

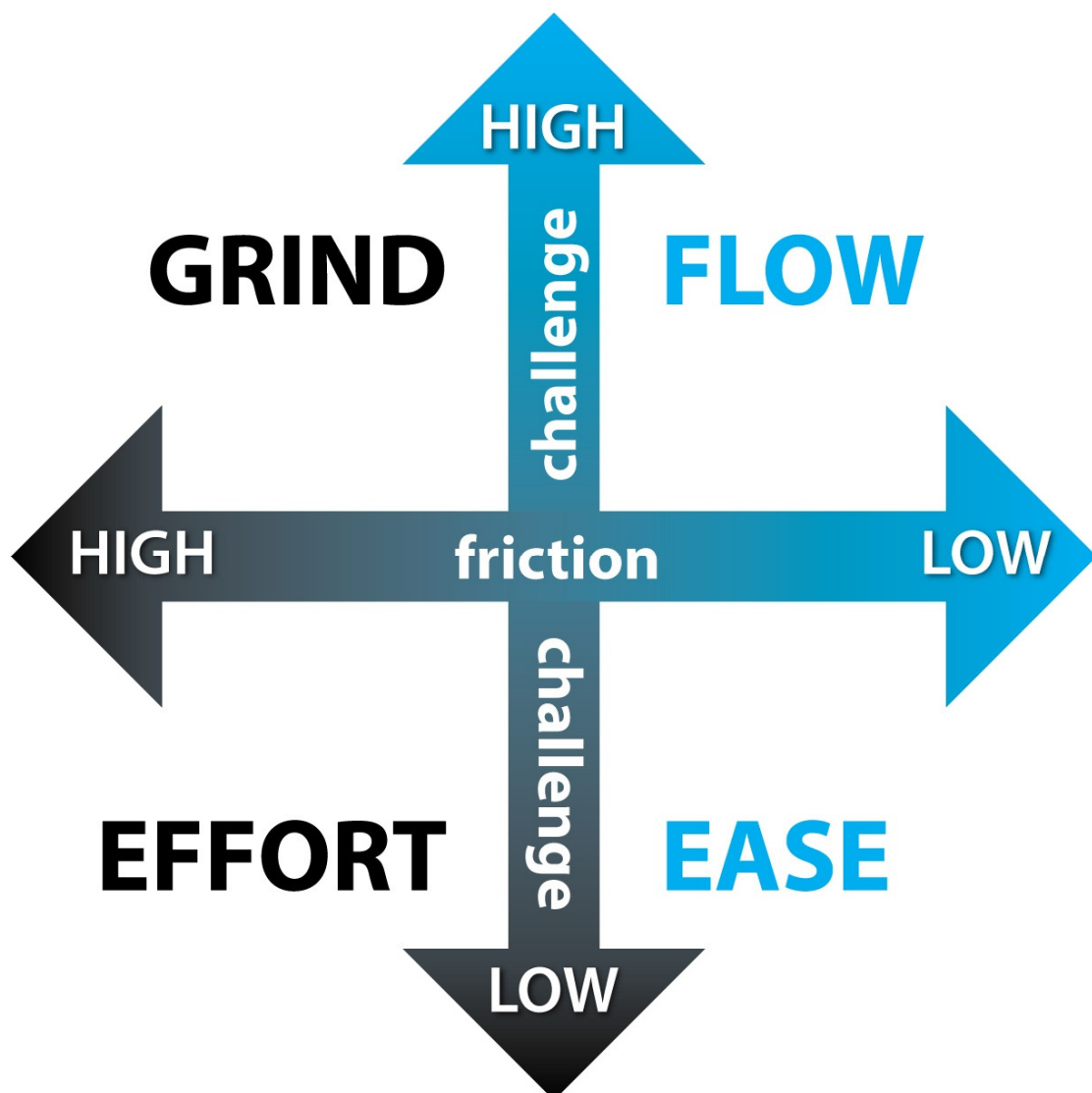
 **Adam Fraser**

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Finding FLOW

In my experience I have found that people tend to move between 4 states of performance. They are:



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Poor health, high levels of stress, burn out and a lack of engagement, is often blamed on the speed and pace of life. However the speed is not the problem, the problem is how we respond to that pace and pressure.

The solution is not to slow down the solution is to get more FLOW!

The Axis

Challenge: Challenge is the vertical axis and looks at your external environment. When you have a lot of pressure and stress on you Challenge is high. When you have a low amount of pressure and stress Challenge is low. Ideally we want a mixture of high and low challenge in our life.

