

The 'Flow' experience

For lawyers on the go, how can one refocus and reframe the mind to develop a new and mindful way of working? Bernadette Baynie elaborates.

Time is indeed our most precious resource. We live in an ever-expanding and ever-demanding digitised corporate world of "now" where time waits for no one. Most of our clients want to have everything now and

be everything now - so that continuously expect us to "do" everything now for them, no matter what time of the day. As lawyers and leaders that expectation can be seriously stressful not to mention overwhelming!



One of the best ways to maximise your precious “time” in both your professional and personal life is to become more action-orientated and enter into an excellent mental state called “flow”. More and more highly-skilled professionals know how to get into this valuable “state of flow” and use it to their advantage.

The wonderfully-named psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi wrote a book called “*Flow – The Psychology of Optimal Experience*” some years ago – after conducting in depth cutting-edge research into our human habits and our levels of performance and happiness

He found that you can be the happiest when you have “*flow experiences*”. These are moments in your life when you are “in the zone”. You become so absorbed in something important that you lose the track of time. You use your skills and abilities to the maximum whilst you are in a highly focused state of mind. When you do this - you reach the highest state of efficiency and performance. Significant results flow from this activity. Something amazing happens to both your mind and emotions. Why? You become so absorbed and fully present in what you are doing that time seems to stand still but conversely expands – and your work becomes almost effortless but precise. You enter into a sense of great calmness and effectiveness. You become one with the tools that you are using. This flow moment energises you and increases your productivity and happiness.

Here is an example - you can attain a state of “flow” through a highly concentrated writing interval, such as drafting an in-depth legal opinion for a client. You are so immersed in the activity that you may feel that the pen or keyboard becomes a part of you, making the task of writing almost effortless. Even though you are using your skills and knowledge to their maximum limits you lose all concerns and fears and self-consciousness. More importantly, you become super confident and intuitive in your ability in the moment to complete the task successfully.

What a great state of presence to reach you might say?

Each one of us has no doubt reached this state of mind before, either intentionally or by circumstance. What a difference it would make to your work life however if you could arm yourself with the tools to do so purposefully each day. You would operate

on a higher level of consciousness and become clearer, competent and inspired to achieve more in the limited time that you have.

To activate this state of flow, you need to:

- » become more alert and aware and very present and attentive to whatever tasks that you take on;
- » develop an upfront strong sense of clarity for each task at hand, in particular the specific steps that you can activate now; and
- » create a sense of urgency for such work, which is a race against yourself mentality; and
- » a “just do it” attitude to get the job done swiftly and efficiently.

As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi said, “*The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we make happen.*”

Once you get up and go and are in the flow - your high focus and inner drive will inspire you to launch and not stop until the job is completed. If you happen to go off piste and find that you are not fully present in the moment, it’s possible that your mind may have become distracted either by: the past (eg replaying some fearful previous episode in your life) or the future (being overcome by a fear of criticism or failure).

Practice catching yourself in such moments. Refocus and reframe your present state of mind. You will find that over a few weeks you will develop a new and mindful way of working. Being “in the flow” will then become automatic and one of your most valuable assets.

So be mindful and remember that your determination flows...where your intention goes! 🚀

This article is extracted from the author’s upcoming book titled ‘Leadership Excellence for Lawyers’.



Text by:

BERNADETTE BAYNIE, managing director,
Bernadette Baynie International Consultants
www.bernadettebaynie.com