venezuela, and my selling and marketing skills were solid thanks to my experience in the business world – what could possibly go wrong? Well, unfortunately, things didn't turn out as I hoped! The brand told me they didn't need another female in the team as they already had the multiple World Champ Cindy Mosey and the market was predominantly male. Instead of heading away with my tail between my legs or trying another brand, I didn't give in. It took a few more meetings but eventually the brand offered me sponsorship, leading to a now 17-year relationship. This is just one example, but if I had to name three factors that are the key to success, they'd be persistence, hard work and commitment.

👥 **6. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO BE LIKED BY EVERYONE!**

When I first started to compete, the group of girls in the World Cup were a tight-knit community. I arrived on the scene and have to admit, I wasn't too warmly welcomed; before I'd even met them, I already felt strong vibes against me. After a while, some of the girls warmed to me; others didn't give me a chance. It wasn't a good feel-



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ing, but I had experienced it before in the business jungles of Hong Kong and London, and knew not to let it bother me. When people feel threatened (and that mightn't have anything to do with your actions or personality) they can turn mean or unreasonable. And even if it's not due to feeling threatened, we all have distinct personalities, opinions and tastes. You have to get used to the fact that you won't be everybody's cup of tea – the sooner you accept that and let go of the illusion of being universally liked, the better. Don't take it personally, be the best version of yourself and don't allow your happiness and self-esteem to be determined by a popularity contest.

**7. SOMETIMES THE SEEMINGLY BIGGEST 'DISASTER' CAN BE A BLESSING**

When I tore my ACL ligament while training, it could easily have been the end of my career. Back then kiting progressed with lightning speed and new tricks were born every day. The news of surgery, a super tough rehab, and over six months off the water before I could compete again, was devastating. Today I regard this injury as one of the best things that ever happened to me. I was too caught up in chasing a world title; the pressure I was putting on myself at each event nearly broke me and I was close to a burn out. I wouldn't have stopped, but the injury forced me to. It was time to reassess and regroup. And what I learnt in my time off the water was priceless, where – working with a sports psychologist – I came to recognize multiple mistakes in my approach to training and competition. I realized that becoming World Champ was not why I quit

my business career, rather it was my passion for the ocean and the childhood dream of a life built around it.

In my time off the water I started to write articles, which were greatly received by the magazines and readers; suddenly my media portfolio tripled. By the end of my rehab, I was the fittest I've ever been and clearest about what I wanted. 15 months after my last comp, I went to one more World Cup event and won it. After that, it was time for me to quit comps, to follow my heart yet again, and fully commit to my path as a globetrotting freerider and travel writer! When my sponsor promoted me onto the international team a year or so later – something I had always aimed for through my competition results, but hadn't achieved – I knew I was on the right track.

Living in Margaret River in Western Australia today, married to my soul mate (a mad Aussie big wave windsurfer), and having created a home on one of the most amazing coastlines in the world, with the Indian Ocean almost at my doorstep, I am living my ultimate childhood dream. Today, I truly believe each and every one of us has the power to realize our dreams. The secret formula to live by: dream, believe, commit, become. I would encourage you to discover your personal path by listening to your heart and to follow it with no fear, to pursue and fully dedicate yourself to your special talents, and to make your personal aptitudes and passions the center of your life.... ■



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