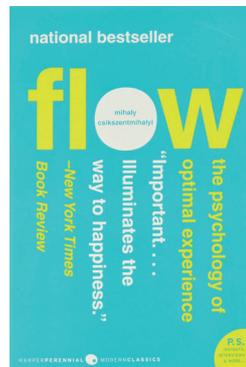




**FLOW**  
BY MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALYI



## THE BOOK



## Flow

by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi



## INTRODUCTION

If you have heard of the concept of flow, it is because of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Flow burst onto the scene in 1990 and changed the way people looked at life. Now, more than 30 years later, its influence can still be felt and 'flow' is the state we all aim for in our life and work.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Flow is an examination of what makes life worthwhile. Have you ever wondered why some people always seem content despite their hardships? How do people find happiness in the worst situations? How do people survive the most boring and difficult situations? Flow has the answer.

This book takes a deep dive into human nature and determines that the ability to achieve a flow state holds the key to fulfilment. It explains that anyone can find their flow and shows you how to get into this rhythm.



## 5 BEST QUOTES

“Control of consciousness determines the quality of life.”

“Repression is not the way to virtue. When people restrain themselves out of fear, their lives are by necessity diminished. Only through freely chosen discipline can life be enjoyed and still kept within the bounds of reason.”

“Few things are sadder than encountering a person who knows exactly what he should do, yet cannot muster enough energy to do it. “He who desires but acts not,” wrote Blake with his accustomed vigor, “Breeds pestilence.”

“If you are interested in something, you will focus on it, and if you focus attention on anything, it is likely that you will become interested in it. Many of the things we find interesting are not so by nature, but because we took the trouble of paying attention to them.”

“A joyful life is an individual creation that cannot be copied from a recipe.”



7 BIG IDEAS

### 1. FLOW

Flow is a state when you are so involved in what you are doing that all else fades away. Time will move at a different rate and you will be focused only on the task at hand. All else will become meaningless.

In this state, it is possible to achieve great things. Mountain climbers often experience flow when they focus solely on scaling the cliff face. Chess players will often experience flow as everything but the game becomes insignificant.

Flow can be achieved in almost any activity. It creates a sense of well being and accomplishment that lasts well beyond the experience itself. In fact, sometimes the experience is actually painful and difficult, take the athlete running at full pelt; the positive after-effects of experiencing flow are lasting.

### 2. CONSCIOUSNESS

Before you can dig into the concept of flow, you need to understand how Csikszentmihalyi defines consciousness. He defines it as the state you are in when you are able to direct the course of specific conscious events like sensations, feelings, thoughts, or intentions. Dreaming is not a conscious event because you have no say over how you experience these events. In a nutshell, consciousness is intentionally ordered information.

The level to which you can control your consciousness will dictate your natural aptitude for flow. Csikszentmihalyi says, “The mark of a person who is in control of consciousness is the ability to focus attention at will, to be oblivious to distractions, to concentrate for as long as it takes to achieve a goal, and not longer. And the person who can do this usually enjoys the normal course of everyday life.”

### 3. ENJOYMENT

Your enjoyment of any given situation can be enhanced by creating a flow experience. Csikszentmihalyi talks about prisoners of war who found ways to make their ordeals more tolerable. One prisoner, for instance, spent much time deep in thought about each and every aspect of his cell, examining every minute detail and pondering its origins. Another spent time mentally rehearsing his golf game right down to the walk from tee to tee. While these are extreme situations, you can see how, by finding a way to focus the mind, intense boredom can be made more bearable.

If your attitude is one of dissatisfaction, you will not be happy. In essence, finding flow means looking on the bright side. You can make a wearisome task enjoyable by making it a game or by changing the way you perceive it.



## 7 BIG IDEAS

#### 4. BECOMING AUTOTELIC

Autotelic is derived from the Greek, auto, (self), and telos (goal). It means that a goal is pursued not for glory or praise or any other extrinsic reason, but purely for the joy of pursuing the goal. If the activity itself gives you pleasure and there are no thoughts of the outcome, it will be more fulfilling. If you work only for praise, if you don't receive the praise you believe you deserve, you will be unhappy. In fact, often even the highest praise will still not be enough.

To become autotelic, you need to lack self-consciousness. The un-self-conscious person has no worries about the way people will respond to their actions. They are free to pursue their goals for their own sake.

Likewise, you must fight societal constraints. Depending too heavily on societal rules can impede flow. It creates too much anxiety and makes it harder to maintain focus.

#### 5. ACHIEVING FLOW

Flow can be elusive. It can happen spontaneously when you are enjoying time with friends, working out, reading a book, in fact during almost any activity that is engaging your body and your mind to the right degree. But what is that right degree?

Flow happens in that sweet spot between too easy and too hard. A pro tennis player, for instance, playing against a novice, will not achieve flow. It will be too easy to win. In the same manner, the novice won't achieve flow because the task is too hard. Pit either player though, against an opponent with equivalent or slightly better skills and flow is possible.

In addition to pushing your capabilities, there must also be established rules. Without rules, your tasks have no meaning and without meaning, flow is also impossible. So how is talking with friends a flow activity? Well, there are actually a lot of complex rules involved in social interaction that you don't even realise are there most of the time. You have to speak at the right times, say the right things, and adhere to any number of other social norms. Next time you're with people you love, try to take a moment to recognise when you're all in flow.



## 7 BIG IDEAS

## 6. RELATIONSHIPS

It is possible to have flow in your relationships. A happy family life will be one that is in flow. However, achieving this takes effort. As with flow in any other sphere, relationships need to be worked at.

Flow needs goals. In your relationships, you need to always have goals that you are mutually working towards. Doing so can create powerful bonds. However, goals always need to be reconsidered and shifted as situations change.

## 7. MEANING

Ultimately, finding meaning is the key to fulfilment. Csikszentmihalyi unpacks meaning in three ways. The first is the purpose or significance of something. The second is intention and how our purpose is revealed in action and the third way is how we order information.

Creating meaning in our lives is about bringing order to the contents of our mind by integrating our actions into a unified flow experience.

Csikszentmihalyi hits the nail on the head when he says, “The meaning of life is meaning: whatever it is, wherever it comes from, a unified purpose is what gives meaning to life.”

In other words, meaning is what you make it. You are free to create your own purpose. By doing so, you open yourself up to flow experiences. When your flow has meaning to you, you will find fulfilment.

**3 ACTION STEPS****1. SET A GOAL**

Flow needs a goal to succeed. In some instances, flow will happen naturally, but you need to set a goal to work towards if you want to create flow.

By establishing a goal, you set yourself up to work towards a flow experience.

**2. MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS AND STAY FOCUSED**

To fully immerse yourself in flow, you also need to take note of incremental progress and keep your attention on the task. Noticing improvement is a reliable way to maintain focus.

Once you lose focus, by definition, flow has gone. Keep your mind only on the task and let everything else go.

**3. RAISE THE STAKES**

For true flow, there must be a degree of challenge. Push yourself and raise the stakes.

Flow lies in the area just beyond your skillset, where it is neither too easy nor too hard. That means constantly pushing yourself just beyond your current capabilities.

**1 KEY TAKEAWAY**

The key takeaway of Flow is that, without finding the time and ways to introduce flow experiences to your life, you will never feel fulfilled. Without flow experiences, life passes by without any true feelings of success or accomplishment.

The good news though is that flow can be learned and nurtured. Put the effort in to create flow experiences in your life and you will be richly rewarded.

Once you are able to create flow experiences, even the most mundane activities can become rewarding. Think of achieving flow as a powerful way to make your life more satisfying.



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