

Insights from *The Rise of Superman* by Steven Kotler

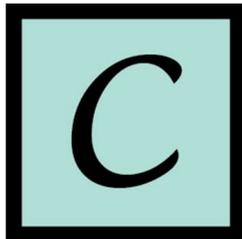
“Flow is an optimal state of consciousness, a peak state where we both feel our best and perform our best. It is a transformation available to anyone, anywhere, provided that certain initial conditions are met. Everyone from assembly-line workers in Detroit to jazz musicians in Algeria to software designers in Mumbai rely on flow to drive performance and accelerate innovation.”

– Steven Kotler (all quotes in bold are by Steven Kotler)

Flow is the feeling of being totally immersed in what you are doing. **“In flow, every action, each decision, leads effortlessly, fluidly, seamlessly to the next. It’s high-speed problem solving; it’s being swept away by the river of ultimate performance.”**

According to Harvard Medical School psychiatrist Ned Hallowell: “Everything you do, you do better in flow, from baking a chocolate cake to planning a vacation to solving a differential equation to writing a business plan to playing tennis to making love. Flow is the doorway to the ‘more’ most of us seek. Rather than telling ourselves to get used to it, that’s all there is, instead learn how to enter into flow. There you will find, in manageable doses, all the ‘more’ you need.”

How to Experience More Flow at Work (4 flow triggers):



Clear goal with high consequences

First, you need to know exactly what you are trying to do (know the pass-fail requirements) and why you are doing it (clear goal). Your goals should always be just beyond your current skill level, forcing you to operate in the space between boredom and anxiety.

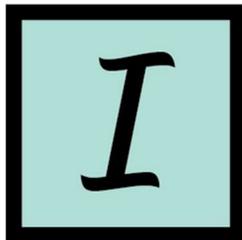
Then you need to put something on the line and heighten your attention (consequence). As human beings, our fear of social consequences is similar to our fear of death (when we lived in tribes, being alienated meant surviving as an outcast alone in the wild). Therefore, you don’t need to put your life on the line to experience high consequence, just give people your word and stick to it (public accountability).



Rich sensory experience

Being mindful of your five senses and experiencing rich sensory input that is complex and novel will trigger flow. *The more complex and unpredictable the experience, the deeper the flow state.*

“If you’ve ever stood before a vast canyon and felt awe—well, awe is a state of total absorption and the front end of flow. When sucked in by the incomprehensible complexity of geologic timescales and epic beauty, reality pauses, if only for a moment. And in this moment, we taste the pinpoint focus, loss of self-consciousness, and time dilation that are deep zone companions.” In the context of work: tea/coffee = taste + smell, music = auditory, novel space = sight, and typing/sketching = tactile.



Immediate feedback

When your experience includes an immediate cycle of action-reaction-improvement, you’ll have a better chance of experiencing flow. **“The smaller the gap between input and output, the more we know how we’re doing and how to do it better. If we can’t course correct in real time, we start looking for clues to better performance—things we did in the past, things we’ve seen other people do, things that can pull us out of the moment.”**

In the context of your work, externalize thoughts so you can immediately improve upon them – sketch out ideas, type out sentences, draw on the whiteboard.



Say “Yes! And...”

Whatever comes up, accept it and add to it.

“Interactions should be additive more than argumentative. The goal here is the momentum, togetherness, and innovation that comes from ceaselessly amplifying each other’s ideas and actions. It’s a trigger based on the first rule of improv comedy. If I open a sketch with, “Hey, there’s a blue elephant in the bathroom,” then “No, there’s not”... the scene goes nowhere. But if the reply is affirmative instead—“Yeah, sorry, there was no more space in the cereal cupboard”—well then that story goes someplace interesting.”