

Reduce stress with the Flow?

By [Michel Duquette](#)

The “Flow”? What is this? A new treatment to help us to release stress?

Well not exactly but it can help! In fact, it is the expression which the Hungarian psychologist Mr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi author of this theory invented to describe the “optimum emotional state” or “optimal experience” observed during his research regarding happiness.

In an interview with Wired magazine, Csikszentmihalyi described “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 are using your skills to the utmost.” (1)

Why did he choose this expression? He was inspired by the athletes and artists he interviewed. When those describe the state where they are when making specific activities, they say “all seems to flow” or “it flows”.

What this optimal emotional state is about? This emotional state occurs at the time of an activity in which the person feels:

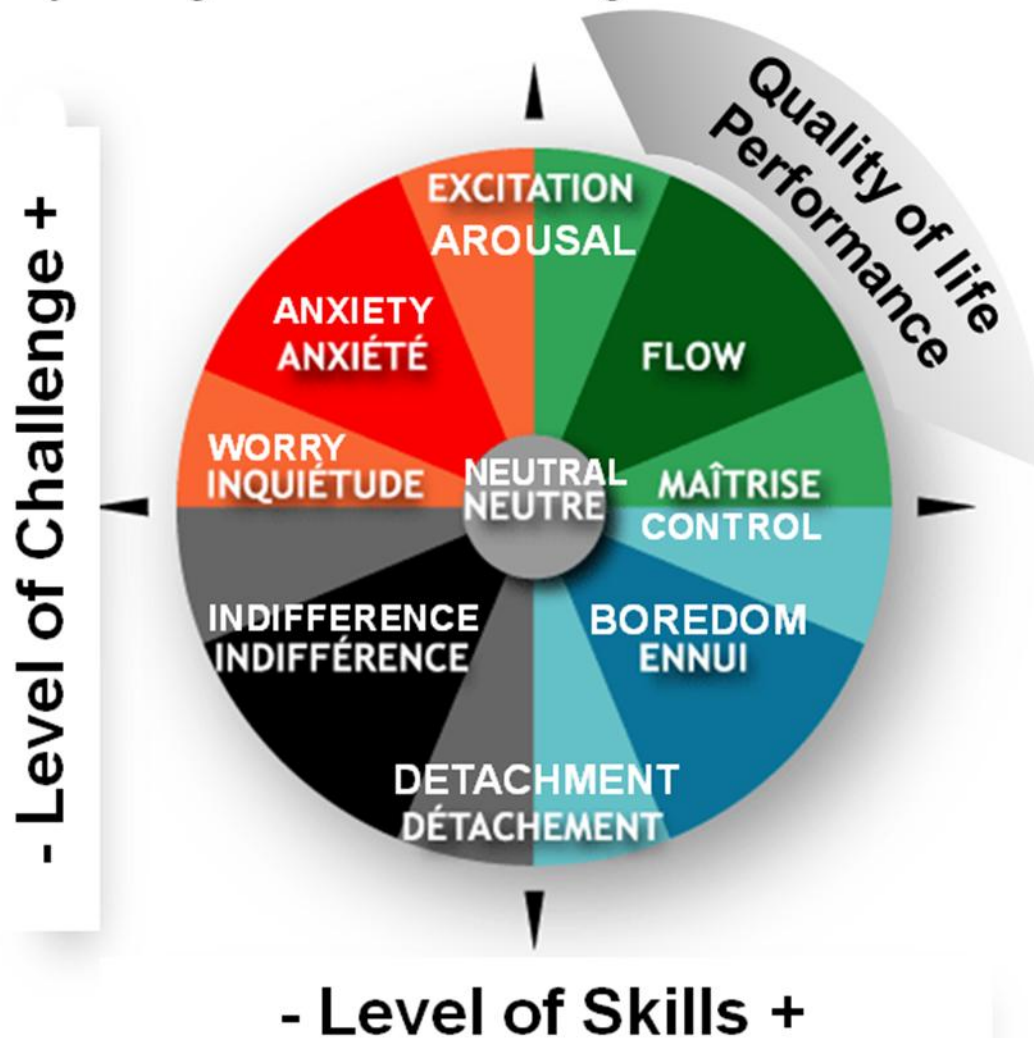
- with much of energy to carry out it and is persevering
- with confidence to make a success of the activity
- impassioned by it and does not see the time spent during the activity
- no fear of testing and learning new ways of doing
- very creative
- a lot of pleasure when doing the activity

This state happens when three factors occurred simultaneously:

- The person feels fully qualify to achieve the activity
- The challenge which it has to take up at the time of the activity is proportionally enough high compare to its skill.
- The person is very motivated by the activity itself.

When these three factors are happening together in the good proportion, a person is likely to feel this emotion (or this “feeling”) during the execution of the activity.

*** Psychological states according to the Flow model ***



** Inspiré du Modèle de Csikszentmihalyi, Massimini & Carli
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Thus, if we could fully know our key skills (we speak of “non-technical skills or in other words, innate skills) and at the same time, fix ourselves appropriated challenges, we would likely increase the number of times in our day where we would be in an optimal emotional state and by the way improve our chance to better balance our life and live without stress.

Another interesting thing is that as we are talking about emotions, we do not need sophisticated tools or thinking process to know if we are on the right way or not. Once we integrate the notion of “Flow” i.e. once we can “remember” those moments in our life when an emotion of this type was lived, we can “know” intuitively or “feel” what puts us in this state. If we know sufficiently our key skills we will then be able to direct in a more optimal way our life professionally and personally. It can help us indeed to balance different aspects of our life and for example slow down when it is appropriate and run

only when we are able to do so and it is necessary. It allows us also to choose where we want to put our energy in an efficient way instead of running in all direction. To focus on our talent and accept to delegate what we are not good at or motivate to do.

If someone wants to know more about the “Flow” I recommend you to get the following book that you can buy in all good bookstores: “Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York; Harper and Row. ISBN 0-06-092043-2”

Do not hesitate to send me your comments or to contact me if you want more information about this very interesting concept, or visit our website at www.icizen.com (sorry only in French for the moment!).

Michel Duquette

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(1) Geirland, John (1996). “Go With The Flow”. Wired magazine, September, Issue 4.09.

[Michel Duquette:](#)

Michel Duquette is an engineer graduated from Polytechnique (Montréal). After many years in senior position for companies like Bombardier, Alstom, AREVA and Dresser in several countries (Canada, USA, Mexico, and France), he decided recently to create an enterprise with a French partner, in the area of personal development: ICIZEN. This company provided specific services in France and in Canada (Québec) but will expand during the year 2009.

He is a good communicator, creative and particularly persistent in the achievement of his objectives and had somehow the seed of entrepreneurship that request only an appropriate ground to grow.

He succeed to transfer his experience and skills developed in the area of performance optimization, coaching, training and in strategic and action plans elaboration in ICIZEN to help people that were in the same environment as him before, mainly managers and professionals, taking a new steps in their professionals or personal life.