

Flow

You are at your highest level of creativity and productivity when you reach a state of **flow**.ⁱ It's an optimal experience of total absorption and self-transcendence where time is altered and you are fully engaged in the moment. To achieve flow requires concentrated attention, a sense of control over the outcome, complete immersion and a challenging task that matches your skill level. If the task is too difficult you become anxious, too simple you become bored.ⁱⁱ Finding flow expands your mental or physical limits while finding intrinsic rewards in the process of each moment.ⁱⁱⁱ

How do you find work that delivers flow?

- 1) Seek work that motivates you intrinsically: work that offers self-determination, competence, task involvement, curiosity, enjoyment, and interest, not extrinsic factors such as competition, evaluation, recognition or money.
- 2) Seek work that challenges you to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Ironically when you work your hardest, you can achieve a sense of effortless flow that pushes past stress into a state of serene mastery.
- 3) Work with concentrated focus.

To achieve your highest level of performance you want to be:

- A) Physically energized. The way you mobilize and manage your energy, not just your time, is the key to productivity. You can accomplish a lot in a short time frame if you focus your energy.
- B) Emotionally connected. To perform any task well you need to be emotionally engaged in a positive way. Negative emotions drain energy.
- C) Mentally focused. Mental focus bring clarity and improves efficiency. Surprisingly, to maximize your ability to focus, you should take breaks.^{iv}

When Leonardo DaVinci was besieged by his benefactor for taking naps mid-day as he painted The Last Supper he said, "Great geniuses sometimes accomplish more when they work less." Rest and mental breaks are restorative and improve productivity.^v

D) **Aligned with your values.**^{vi} Spiritual energy, a connection to a deeply held set of values and a purpose beyond yourself is a powerful source of motivation and perseverance.

When the Cantor Fitzgerald bond trading company lost 2/3 of its employees and all its computer data in the collapse of the world trade center in 2001, it tapped into

a reservoir of compassion to move forward. The surviving employees banded together to give 25% of the company profits for 5 years to the families of their lost coworkers. Because they had a shared mission greater than themselves, they found passion in their work, rebuilt their collapsed company and gave away over 292 million dollars.^{vii}

To learn more, read *Flow* by M. Csikszentmihalyi and *The Power of Full Engagement* by J. Loehr and T. Schwartz

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ⁱ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, (1990) Harper & Row.

ⁱⁱ J. Makamura & Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, (2009) *The Concept of Flow*, C. R. Snyder & S.J. Lopez, Oxford handbook of positive psychology, Oxford University Press. Pgs. 89-105

ⁱⁱⁱS. Lyubomirsky, (2007) *The How of Happiness*, Penguin Press, Pg.183

^{iv}A. Ariga et al. "Brief and rare mental breaks keep you focused: Deactivation and reactivation of task goals preempt vigilance decrements." (2011) *Cognition* Volume 118, Issue 3, March, pgs. 439-443

^vF. Jabr. "Why your brain needs more downtime." (2013) *Scientific American*

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mental-downtime/>

^{vi} Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, *The Power of Full Engagement*, 2003, pg. 197, Simon and Schuster

^{vii} Edie Lutnick, "An Unbroken Bond: The Untold Story of How the 658 Cantor Fitzgerald Families Faced the Tragedy of 9/11 and Beyond."