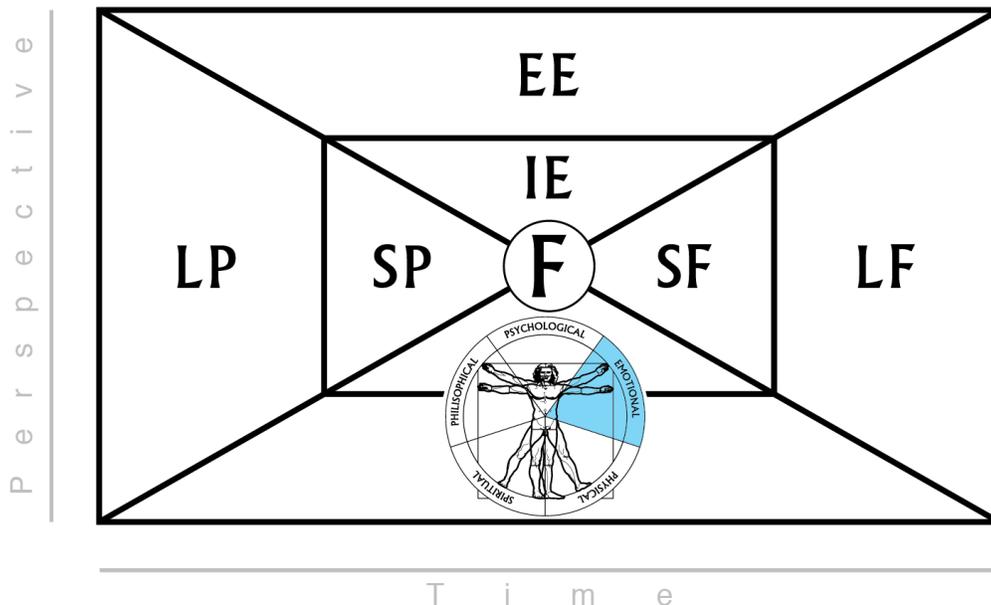




FINDING YOUR FLOW TOOLKIT
VOL. 55
PERSONAL NEEDS AND LIFE BALANCE

The Dalai Lama, when asked what surprised him most about humanity answered:

“Man. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present: the result being that he does not live in the present or in the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then dies having never really lived”



Within the 12-dimensions we have discussed dozens of mindsets, principles, concepts, tools, and practices that facilitate flow and increase performance. But to sustain flow and performance over the long-term requires a look at **Personal Needs and Life Balance**.

Flow is expressed in many ways—some more intense than others. Dare I say that flow can be an addictive experience? Who doesn't want to be in that place where everything is clicking, getting lost in the moment, expressing your internal motivations and energies towards meaningful goals? But peak states of performance and flow do take energy and resources—and these must be replenished and managed. Mozart lacked this skill.

It is important to remember that flow is cultivated, not just through strategies that feed moments of performance (MOP's) but actions that feed daily living. You are not just a human "doing", but more importantly, a human "being".

Workaholics, often addicted to the buzz of positive feedback and reinforcement, find their bodies rebelling, relationships suffering, and the subtle joys of life taking a back seat to achievement. Their quest for excellence in one area can leave them without time and energy for the little things, which are often the foundation for the big things.

I've known many top performers in my career and Andre Agassi was one of them. I met Andre in 1986 at the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy, the "West Point" of tennis academies. All of us were there to explore our potential as elite or professional athletes.

Andre was born to play tennis, not because he was the most gifted, but because his father, an Iranian Olympic boxer and tennis enthusiast, demanded it. Second place trophies at tournaments usually resulted in Mr. Agassi publically smashing it on the ground, letting everyone know that second place was unacceptable.

Andre was not allowed to participate in after school activities or

other sports, and the hand-made court his father built was Andre's dojo/cage where he was required to hit thousands of balls every-day—no excuses.

