

Productive to the Max

Productivity

Performance

Profitability

Flow

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"The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile."
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Do you find your life and work interesting? Do the days fly by quickly with little effort on your part? Do they end with a feeling of satisfaction and completion?

Or do you find that you are zoned out most of the time? That you do unusual things like leaving the cat in the fridge, not watching where you are going, or ending up in a place to which you have no idea you were going?

Perhaps the days drag on and your sense of accomplishment is elusive. You tune out at meetings and find it very hard to focus. You are bored and frustrated and apathetic.

Then you are probably out of sync and not in the "Flow".

The term "flow" was coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a professor of psychology whose ground breaking paper, ***Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*** set forth the concept for the first time. Flow, as described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is a "state of inner experience in which there is order in consciousness." He also states that "some of the activities that consistently produce flow (are) sports, games, art, and hobbies." "The more a job inherently resembles a game - with variety, appropriate and flexible challenges, clear goals, and immediate feedback - the more enjoyable it will be."

In order to stay in the flow you must pay attention to what is happening now. You can do that only if the challenges you are faced with are in sync with your skill levels. Think about the times when you really do well and perform optimally. It is because you have set a goal, created action plans or tasks, set up rules and systems and obtained feedback on your performance. You are so "in the moment" that nothing distracts you and you do not have

time to worry about anything irrelevant. You ignore interruptions and just push on and you even enjoy doing it!

This concept of "flow" or "staying in the zone" is used by sports trainers and psychologists all the time. By using various techniques, athletes are encouraged to push themselves to overcome the difficult aspects of their game, to learn and grow and improve their techniques and mindset. Although their conscious mind is telling them that a certain move might be too challenging, or even dangerous, as they stay focused, those difficulties are overcome.

How can you use this very simple concept of flow, an optimal psychological and physiological climate for peak performance to **M**-aster your Time, **A**-chieve your goals **and** **X**-pand your potential?

Control the "flow"

- You can influence and affect when and how you get in the flow because you have control. Time Management is all about control. You can and should keep yourself on track by using the following techniques:
- Improve your skill levels. If you cannot master the skills required of your position, then you will either be overwhelmed or find it too challenging. Take advantage of training, coaching and mentoring to develop and expand your potential. You will tend to procrastinate if you are unfamiliar with something and your concentration will suffer.
- If you are bored, change the way you are doing things- add a creative twist or another dimension to the challenge. Move somewhere else to do the job. Delegate part of the task to others or trade jobs for a while. Pretend you are teaching the subject to someone else and talk about it. This makes it much more interesting.
- Prepare your environment and your materials. Create an atmosphere of peace and tranquility by getting rid of the clutter and creating areas where you can access information quickly. Learn to have only the item you are working on in front of you.
- Set aside time on your calendar for the task and overestimate the amount of time it will take. Make an appointment with yourself and block off the time.
- Anticipate and avoid interruptions. Deal with these before or after the task and advise others that you are not available.
- Take proper breaks to conserve your energy.
- Focus your attention completely on the task. Train yourself to block out self-interruptions and concentrate on only the task at hand. Take all the "busyness" that is in your mind and relegate it to to-do lists or appointments.

We have so little time to do what we want in life; to enjoy our work, family, friends and hobbies. Make the best use of it so you can enjoy every moment.