



OCTOBER 2018 FINDING FLOW



I spent this past summer reacquainting myself with the game of golf. I invested a small fortune in equipment, clothes, greens fees and lessons. It has consumed most of my weekends. My experience is best described as equal parts exhilaration/frustration and total obsession. According to Mihali Csikszentmihalyi (Mihali)*, the lead researcher of optimal experience, my renewed hobby is a particularly good way to achieve a state of flow. “Flow is the state of being so involved with an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great costs, for the sheer sake of doing it.” When it is going well, time seems to stop. When it is going poorly, it is a grind. Yet, the prospect of even the shortest experience of a flow state keeps me (and my golf playing comrades) coming back week after week and round after round.

“*Flow is the state of being so involved with an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great costs, for the sheer sake of doing it.*”



Mihali Csikszentmihalyi

It isn't necessary to immerse oneself in playing golf to experience flow. There are many other ways to achieve it. Flow experiences occur when our skills meet the challenge—and both are high. Examples might include a surgeon performing an intricate operation, a mountain climber scaling a peak, a musician attacking a complicated piece, an event planner orchestrating a complex meeting. During the challenge itself, there is no thought of how one “feels” about it. Surgeons, musicians, planners and even want-to-be golfers report that during the experience they aren't feeling anything. They are “in the zone”. It isn't until afterward that they will express emotion. Whether it is relief, gratitude, satisfaction or amusement—the sense of total immersion felt in those flow moments stand out as some of the very best of their lives.

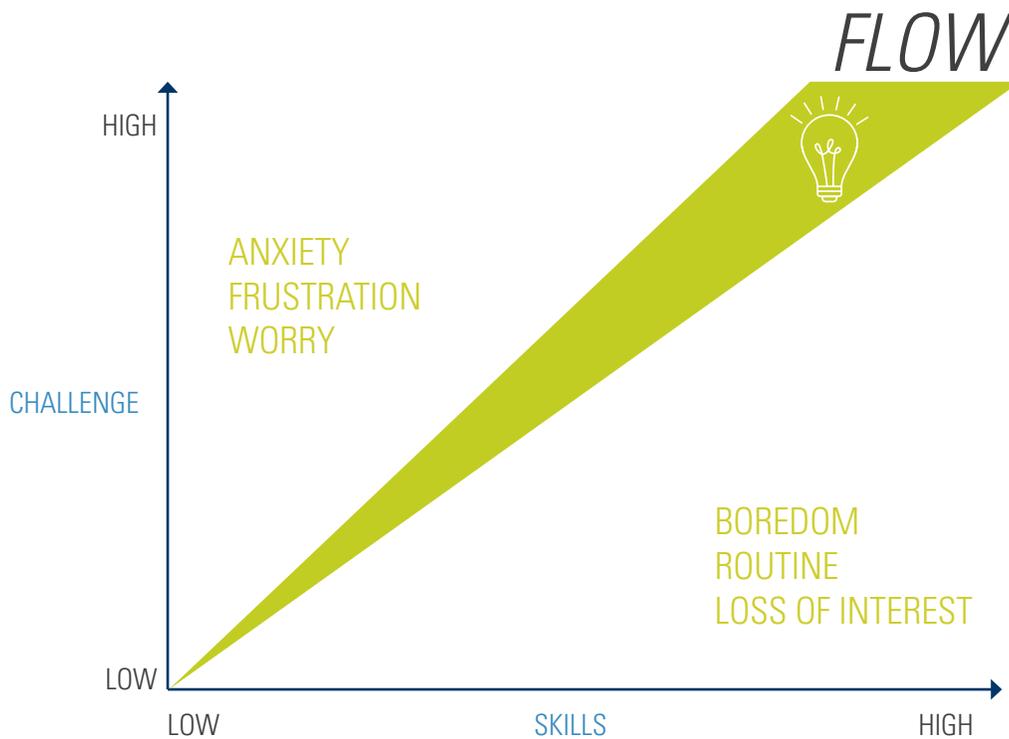


flow experiences occur when our skills meet the challenge

*I am going to assume that we are on a first name basis because I fear misspelling his last name almost as much as I do mispronouncing it.



the supplement
FACILITATING VITALITY



If one sifts through the everyday experiences of life, where would one look to find potential for a flow state? According to Mihali, flow states occur when talking or socializing with friends, working or studying, driving, and most especially during active leisure pursuits such as sports or games. Regardless of the endeavor, flow experiences are most likely to result when the activity is undertaken because the experience itself is the reward. “I just like doing it.” Is the typical explanation. There is no competitive ranking, money, power or fame that results.

If I were to look back on my summer of playing golf, I have to admit that I have had very few moments of flow. With reference to the figure above, I would describe them as more worrisome and anxious – where challenges are high and skills are low. But during every round there is at least one shot, one hole and sometimes an entire nine holes that go very well and I am reminded of the days when the challenge seemed more in line with my skills. I am going to keep grinding away. And when I am feeling the need for a little more mastery, I am going to relax on an “executive” course.

How will you find flow?



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Patricia M. Fuller has dedicated the last 20 years to designing and delivering wellness programs. Her events earn consistently excellent ratings for her holistic approach and her real world application.

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