By the time Andre came to the Academy it was clear that he would likely be a top tour player if he could keep his wits about him, but that was in question. He rebelled as many in his situation often do, from failing grades to humiliating opponents at national tournaments. He was fascinating to watch—but there was more to him than most people saw. There was a regular guy inside the machine dying to hang out and be one the guys. But that wasn't on the agenda. Like it or not, there was a destiny at stake.

During afternoon workouts I often ran into Andre at the indoor courts. It was a joy to watch him slam backhands and forehands corner to corner with pure focus. He was in the zone all right. By the time he was 15 he had far exceeded the 10,000-hour threshold of intentional practice so it was hard for him not to be great—at tennis. His father made sure of that. But he was miserable inside—and not great in anything else.

As many now know through his biography "Open" Andre "hated" tennis! But it was all he had, he was good at it, so he played on, hoping that he could take his father's dream to its logical conclusion, and then perhaps find a life after he made it on the tour.

His was a rocky career at first—built more around the fear of loss rather than his love of the game. Luckily it ended well—better than I can say for others at the Academy with even greater talent who burned or washed out. As for Andre, he did become the number 1 player in the world, won 8 Grand Slam events, and captured Gold at the 1996 Olympic games. But the costs were extremely high and the journey—quite less than healthy.

Over the past few year's we've heard of "Tiger Mothers" who dominate, even intimidate and humiliate their children in order to push them to the right side of the bell curve. And there is no doubt

about it, some of these kids are performing well in school, but at what cost?

The principles at play that support flow and peak performances do produce results. But within our hyper-competitive environments, fatigue, burnout, drop out, mental illness, even suicide has reached its pinnacle. It's time to take a step back, gain some perspective, and see the bigger picture. It's time to look at flow, not just as a short-term quest, but a way of life. The Japanese know something about this...

We all want to find more flow and greater levels of personal performance and influence, but to keep it up requires a foundation of general health, wellbeing and a sense of balance that makes life itself a little less stressful and a little more grounded. While there is no one formula, I've noticed **three themes** that take can take the edge off life's challenges and provide some relief while still pushing towards excellence:

Theme 1: The "Who-ness" vs. "What-ness" Paradigm:

Separate "Who-ness" from "What-ness": First and perhaps the most important is the capacity to set clear boundaries between "who" you are from what you "do". Refuse to let any external performance, individual, or group dictate your intrinsic value. Continue to measure results and improve your craft, but do not let outcomes be either a condemnation or a coronation of your value. Balance begins here: the sanctity of self.

Theme 2: Needs and Balance Through Addition:

Micro Vacations: Schedule some leisure time with no other objective than to have fun: see a movie, go bowling with friends, scope out a new gadget, or engage in a hobby. This gives you something to look forward to—an island of pleasure in the midst of demands.

Stay Connected with Friends: Growing human connection makes

life worth living. With so many technologies to choose from, a brief email or Skype call builds upon your emotional bank account. Even more impactful: a hand written note.

Take Time to Reflect: Taking time to reflect on your day, its highlights, lessons learned, or positive interactions with others, gives you the opportunity to internalize life's small joys and lessons. Journaling is even more powerful—and the start of your biography!

Serve Others: Few things take you out of your own world and gravity more than placing your attention, time and resources on someone or a cause beyond self. Finding a place to serve reminds you what you were really designed for: serving others.

Lose Yourself in Nature: Find a natural place to wander. With so many pre-constructed environments that channel our daily actions, finding a natural place to spend some time can support your sense of well-being and existential grounding.

Get Physical: Commit to daily physical activity of any kind. For those who are able, there is no substitute for physical movement. If you are not physically active 3-5 days a week for at least 30 minutes, now is the time make that happen. Start with a walk and let it evolve from there. Visit your local recreational center or gym and work with a professional to build a physical routine. There is no balance without movement.

Savor Life's Pleasures: Build a list of the little things that bring you joy and savor them: driving and listening to a book, getting a massage, eating a cheeseburger, taking a scenic drive. Whatever your simple pleasures, build your list and practice being fully present with them.

