

HI Level “Power of the Flow”

By Brad Yates

The Flow

The term "flow" can be misleading when associated with activities that require little energy or attention; i.e., to go with the flow. The power of flow is the product of hard work and a laser-like focus; a very special energy that allows you to breathe, be relaxed and calm as you work your way through self-imposed limits.

The Power of Flow

The power of flow is the authority that you give yourself to push through resistance and discomfort: It is a feeling that makes a difficult task feel easy, a boring task fun, and a very scary task feel both necessary and manageable. The power of flow is present when you have the confidence to accept your situation, when you enjoy the process, and when you have the enthusiasm needed to accomplish specific results.

***Reflection:** My introduction to the "flow" was a mystical like experience, an altered-state of consciousness as presented by Michael Murphy and Mike Spino in their work at the Esalen Sports Center in the Seventies. I utilized this approach to creating the flow swimming at sunset in Waimea Bay in the summer, surfing in small waves in the spring and fall and running in soft sand at Sunset Beach... again in the summer. All of these locations share the beauty and power of the North Shore of Oahu. Swimming at Waimea Bay, looking down in the crystal clear water and then looking up at the light show created by the sunset reflecting off of the mountains. Surfing in the perfection of clean and mellow surf that happens before and after the storm season, waves that make you feel like you are a genius compared to the challenge of surfing the same spots in the winter. Running in the sand at Sunset Beach, almost impossible except for those few months in the summer when the beach flattens out. During this time you can run right next to Ocean, sometimes all the way from Sunset Point down to Off the Wall and back. The magic of these environments combined with the exhilaration of training hard was enough to put me in the flow for long periods of time. In this "state"; I was able to swim, surf and run better, harder and longer than ever before. Twenty to thirty some years later and I remember these moments in living color. Such is the power of flow to create strong emotions and memorable performances.*

Acceptance

To access the power of flow you must make a conscious decision to be in charge of your own experience. Acceptance allows the breath to quiet the mind so you can settle into your emotions and operate in the present moment. *Reflection: In the eighties, I became more adapt at experiencing the "flow" in a wider range of activities including my work as a teacher. The "responsibility movement" made taking responsibility and choosing to do what needs to be done much more appealing than being the "victim" and creating resistance and discomfort for yourself.*

Enjoyment

To maintain the "power of the flow" you must be able to find enjoyment in the process. In short, the task of performing the work must become fun. Both in practice and in competition! The presence of the fun stimulates the creativity needed to imagine, visualize, and manifest expected outcomes. *Reflection: In the nineties, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book the FLOW clearly demonstrated that the flow-state was a function of "joy, creativity and the process of total involvement in life." This awareness created the need for me to write about and understand the ability to express the fire; the interest, excitement, intense desire and passion you have for what you love to do. Hence, the title of my book, FUEL THE FIRE, Perform with Passion!*

Enthusiasm

The power of flow to produce results is linked directly to the enthusiasm associated with the accomplishment. The feeling of "enthusiasm" is the basis of momentum, that spurt of energy that comes when you can see the "top of the hill" and you know that you can finish strong and get the job done.

Reflection: The power of flow to create outcomes has become readily apparent to me as many of my clients have learned to operate at acceptance, feel the enjoyment and harness the enthusiasm for what they want to accomplish. Their success has inspired me to write about this process. The power of flow can be captured by anyone in any task, and any individual who experiences the flow must be prepared to actively sustain it if they hope to accomplish great things. As with any powerful emotion, the intensity of the moment must always be balanced by equal amounts of calm to maintain the proper focus and achieve the desired result. It's like the swimmer that experiences the power of flow and then loses focus in the race and swims off course or misses an opportunity to win the race.

The Power of Flow

The example I use to describe the power of flow is that of a long distance runner. The runner in question is planning to experience the power... he has worked very hard to get here. He is very grateful for this opportunity. He shows up at the starting line wanting to compete, he is very present, he feels excited and yet calm... focused on his plan for the race. As the race starts he gets off the line with just the right amount of intensity... he quickly establishes the pace and gets into position and maintains contact with the runners that are slightly ahead of him... running with good form he settles into the race. The joy of running allows him to stay physically engaged in each stride... each moment. His face and upper body are relaxed; he uses his breathing to manage his emotions; and when the discomfort hits, he uses his imagination to quiet his mind and call on his base of fitness to push on and through to the other side... to a feeling that says' **GIYAH... I CAN DO THIS...** at just the right moment he starts his sprint and finishes strong... feeling great about his effort.

The power of flow here is the heightened state of awareness that merges the mind and body and creates the calm resolve: the state of "natural knowing" that underlies success in endurance activities as well as all areas of life.

Keep It Simple

The long distance runner experiences the power of the flow! The acceptance, enjoyment and enthusiasm are all very much a part of his ability to give a personal best effort and feel very good about the results. My intention in this column is to present similar information and examples to make it easier for you to experience the power of the flow and accomplish the performance goals that represent personal bests for you in acceptance, enjoyment and enthusiasm.

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