Friction: Friction is the Horizontal axis and looks at your internal world made up of your psychology and physiology. This axis looks at how your internal world is coping with the external pressure. When you have high friction the external world is wearing you out wearing you down, when you have low friction the external world is having minimal impact on you.

The Quadrants

Grind - This is when you are under the pump, you have high challenges in your life a high amount of stress and you are slaving away. When you are in this phase you are doing lots but you are not very effective. Because when you are a grinder you get cognitive dysfunction, they are just two big words that mean your brain don't work so good, and example is when you read a page of a document and you get to the end of the page and think what did I just read, or you forget to do things during the day you forget to return phone calls. In grind you make mistakes and things slip past you forget emails, you don't send off reports, you forget to call people back.

Effort - When we grind for too hard for too long we hit burn out, we fall into effort this is where the challenge is low and the friction is high everything is an effort, its an effort to get out of bed, its an effort to go to work. The most simple things feel like an effort.

Ease - Ease this is where you are truly relaxed, you are at peace and you find it easy to relax.

FLOW - This is where the challenge in your life is high but you have a low level of friction. Flow is where you are in true high performance. Flow is where you are working at your highest level, where you are totally immersed and

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absorbed in what we are doing, where time stands still and the world disappears. Flow has been described as a state of zero stress and authentic happiness.

Individuals who experience a lot of flow in their day have a greater quality of life and improved productivity.

We can experience FLOW at work, with hobbies and in our relationships.

In my research I have seen people of all walks of life exhibit flow. From CEO's running a company, musicians playing music, to butchers taking pride in making sure their products are cut to the best of their ability.

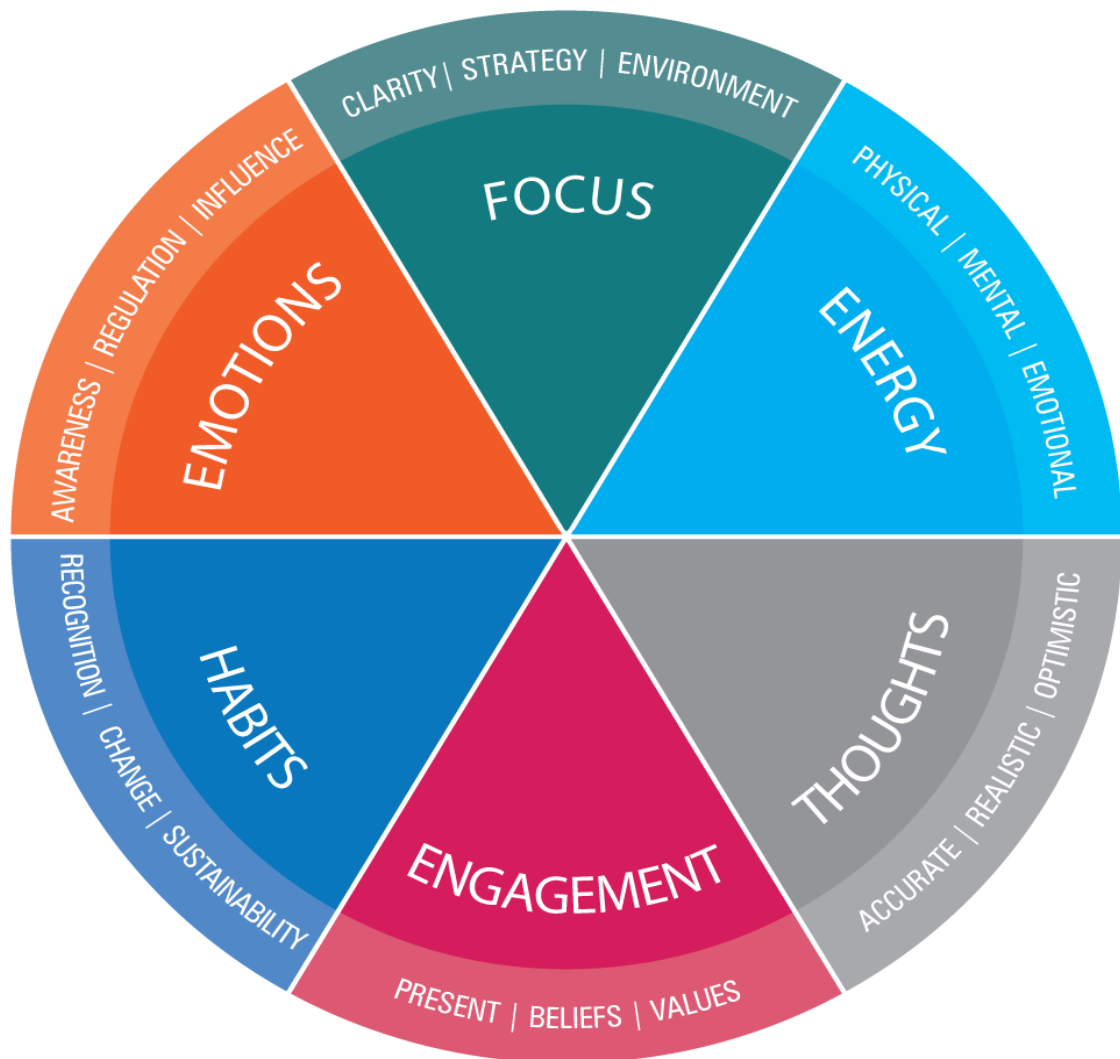
In essence FLOW is where you are emotionally engaged and completely focused on the task at hand.

