



## RESILIENT!

LEADERSHIP & THE INTEGRAL LIFE

May 2007

Edited by Dr Sven Hansen

Welcome to RESILIENT! - Our client newsletter which aims to bring you topical and practical ideas to improve leadership, build resilient organisations and create a meaningful life.

### Finding Flow

By Stuart Taylor

Can you remember a time when you were performing at your best? This was possibly a client negotiation, a group presentation, a game of golf or time with your children. In this month's Newsletter we will discuss the pursuit of Flow for health, happiness and performance.

#### What does it mean to "Be in Flow"

Invariably, the experience of Flow is associated with time standing still, total absorption in the task at hand, everything just falling into place and a subsequent sense of euphoria and wellbeing.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi<sup>i</sup> proposes eight characteristics of a Flow state:

1. Goals are clear
2. Skills and Challenges are high and equal
3. Control is no problem
4. Feedback is immediate
5. Concentration deepens
6. In the present
7. Sense of time is altered
8. Loss of ego

"Being in Flow" isn't simply about relaxing and calming your brain. It is about comfortably achieving greatness – or as Csikszentmihalyi says, skills and challenges are both high and equal. See Figure 1.

We define **Flow** as the biological state of full engagement. This state comes about when an individual or group have clear goals, challenge, immediate perceived ability to deliver, absolute focus and are totally absorbed in the present. Positive engagement also comes from two lesser states that Csikszentmihalyi calls **Arousal** (motivated and excited to attempt stretch goal) and **Control** (comfortably delivering existing goals).

Mapping disengagement against Csikszentmihalyi's chart, states of anxiety, worry, apathy and boredom may all lead to disengaged behaviour. The key is to provide people the right level of challenge for their skills.

When skill and challenge are poorly matched, people struggle to engage.

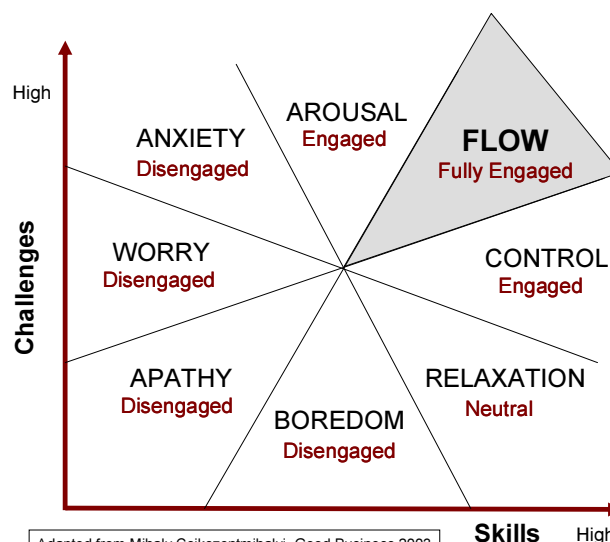


Figure 1. Flow – High Skills & Challenges

#### The Role of Positive Emotion

As highlighted by Martin Seligman<sup>ii</sup>, emotion is missing from the eight characteristics. So what about the deep sense of enjoyment that we feel when we recall Flow states? The reality is that we experience this deep sense of enjoyment immediately **AFTER** the experience or when we relive the memory. Seligman calls this Authentic Happiness. **DURING** Flow, our awareness of emotion is absent.

The role of emotion is, however, pivotal **BEFORE** a Flow experience. In fact, positive emotion is a "ticket to entry" – without positive emotion, you can forget about having any time "in Flow". Clearly, if you are living with sustained negative emotion and the associated stress, you



are more likely to be spending time in the Death Spiral<sup>iii</sup>

## Why should we be striving for Flow?

In Flow we enjoy optimal performance, good health and increasing happiness. When we are in Flow we are living and working in the "relaxation response". In other words, we are stress-free. This occurs because we have a singular focus on the present task; a task that we have the skills and control to complete. We have no mindless chatter ruminating about the past or worrying about the future.

The absence of stress – and the associated damaging effects of the stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) – means that we are able to operate physically, cognitively and emotionally at our best. A large number of research studies have proven that health, memory, learning, creativity, decision-making, physical performance and emotional resilience all improve in Flow states. Achieving Flow is the ultimate in mastering our stress.

