Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of “Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience,” describes flow as “being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you’re using your skills to the utmost.”

Csikszentmihalyi’s ideas on flow stemmed from his attempt to discover a path to happiness. He wanted to figure out “how to live life as a work of art, rather than as a chaotic response to external events.”

“Flow” & Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi discusses what it feels like to be in flow:

- Completely involved, focused, concentrating – with this either due to innate curiosity or as the result of training.
- Sense of ecstasy – of being outside everyday reality.
- Great inner clarity – knowing what needs to be done and how well it is going.
- Knowing the activity is doable – that the skills are adequate, and neither anxious or bored.
- Sense of serenity – no worries about self, feeling of growing beyond the boundaries of ego – afterwards feeling of transcending ego in ways not thought possible.
- Timeliness – thoroughly focused on present, don’t notice time passing.
- Intrinsic motivation – whatever produces “flow” becomes its own reward.

So how do you get there? Wikipedia’s entry on the subject says the following conditions help:

- Clear goals (expectations and rules are discernable).
- A high degree of concentration on a limited field of attention (a person engaged in the activity will have the opportunity to focus and to delve deeply into it).
- Direct and immediate feedback (successes and failures in the course of the activity are apparent, so that behavior can be adjusted as needed).
- Balance between ability level and challenge (the activity is neither too easy nor too difficult).
- A sense of personal control over the situation or activity.
- The activity is intrinsically rewarding, so there is an effortlessness of action.

Group environment matters too. A couple of flow friendly space attributes:

- Creative spatial arrangements: Chairs, pin walls, charts, however no tables, therefore primarily work in standing and moving.
- Playground design: Charts for information inputs, flow graphs, project summary, craziness, safe place (people can say what is usually only thought), result wall, and open topics.
Enemies of flow include fearing what other people think…

A major constraint on people enjoying what they are doing is always being conscious of a fear of how they appear to others and what these others might think. Ecstasy includes rising above these constraining concerns of the ego.

...and mundane daily routines.

Stepping outside of normal daily routines is an essential element…This might be obtained through diverse routes or activities, such as reading a novel or becoming involved in a film.

**More links on flow**

Michael Buffington offers [his tips for getting into flow](#) (including listening to music he’s heard over and over again, a cold office, caffeine, and competition).

*[Prototype…Prototype…Protospiel](#)* summarizes a five phase creativity model (as defined by Csikszentmihalyi’s “Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention”) used to improve the design of a game.

Beyond Creativity [defines the nine elements of flow in the context of golf](#).

*[Flow with Soul](#)* is an interview with Csikszentmihalyi (btw, his name is pronounced “Chicks sent me high”).

The fact that you were completely immersed in what you were doing, that the concentration was very high, that you knew what you had to do moment by moment, that you had very quick and precise feedback as to how well you were doing, and that you felt that your abilities were stretched but not overwhelmed by the opportunities for action. In other words, the challenges were in balance with the skills. And when those conditions were present, you began to forget all the things that bothered you in everyday life, forget the self as an entity separate from what was going on — you felt you were a part of something greater and you were just moving along with the logic of the activity.

Everyone said that it was like being carried by a current, spontaneous, effortless like a flow. You also forget time and are not afraid of being out of control. You think you can control the situation if you need to. But it’s hard because the challenges are hard. It feels effortless and yet it’s extremely dependent on concentration and skill. So it’s a paradoxical kind of condition where you feel that you are on a nice edge, between anxiety on the one hand and boredom on the other. You’re just operating on this fine line where you can barely do what needs to be done.