It has the following characteristics:

- **Clear goals – you have a clear strategy for what you want to achieve**
- **No ego – you are not self-conscious about your performance**
- **Deep focus – you have a calm focused mind**
- **In the present moment – you are completely immersed in what you are doing**
- **Feeling of control – you feel like you have control over the situation**
- **Time distorts – you usually lose track of time**
- **Positive Emotion – you have emotions like arousal, excitement, joy and happiness.**
- **Positive Mindset – your self talk is positive**
- **Low stress – there is no stress when you are in FLOW**

The goal is to spend more time on the right hand side of the model and ideally you want to toggle between FLOW and EASE.

Setting yourself up for FLOW



To facilitate FLOW we need to address the above areas outlined in the model.

1. Focus

Of all the characteristics of High performers one thing they have in common is an amazing ability to focus. A sign of flow and one thing that you need to get into FLOW is the ability to lose yourself

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in whatever you are doing, so much so that the whole world disappears and you are lost in the task at hand.

However as a society it is considered that we are losing our ability to focus, with some researching claiming that the average attention span of an adult is 10 to 40 seconds. Researchers are now talking about a condition called Attention Deficit Trait (ADT). This is a condition where adult's brains during the day are mimicking a child's brain with ADD. The characteristics of ADT are that people can't focus, are easily distracted, multitask too many things and don't complete tasks.

There are 3 main reasons why we are developing ADT:

- ADH. Attention deficit habit. The habits we have in our day are actually reducing our ability to focus on a task. For example. We leave our phone on in meetings, we leave our email open and every time it beeps we go and check it. All these things destroy focus.
- We are over stimulated – we don't have to focus on one thing for too long, as it will be replaced by something else. This is the result of shifting from a physical economy to a digital economy. We all have information obesity.
- For too long pride ourselves on the ability to Multi-task. The greatest enemy of focus is multi-tasking. Multi-tasking suggests that you can focus on many things at once. However multi-tasking is a myth. The reality is that multi tasking is a very inefficient process and all your brain is doing is bring memories in and out of long term into short-term memory.

What is the fall out of this?

The brain is made up of older primitive parts which are driven by emotion and survival (Old Brain), and newer more sophisticated parts that are used for planning, strategy, creativity and emotional intelligence (New Brain).

When our New Brain has too many data points coming at it, it starts to become overwhelmed and stressed, the New brain shuts

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down and the Old Brain kicks in. This reduces our brains ability to perform high level functions and productivity drops.

By practicing focus and having a calm brain we keep the New brain in charge and our performance gets better.

How do we improve focus?

1. **Set up your environment** to support focus, turn off the email, turn the phone off, don't have the TV on while you are talking to your partner. Push back on the environment. Control your environment don't let it control you.

- Think about having email hours where you check email at certain points of your day.
- Start the day doing tasks, rather than cleaning out your inbox. For example between 8am and 10am focus on completing tasks without turning on your technology or accepting meetings.
- Chunk and group tasks together, for example if you are doing sales calls do them in a large chunk rather than sporadically during the day. If you are writing proposals or a presentation, shut yourself off and completely focus on that without interruption.

