

An Introduction to Highly Productive Flow States

A big buzz word at the moment in the world of productivity is something called 'flow'. Flow essentially refers to a state of mind that many people believe to be the state of 'ultimate cognitive performance' and which is characterized by a complete focus and attention to the point where all background distractions seemingly disappear.

The term has been used for a long time but has recently be re-popularized by a book called 'The Rise of Superman' by Steven Kotler. Let's take a look at what precisely flow is and whether or not it really holds the key to your ultimate productivity.

What is Flow?

Most of us will have experienced flow at one time or other in our lives. Most people describe flow as being that point when you're surfing, skiing or playing sports when everything slows down and you are able to react with super-human reactions. It's that sense of calm that allows you to pull off the impossible and achieve amazing feats and it's thus highly sought after by athletes.

Flow is *also* that point in time when you're writing and you completely focus on what you're doing to the extent that you don't even get up to go to the toilet or eat. It's when you're having a conversation and you completely lose track of time.

On a neurological level, this essentially means that you're completely switched on to what you're doing and completely engaged with it so that everything else appears less important. As a result, the brain produces chemicals that are similar to stress hormones but with feel-good endorphins. Specifically, flow seems to be the result of dopamine, norepinephrine, anandamide, serotonin and adrenaline.

Is Flow Real?

The concept of flow is supported in numerous studies and almost all of us can attest to having experienced *something* like it at some point in our lives.

That said, the idea of flow also seems to be one that is prone to exaggeration and embellishment. Too often, flow is treated like the solution to everything and Kotler in particular makes a lot of sweeping statements like 'every work of art or world record ever is the result of flow'. There is no science to back this up.

Likewise, flow is likely not one state but multiple states. The 'flow' we feel when sitting in front of a computer is likely very different from the one you get snowboarding.

That said, there is definitely a big benefit to being highly engaged with what you are doing. If nothing else, this teaches us that simply being fascinated and passionate about your work is the very best way to increase productivity.