**Article about ‘Flow”**

*By Tatiana Gulko at ‘Conversations with Tatiana’*

Have you ever felt so absorbed in an activity, that you completely lost track of time? This was likely to be a positive experience for you. You probably became engrossed in a pleasant activity to such an extent, that you simply didn’t notice that many hours have gone by. Perhaps you even forgot to eat your lunch or dinner.

There is a very simple explanation for this phenomenon. There is even a scientific name for it.

Flow.

Flow is an utterly pleasant state, characterised by a deep immersion into a particular activity, also known more colloquially as ‘being in the zone’. People describe as feeling immersed, energised and fully focused in this activity. One is completely absorbed, and many people report losing track of time, glancing at the clock only to realise that hours have gone by without them realising. The psychologist most famous for studying this phenomenon is the American-Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who started observing this concept as early as the 1970s.

The reason why this state was called flow was because of a study done by the psychologist. When asked to describe what this pleasant state of absorption felt like, people described as if water was ‘carrying them along’.

Flow or hyper-focus?

Interestingly, flow is actually different from hyper focus. We can become hyper-focused on something that isn’t necessarily pleasant or fulfilling, and may even be detrimental to our lives. Examples of such unhelpful hyper focus are surfing the net mindlessly, or playing video games. Whereas flow is associated with pleasant and utterly fulfilling tasks that leave us feeling rejuvenated, activities such as mindless internet surfing may feel good ‘in the moment’, but do not actually make a person feel fulfilled or energised.

How to find flow

The specific activities that can help one to achieve the state of flow will be unique for each individual. These activities are usually related to your unique interests, talents, capabilities and aspirations in life. However, if you feel that you have no idea how to achieve this pleasant state of being engrossed in an activity, here are some tips to help you discover how to get there.

Step 1: Pick work you love

Make a conscious effort to seek out activities that are inherently pleasant to you, and that are in line with your interests. If you know you don’t enjoy mathematics, then doing mathematical activities is not the way to go to achieve flow! Rather, make a conscious effort to find jobs or hobbies that are in line with your interests.

Step 2: Become aware of what you love to do

The above kind of brings me to the next point rather naturally. Be aware of what your interests are. Children are often very much in tune with their interests, and are ready with an answer if you ask them what their favourite subject at school is. Take a leaf out of their book and ask yourself the same question. Grab a notebook and record your answers.

What was your favourite subject at school? What do you ‘procrastinate with’ given the chance? What would you love to do if money wasn’t an issue or if you won the lottery? If you are still stuck, look back on what you loved to do as a child. Some activities may of course no longer spark the same joy, but very often they are a clue to where your natural interests lie. This is an excellent opportunity for brainstorming.

You can also look over the activities you already do, and grade them on their ‘pleasantness’ factor. This is another useful exercise to see what makes you lose track of time, and what leaves you watching the clock.

Examples of hobbies that can put us in a state of flow include singing or playing an instrument, artwork, creating new things such as crafts or woodwork, writing fiction or non-fiction, solving a problem or mathematical equation or cooking interesting dishes.

Step 3: Unplug

Most of the activities that allow us to reach the deeply satisfying state of flow involve deep concentration. Not surprisingly, being ‘plugged in’ is very much the enemy of this state. Given that we are constantly switched on, this may be the reason why many believe that our most recent generation is perhaps the most stuck on what to do with their career, and most often report feeling unfulfilled in life.

For this reason, it is recommended that you immerse yourself in activities that are off-line, hands-on or require being in touch with nature. For example, if you love to write, why not leave your gadgets at home, turn your phone on airplane mode and write using pen and paper, in the park or in the forest? Generally, the more time you spend ‘unplugged’, the more likely you are to practice your ‘flow muscles’. Yes, the ability to get absorbed in something is a muscle, one that we haven’t used much in our ‘always on’ world.