2. **Formally practicing focus.** An example of a formal practice is meditation. There is a huge amount of evidence showing that meditation can increase our ability to learn, helps increase the amount of grey matter in the brain, generates new neurons in the memory part of the brain and dramatically reduces our stress levels.

3. **Practice being present.** Also know as Mindfulness or Attention Management. During the day practice focusing your attention on what ever you are doing. So often people are performing a task but thinking about the next thing they have to do. Start to look at where your attention is going and can you start to pull it back to the present moment. If you are writing a report focus entirely on that report without thinking of the other things you need to do in the day. Likewise if you are having a conversation with someone totally immerse yourself in that conversation don't let your mind drift. A tremendous amount of research has shown that the ability

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to be 'present' dramatically reduces our stress levels (as stress lives in the future). Also being present with people builds rapport with them as giving someone our undivided attention is the ultimate compliment. For the next 7 days observe how 'present' you are with:

- Tasks
- People you interact with
- When you get home

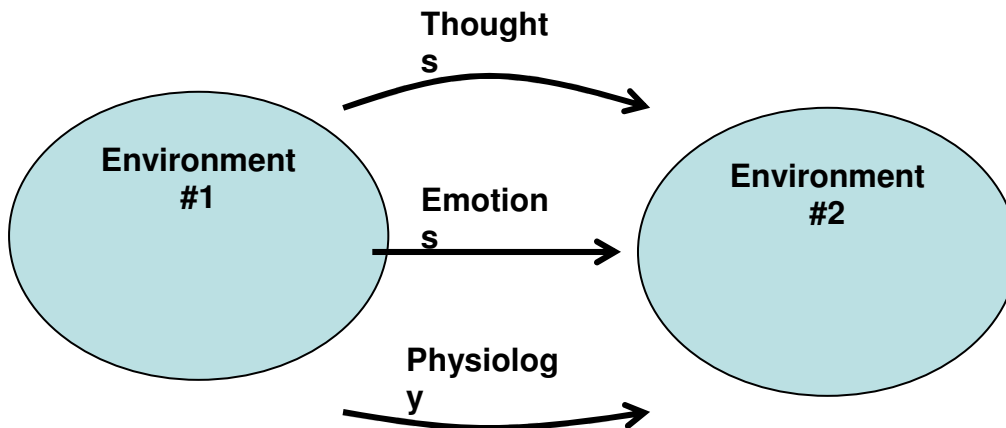
2. Engagement

My research into the armed forces showed that many of them found it hard to maintain relationships. One of the reasons for this was that what they did for a job and their home life was worlds apart. Many of them expressed that they found it difficult transitioning between those two worlds.

Following this I began to realise that every environment has a mindset to it. Work has a mindset, home has one, a sales meeting has a very different mindset to an internal meeting. Our level of engagement in an environment is determined by the mindset we bring into it.

In other words engagement is determined by how we show up.

Specifically when we show up what Emotions, Thoughts and Physiology do we take into that new environment. Our thoughts, emotions and physiology determine our level of engagement and our chance of success in that environment.



The question is what do we do in the transitional space between environments. This transitional space is called the 3rd Space. Do we have a 3rd Space where we regulate our Emotions, Thoughts and Physiology to help us in the next environment.

For example the 3rd Space can be used during the transition from work to home. The 3rd Space is the gap between work and home where you adopt thoughts, emotions and physiology that will help you be more engaged at home.

Some people use the car ride home as the 3rd Space. Some individuals say that the ride home is the only time of the day where I am not responsible for another human being, its my time to think about my world, I play some relaxing music and change my mindset to one that will suit home.

Other people use exercise as the 3rd Space.

Also you can use the 3rd Space to transition from home to work. Most people bring negative emotions (sadness, apathy, boredom), negative thoughts (“another day at the grind stone”, “I am tired of working so hard”), and tired and depleted physiology into the work place. How do you show up in the morning?

Can you use the third space to bring better emotions, thoughts, and physiology into the work place.

3. Thoughts

Performance is more about the conversation between your ears than anything.

We have 65,000 thoughts a day for the average population it is estimated that only 1% of those thoughts are positive or beneficial. So often we waste our mental space and focus on thoughts and events that do not matter, or we worry about things that haven't even happened yet. To get more FLOW we need to be ruthless about how we spend our mental energy and space. We don't want to waste valuable mental space and energy on insignificant and trivial events.

Be aware of the conversation you have with yourself. In terms of this conversation there are two main areas we need to be aware of; Explanation Styles and Thinking Traps.