## How much of your day is spent "in Flow"?

Everyday life, adversities and setbacks mean that we can't be "in Flow" all the time. Research shows that 15-20% of adults never experience Flow. Conversely, some professionals can spend 50% of their day in Flow.

Wherever we are individually, we can make lifestyle changes that increase the percentage of our day and life that we live "in Flow". These changes include relaxation practices, sleep, exercise, nutrition, emotional flexibility, impulse control, cognitive discipline and not to forget adopting a spiritual outlook.

## A Practical Starting Point for Flow

Assembling Csikszentmihalyi's eight characteristics takes persistence and a high level of self awareness. It is well worth the effort!!

However, a more immediate starting point for building Flow is to work on shifting your physiology into Flow on a daily basis. In a proactive way, you can use meditation and breathing or reactively, using real time relaxation in the heat of battle.

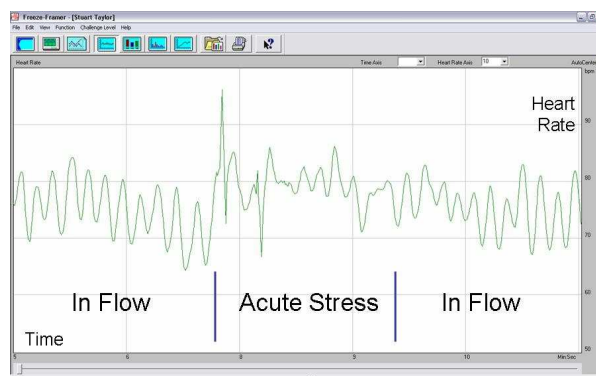


Figure 2 Freezeframer Heart Rate Variation Graph

Biofeedback is an important part of physiological Flow. This is simply building awareness of what your body is telling you. When you observe erratic and high heart rate; short, shallow and rapid breathing and/or increased muscle tension; please recognize that you have lost your calm. There are also a number of biofeedback tools (such as Freezeframer<sup>iv</sup> – see Heart Rate Variation graph in Figure 2) that can help you learn to build greater physiological Flow.

## About Us

Based in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, The Resilience Institute works with senior executives and the entire employee base to build organisational and personal resilience. The Resilience Institute uses an evidence-based approach to introduce the personal disciplines of sustainable high performance within a meaningful life. The Resilience Institute achieves sustainable and measurable improvements using assessment instruments, consulting reviews, workshop interventions and personal coaching.

For further information...

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<sup>i</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, Good Business, 2003

<sup>ii</sup> Seligman, Martin; Authentic Happiness, 2002

<sup>iii</sup> © The Resilience Institute 2007

<sup>iv</sup> Heartmath Institute



## Upcoming Resilience Programs

### Practical Resilience Program – Public Program

There is more to life than living in negative stress, fatigue and illness that is often associated with the “dash for cash” and “dash for career”. Resilience is a key competence to help you to live and work with **higher engagement, health and happiness** and ultimately reach out to your full potential.

In two half-day workshops, learn how to train your brain and build your happiness and resilience...

- ✓ Health & Resilience assessment
- ✓ Introduction to Resilience
- ✓ Mastering Relaxation and Fatigue
- ✓ The Practice of Flow
- ✓ Health and Physical Vitality
- ✓ Emotional Intelligence
- ✓ Brain Training & attention control
- ✓ Spirit in Action

### Previous attendee said...

- ✓ *The Resilience session presented by Stuart was sensational. My Wife and I are going to go over the material again as we can see real benefits to our family life.*
- ✓ *What a great inspirational speaker!*
- ✓ *The program has made me take an honest look in the mirror.*
- ✓ *I have noticed a change in my personal attitude to handling stress. I'm a much happier person and life is great again!!*
- ✓ *I feel a renewed enthusiasm for getting the balance in my life right for me, my work and my family*
- ✓ *The resilience program provided tools to address both physical and psychological wellbeing*
- ✓ *I liked the way Stuart delivered the program with honesty, authenticity and sharing his own personal stories.*
- ✓ *The resilience program was great. I found it very relevant. Now I have some techniques to help me move in more positive/optimistic directions.*

### Upcoming Dates...

Melbourne - 15 May & 28 May 2007 (places still available!!)

Melbourne - 17 Jul & 31 Jul 2007

### For More Information...

- Visit our website [www.resilienceinstitute.com.au](http://www.resilienceinstitute.com.au) and download a registration form
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