

Hello and Happy Thanksgiving!

I wish you and your family a very happy Thanksgiving!

I wrote an article about balancing work and home life I thought I would share it with you. I discuss the concept of "flow" which I talked about in a previous newsletter.

When your Body is at Home is your Mind still at Work?

While at work, is your mind distracted by all the things you need to do when you get home? When you're home do you think about things you need to do at work? Our minds travel at light speed jumping from one thing to another. Think back to your early school days when you daydreamed out the window during class. Or maybe you were bored near the end of summer wishing for school to start? It seems like we have a hard time focusing on the here and now! How do we slow our thoughts down and why should we slow our thoughts down anyway?

There's a lot of buzz lately about "being in flow." Even Oprah has talked about it on her show. Research supports the notion that the most fulfilling time in a woman's life is when she is deeply engaged in what she is doing. Flow is when we are so engrossed in an activity that time flies by and we may even forget to eat, sleep, and keep the date we made with that guy on the internet! All of us have had these experiences and engaged in what researchers term a "flow" activity.

Flow is the term a psychologist named Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi gave to the experience of full engagement in what you are doing. He has done extensive research on identifying and understanding the times when people feel enjoyment and deep involvement in life. Flow is defined as being engaged in an activity that challenges and provides an opportunity for you to use your skills. There has to be a right balance between challenge and skills. If there is not enough of a challenge then boredom tends to creep in. If the task at hand is difficult you may become discouraged and anxious. Creating the right balance is essential to making all this work. You can experience flow at work or home - working in the garden, walking in the park, or while playing the piano. Some people are deeply engaged while looking at a painting while others may find it boring. We each have our own unique way of getting in the flow.

The Challenge

So the question is what gives you flow? Watch yourself during the day to notice what activities you are vigorously engaged in. You could do this by checking in with yourself every hour or so. If your mind is somewhere else other than what you are doing then you are not experiencing flow. The key to living a deeply engaged life is to fill your day with as many flow experiences as possible.

When you're having a conversation with someone, are you listening to what the person is saying or are your thoughts racing ahead to what you want to say or what you have to do later in the day? Here's something you can try: practice allowing the racing thoughts to flow right past you and don't grab on to them. Don't give them a place to land. Refocus on the person you are speaking with. You'll automatically be able to increase your enjoyment in the moment if you do not give other random thoughts any attention. The same thing can be said while reading a book: Are you thinking about what you want to eat or how someone made you angry? Notice the thoughts and let them flow by while refocusing on your reading.

If our minds are always anxiously racing around we miss out on living in the moment. When you think about it the moment is all we really have since there are no guarantees we have tomorrow.

So let's talk about quality time at home. If you have children then your evenings are probably filled with their activities and preparing them for school. Turn each event into an engaging event in your mind without letting your thoughts race ahead outside of what you are doing. Notice the small nuisances about being with your children.

Good old television! Researchers found people are mildly depressed while watching television. Many of us have experienced a night in front of the television while our minds were on other things. Try limiting television to shows you really like or find a more engaging activity. Make a list of all of the things you're interested in trying, researching or special projects you want to complete and pick one to work on.

Increasing flow will happen little by little as you become more aware of what activities engage you. By refocusing on what you are doing in the moment you'll find yourself more engaged in each moment of life and aware of how you spend your time. You will learn to shift your attention and energy to turn boring moments when you are drifting into more engaging ones.

References: Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1990). FLOW The Psychology of Optimal Experience.

All the best,
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