A. Explanation styles:

When we experience events in our day, we explain them to ourselves in our heads. Specifically we explain events on 3 levels.

Does this Always Happen OR *Does This Rarely Happen*

It affects Every area of my life OR *It affects only part of my life*

It is due to me OR *It is due to others*

These 3 levels can also be explained as:

Permanent OR *Temporary*

Global OR *Specific*

Internal OR *External*

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In other words when an event occurs to us we explain it by saying:

Does this always happen to me or does this rarely happen?

Does this affects every area of my life, or affects only a small part of my life?

Is this due to my actions or the actions of others?

When we have challenging events happen to us we can fall into the trap of going to either extreme such as making things permanent or global when they are not. Also we can make things our fault or someone else's fault when it is not that black and white.

When explaining events to ourselves we need to ensure that our thoughts are:

- Accurate
- Realistic
- Optimistic

Start to watch your thinking style.

2. Toxic Thoughts:

When you find yourself experiencing negative emotion and pessimistic thoughts ask your self am I falling into Toxic Thoughts (common ones are outlined below). If you catch yourself falling into a Toxic Thoughts see if you can overcome it by challenging it.

Toxic Thoughts	Challenge
Predicting Disaster (where you predict outcomes and events in the future)	Is there strong evidence to support this; what are the chances of this occurring
Inflexible Thinking (where you see only one way to do things, where the world has to work in a very set fashion)	How reasonable are my thoughts, what will happen if things are done differently, is this really the best way to do things

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<p>Closed Minded (Where you are not open to change in any way, change within your environment, change within your self)</p>	<p>Be open to new ideas, constantly look for new ways to do things</p>
<p>Filtering (only seeing part of the evidence, just looking at part of the situation)</p>	<p>Look at the big picture, take time to accumulate all the evidence</p>
<p>Personalising (where you make everything about you, eg if someone is in a bad mood you think what did I do)</p>	<p>Focus on role of others, realise that it is not always about you</p>
<p>Judging/ Blaming (this is where you unfairly blame and judge other people and yourself)</p>	<p>Treat people and yourself with unconditional respect. Look for the good and potential in people</p>
<p>Labelling (We often labell other people and ourselves inaccurately)</p>	<p>Check for accuracy, ensure that we havent labelled someone and are closed minded to changing that label</p>
<p>Mind reading (where events occur and rather than checking in with people on why they did it we make the story up in our head)</p>	<p>Communicate with people and ask for reasons motive and express your concerns</p>
<p>Comparing (Where we compare ourselves to others)</p>	<p>Focus on what you are trying to achieve and what you are trying to achieve</p>

Mental toughness is a key to high performance. Mental toughness is the ability to regulate the conversation between our ears.

4. Emotions

The emotions we feel in a day drive our behaviour. Top sales people often say, “logic makes them think, but emotion makes them act”.

Emotional intelligence is made up of 4 main areas.

Awareness of the emotions we feel

Regulation of our emotions

Awareness of the emotional state of others

Influence over other people’s emotional state

Emotional Intelligence is essentially about regulating emotions to achieve a desired outcome.

Emotional intelligence has been shown to be far more important than traditional IQ in terms of success and leadership.

Self Awareness

Specifically can you be aware of the emotions you feel in a day?

If we are not aware of the emotions we feel in a day how can we regulate them?

There are 413 emotions, the 6 primary ones are:

- Happy
- Sad
- Angry
- Fear
- Disgust
- Surprise

Self Control

Once we are aware of our emotional state can we choose more functional emotions that will help us achieve more happiness and performance in our lives?

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When an emotion is not serving us well or it is an emotion that won't help us achieve the outcome we want, can we replace it with an emotion that will.

This is called an emotional FLIP, where we FLIP the emotion around.

For example if we are angry at someone at work and anger will not help the situation, can we FLIP the emotion to have compassion for that person? If we feel sadness can we FLIP that to feel joy? If we feel contempt can we have respect? If we have apathy can we have passion?

Emotional FLIPPING is where you "Choose your Mood".

Awareness of others

Empathy is the ability to put your place in other people's shoes. To understand how they are feeling. Great leaders exercise empathy, they understand the pressures and emotional state of the people they manage.

5. Choose your habits

High performers are constantly open to change and regularly review their habits. If they have a habit that is not helping them get better performance they simply get rid of it, likewise if a habit is helping them improve their performance they keep it.

Remember to regularly audit your habits!