

Breakthrough Life Coaching Newsletter, September 2008

Hello everyone,

I've been reading about the experience of "FLOW" a term coined by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. I decided to write a little about this experience based on Csikszentmihalyi's research.

In this newsletter:

1. FLOW
2. Happiness Tip

Researchers believe happiness is something each of us can cultivate into our lives. As we are well aware, there are many things in life we do not have control over so the key is to focus on learning to control our inner experiences. How you feel about yourself and how you interpret what happens to you each day will determine your level of happiness.

Think about a time when you were at your best. A time when you were completely in control of and absorbed in something you were doing. Did you feel exhilarated? Did you feel fulfilled and a deep sense of enjoyment?

This is what the flow experience is all about. Being engaged in living in the moment and not racing ahead in your thoughts into the future. When you race ahead you miss out on pockets of happiness. There is no guarantee the future will come. Living in the moment and enjoying the journey is the key to living a fulfilling life. We are only guaranteed the moment.

Contrary to what you might think research has shown that the best moments in a person's life is when one is deeply engaged in what one is doing. Have you ever been so engrossed in an activity that time seemed to fly by? You may even have missed a meal during that time. When you are completely absorbed in what you are doing you are in "flow." It is explained by being in engaged in an activity that challenges you 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 you will become bored. If the task is too difficult then you will feel discouraged and anxious. Creating the right balance is important. The activity can be your work, teaching, painting or looking at a painting, hiking all depending on what your interests and values are.

Watch yourself during the day when you are engaged in various activities. Notice, if while speaking with someone if you are really listening to the person. Are your

thoughts racing ahead to what you want to say or what you have to do next? Practice allowing the racing thoughts to flow right past you and don't grab on to them. Focus on the person you are speaking with. Deep listening is a practiced skill and very rewarding.

When you are reading a book is your mind distracted? Are you thinking about what you want to eat or do the next day? Let the thoughts flow by and focus on your reading.

Make a list of new things you have thought about trying but never made the time for. Do you want to play tennis? Do you want to go for a walk in the park more often? Make a list and pick one activity to do and try and focus on the activity without letting your mind anxiously wander.

By trying new activities and becoming aware of what you are doing and what activities give you flow you will be able to increase your fulfillment in life.

Some people spend their leisure time in front of the television to unwind after a long day. Research suggests people are mildly depressed while watching television. You may want to see if some of the time you spend in front of the television could be used for a flow activity. Have you ever said to yourself that you should turn off the television but you keep staring at it for another hour while your mind drifts?

If you have a boring task to do such as cleaning or waiting for a bus try and find something about it that will make it a challenge or more fun. Maybe while you clean you can listen to a piece of music you love or make the task challenging in some way.

The happiness tip for this month is to find some way to increase "flow" in your life. I am going to focus on ways I can make cleaning more of a flow experience. As I write this I am looking around at my cluttered desk. As much as I want to race ahead in my mind about all of the other things I need to get done I am going to let those thoughts flow right by and create an organized workspace for myself today.

All the best,

Donna

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

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