

# Go With The Flow





# “Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness.”

Sigmund Freud

When an athlete is “in the zone”, anything seems possible: physical effort minimises, and time becomes unimportant. Only the task and the moment exist in exhilarating and boundless harmony. It’s been likened to a state of ecstasy, and professional sport is peppered with anecdotes of athletes who’ve delivered a peak performance after transcending into this powerful state of mind.

But being “in the zone” is not limited to athletes. The kind of absorption that leads to enhanced creativity or optimal performance can occur in any arena. Artists, writers, sculptors, tradespeople, coaches, literally *anyone* can experience this state - which psychologists more accurately refer to as *flow* - when people are fully involved in a task.

## What is Flow?

In a business context, flow has been described as a “short-term peak experience at work that is characterized by absorption, work enjoyment, and intrinsic work motivation.” Simply put, being in flow means a team member is engaged and happy. They’re doing what they do best.

We find that in times of crisis, we more readily experience a flow state because we’re adrenalised by purposeful intent. During the early days and months of the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us naturally tapped into this flow state.

## Unpacking Flow?

Once we step *out* of our normal reality, and step into a state where only the task exists, we can achieve extraordinary things.

Science tell us that in a flow state we take in more information, process it using more parts of the brain, and learn at speed. The chemicals released are both “feel good” and performance enhancing, thereby ensuring high levels of intrinsic motivation. Our attention is at attention! And because our mind is open and receptive, we can pivot and adapt without raising a sweat.

## What Does This Mean

### For Leaders?

So how does flow enter the workplace? As leaders, we can create an environment that encourages this kind of deep focus by applying simple Flow principles:

- Setting clear goals
- Making sure we match our team members’ skillsets to the tasks i.e., we need to be suited to the challenge. (We should find the task “not too difficult, but not too easy”)
- Providing immediate feedback

Advocates of flow believe that the optimal mindset is best supported by regular, better-targeted feedback, informally in the moment, or formally as a performance review, as many as four or six times per year.

Excitingly too, the flow state can be experienced interdependently as a team. The latter is referred to as “flow contagion,” when an individual’s flow state feeds others.

Flow contagion can be nurtured by:

- Limiting distractions
- Encouraging specific routines to trigger flow
- Organising schedules to enable groups to deeply focus together
- Enabling autonomy
- Influencing collective ambition

If teams are well suited to their task, perceive that their purpose aligns with their leaders, and that decisions are being made through a purpose-driven lens – then they will deep dive into the organisational flow. Company transformations occur when we achieve this kind of synchronicity.



The background is a vibrant yellow with large, abstract, overlapping shapes in red, blue, and pink. In the top right, there are two overlapping shapes, one blue and one red. In the bottom right, there is a large, complex shape composed of red, blue, and pink. The text is positioned in the upper left quadrant.

## Key Takeaways

It's been suggested that by bringing ourselves and our teams into a flow channel, we are, in essence, finding happiness.

Having an open conversation with our colleagues and teams about the nature of flow, and the environment that will best nurture it, sets us up to experience it more often. Think of it as “inviting” flow in.



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