Practice Mindfulness: Take time to do nothing more than to be present and let go of control. There is no practice that is as equally profound as it is simple. Doing nothing but breathing, in through nose and out through the mouth, letting all thoughts go, just being,

is one of the bodies biggest secrets for reset and renewal.

Find the Humor: Humor in all of its forms, takes the edge off. Friend and colleague Jeff Evans (a member of the first team to summit Mt. Everest with a blind man) speaks of their use of “positive pessimism” in uncomfortable moments. They would say things like “It’s cold but at least I’m wet”, which brought perspective to the moment. This technique is common amongst Navy SEAL’s who spend much of their deployment hours in harsh conditions. Whether it’s funny movies or light hearted practical jokes, identify what lightens the mood, makes you laugh, and brings a little more humor into your day.

Theme 3: Needs and Balance Through Subtraction:
Offload Burdens (People, Actions, Things, Circumstances)
that weigh you down. A few questions to consider:

People: Are there people in your life that drain more of your resources than they restore? Is there a way to gain some distance? What about the people who bring out the best in you and you in them: Is there a way to draw closer?

Things: Are there things (sitting in your house, storage room or attic) that you don’t want or need that are producing physical and mental clutter? What might you get rid of that would remove these back of mind distractions?

Actions: What tasks cost you more than your time is worth? What might you eliminate, or delegate, to leverage your time more effectively? Do you have a “to don’t” list?

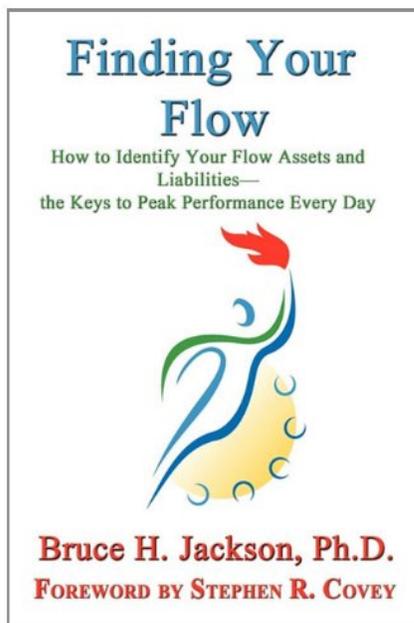
Circumstances: What do you still pay attention to that remains outside of your control? In his biography, John Cleese speaks of his mother’s obsession with writing down every worry she had in order to discuss and sort out each solution. The result: increased neurotic behavior and lots of wasted energy—for both mother and son. Situational awareness: good—obsession with uncertainty—bad.

If you are reading this, you are most likely seeking great things in your life. But let's not do it at the sake of life itself. Andre did achieve most of his tennis goals, but as many of us witnessed, it didn't have to be such a miserable process. Today, he's living a more balanced life—giving back and building schools as a tribute to the life he missed as a young protégé.

I've known many who have made their summits, won their trophies, acquired their titles, and made their millions, many to comment that they paid too much attention to the a destination, carried around too much baggage, and forgot to enjoy the journey —forgetting the great lyric written by John Lennon: "life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans."

EXERCISE AND PRACTICE:

- Create your own list of personal needs/life balance strategies
- Ritualize some of these in your time management system

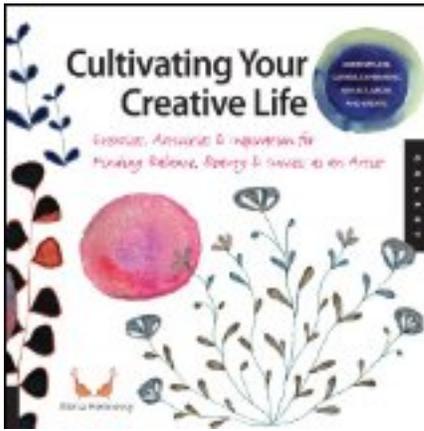


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