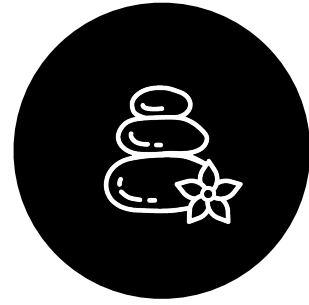


CULTIVATING *Flow*



When you begin to replace distractions from television, social media and the opinions of others with **doing things that bring meaning to you, you'll be in your flow**. Are you wondering whether you're doing the right things for yourself **to cultivate your flow?**

When it comes down to it, you just really want to be at ease knowing that the work that you are doing is purpose-filled and you're living a meaningful life full of positive contributions towards yourself and humanity.



Meaning is more than just intention. Meaning is something that you derive, that you share with others, it's something that you are in charge of creating for yourself. When you have meaning, you flourish throughout life.

Over time, ancient philosophers, scientists and theorists have come up with many definitions of what it means to live with meaning. Current research

in modern psychology supports a comprehensive understanding of meaning developed by *University of Connecticut* researchers, George and Park:

- **Comprehension** - the degree to which people perceive a sense of coherence (SOC) and understanding about their lives. This is comprised of three main components: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.
- **Purpose** - the extent to which people experience life as being motivated by their goals, values and beliefs.
- **Mattering** - the degree to which individuals feel that their lives are of value and significance to the world (George and Park, 2014).

One way to satisfy this three component theory to not only bring more meaning in life but to increase your *well-being, creativity and productivity* is by engaging in activities and work that keep you engaged in a manner whereby your focus and attention do not get broken for another task. Also, time becomes non-existent.

DO WHAT YOU LOVE

That's right - do what you love. This allows you to cultivate flow. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a positive psychology researcher interviewed 8,000 people all around the world: artists, athletes, musicians, nuns etc. He wanted to know what people experienced when they achieved optimal levels of performance. He also wanted to know what influenced their positive

WHEN YOU ARE INVOLVED WITH AN ACTIVITY THAT ENCOMPASSES ALL ASPECTS OF YOU, AND NOTHING SEEMS TO MATTER - YOU ARE IN A FLOW STATE.

state of well-being. Csikszentmihalyi came up with the term '*flow state*.' He noticed that when he interviewed people, many described being engaged in a task or activity that seemed rather effortless and engaging - as *being in their flow*. Amongst the thousands of people that Csikszentmihalyi interviewed, he found that regardless of one's culture or education there are seven conditions that are present when one is experiencing *flow*:

1. **Completely involved in what you're doing** - focused, concentrated.
2. **A sense of ecstasy** - of being outside everyday reality.
3. **Great inner clarity** - knowing what needs to be done, and how well you're doing it
4. **Knowing that the activity is doable** - that your skills are adequate to the task.
5. **A sense of serenity** - no worries about oneself, and a feeling of growing beyond the boundaries of the ego.
6. **Timelessness** - thoroughly focused on the present, hours seem to pass by in minutes.
7. **Intrinsic motivation** - whatever produces flow becomes its own reward.

When your skills and challenges are higher than average, you can get yourself to a place of flow and you become passionate about what you're working on.

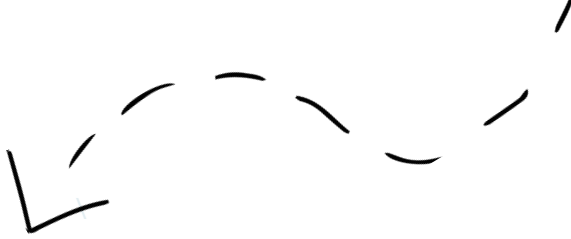
WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BRAIN DURING FLOW?

Many people that experience flow tend to have an *autotelic personality* - internally driven people with a tendency to engage in an activity for its own sake. Autotelic personalities tend to be more self regulated, have a high interest in life and are less stressed.

During a flow state, the following changes occur in the brain:

- When there is concentration on fulfilling a goal, there is **reduced activity in the prefrontal cortex** (the part of the brain responsible for decision making, reflecting and organizing).
- **The brain goes into an alpha wave state**. The alpha is the resting state and it aids in learning, resting and alertness.
- **Endorphins, norepinephrine, anandamide, serotonin and dopamine are released** due to real-time feedback, increased curiosity, feelings of control and motivation brought on by goal fulfillment.

The temporary inactivation of the prefrontal cortex down-regulates by a process called transient hypofrontality causing an individual to lose self-consciousness, to quiet their inner critic and to experience distortion of time during a flow state.



DO YOU NEED TO INCORPORATE MORE FLOW INTO YOUR LIFE? (IF YOU AGREE WITH MOST OF THESE, YOU MAY NEED TO INDUCE YOUR FLOW STATE)

- You're feeling uninspired
- You may be waking up feeling sluggish
- Your mind feels fogged; you have mental blocks
- You're not attracting what you want
- You may be stressed
- You're too focused on deadlines and awards then the actual task itself
- Your goals are unclear
- You're bored - your skill set exceeds your challenges
- Your anxiety levels may be high - challenges exceed your skills set

HERE ARE 10 WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR FLOW

#1 Have clear goals. Full understand your intentions and write down your goals. Be clear on what you aim to achieve and know your 'why' behind it.

#2 Connect with your creative power. Carve out time each day and spend it towards working on your passions. Allow your creativity to take over. Have fun!

#3 Focus on your success. Capture your visions and understand your motivations. Where do you plan to be in the future? How do you wish to feel? Merge your future self into your current reality.

#4 Clear away distractions. Schedule your 'flow times.' Turn off your phone and create a quiet space free of distractions and technology to focus on your art.

#5 Set low expectations for yourself.

Don't expect much except to be in the moment and enjoy yourself with the creative task that you are choosing to do.

#6 Be open to ambiguous feedback. Look for feedback from the activity itself. How does it make you feel? What benefits are you gaining from it? What have you learned? What adjustments can you make?

#7 Concentrate. Keep yourself focused on the task. Perhaps plan to do your task in little chunks of 25 minute intervals and take 5 minute breaks in between. This will keep your mind without wandering about other things.

#8 Keep a skill-challenge balance. Make sure that your skill set is balanced with the challenge involved in the task. If you require more skill, make learning something new a goal of yourself. If you need to be further challenged, create a reasonably harder challenge for yourself.

#9 Create a personal mission statement. In eight words or less write down what you intend on achieving. This can act as your target - your big picture goal.

#10 Get into a calm state. Bring attention to your body and mind. Where are your thoughts flowing to? What parts of your body feel tight? Do some stretches, find a 5 minute meditation to clear your mind and relax your body. Be at ease so you can think clearly and creatively.