

FINDING FLOW IN THE PRACTICE OF LAW AND BEYOND

Enhancing productivity
and happiness as an
attorney and a person.

THE ORIGINS OF FLOW

- The term "Flow" was coined by German psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book, *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology*
- Csikszentmihalyi set out to answer the questions:
 - *"What contributes to a life worth living?"*
 - *"What are the roots of happiness?"*
 - *"What in our everyday life makes us feel really happy?"*

GENERAL PRINCIPLE

“What I ‘discovered’ was that happiness is not something that happens. It is not the result of good fortune or random chance. It is not something that money can buy or power command. It does not depend on outside events, but, rather, on how we interpret them.

Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy.”

–Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

BEEPER STUDY

EXPERIENCE-SAMPLING METHOD (ESM)

- ESM is a research method first proposed by Reed Larson and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1983 that psychologists use to study human experience.
- Made possible by the beeper or pager
- ESM asks the participants in a study to self-report using a systematic survey at random times of the day.
- Five key components to ESM:
 1. The Participants
 2. The Signal
 3. Experience Sampling Form (ESF)
 4. Follow-up Interviews
 5. Data Analysis
- Flow has been found to be correlated with a positive mood.

WHAT IS FLOW?

- Being ***involved*** with what we are doing.
- In ***harmony*** with the environment around us.
- The feeling when we are ***fully alive***.
- Easy examples: Singing, dancing, or playing sports.
- Flow also happens when we work, read a good book, or engage in a friendly conversation.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO FLOW?

- 1) Completely involved in what you are doing—**focused**.
- 2) A sense of **ecstasy**—of being outside everyday reality.
- 3) Great inner **clarity**—knowing what needs to be done, and how well you are doing.
- 4) Confidence that the activity is **doable**—that your skills are adequate to the task.
 - Finding a balance between a difficult challenge and something within our control (“Goldilocks Task”)

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO FLOW?

- 5) A sense of **serenity**—no worries about oneself and growing beyond the boundaries of the ego.
- 6) **Timelessness**—thoroughly focused on the present, where hours seem to pass by in minutes.
- 7) **Intrinsic Motivation**—whatever produces flow becomes its own reward.

MUSICAL COMPOSER

INTERVIEW, 1975

“You are in an ecstatic state to such a point that you feel as though you almost don’t exist. I have experienced this time and time again. My hand seems devoid of myself, and I have nothing to do with what is happening. I just sit there watching it in a state of awe and wonderment. And [the music] just flows out of itself.”

ROCK CLIMBER

TO CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 1975

“It’s self-catalyzing...the moves create each other. The move you’re planning to do is also the genesis of the move you’re going to do after you’ve done that one...”

SUSAN JACKSON

COMPETITIVE FIGURE SKATER, 1996

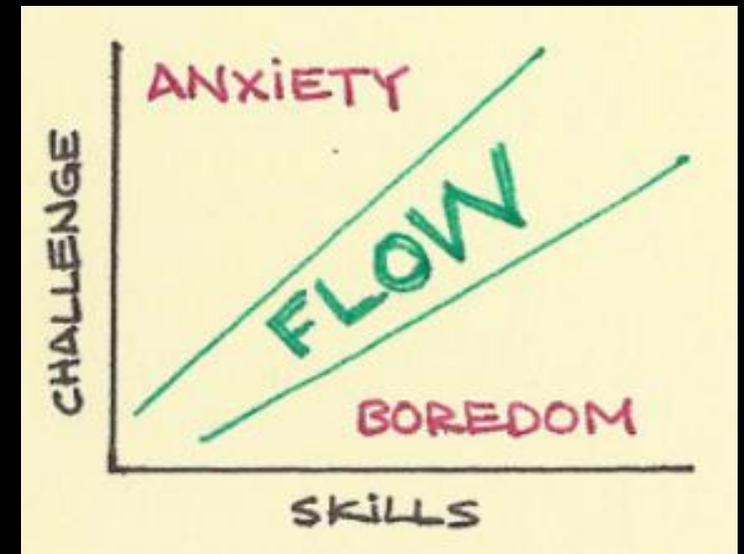
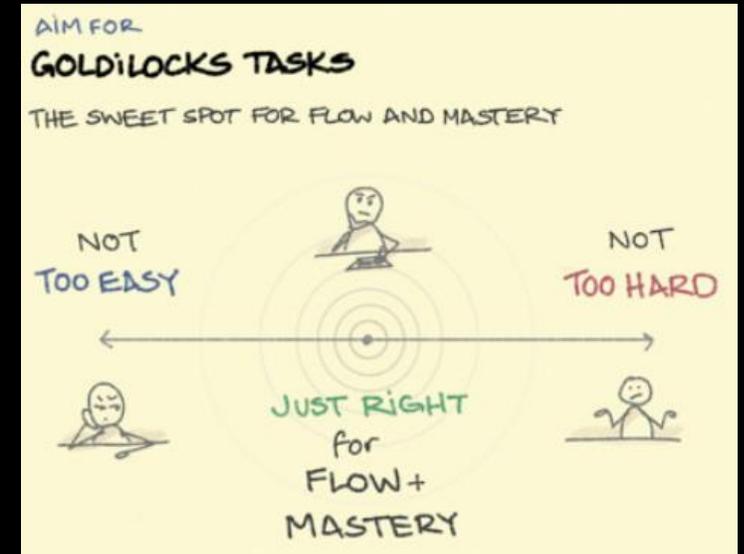
"It was just one of those programs that clicked. I mean everything went right, everything felt good...it's just such a rush, like you feel it could go on and on, like you don't want it to stop because it's going so well. It's almost as though you don't have to think, it's like everything goes automatically without thinking...it's like you're on automatic pilot, so you don't have any thoughts. You hear the music but you're not aware that you're hearing it, because it's a part of it all."

CONDITIONS TO THE FLOW EXPERIENCE

1. There are **clear goals** every step of the way.
2. There is immediate **feedback** to one's actions.
3. There is **balance** between challenges and skills.
("Goldilocks Task")

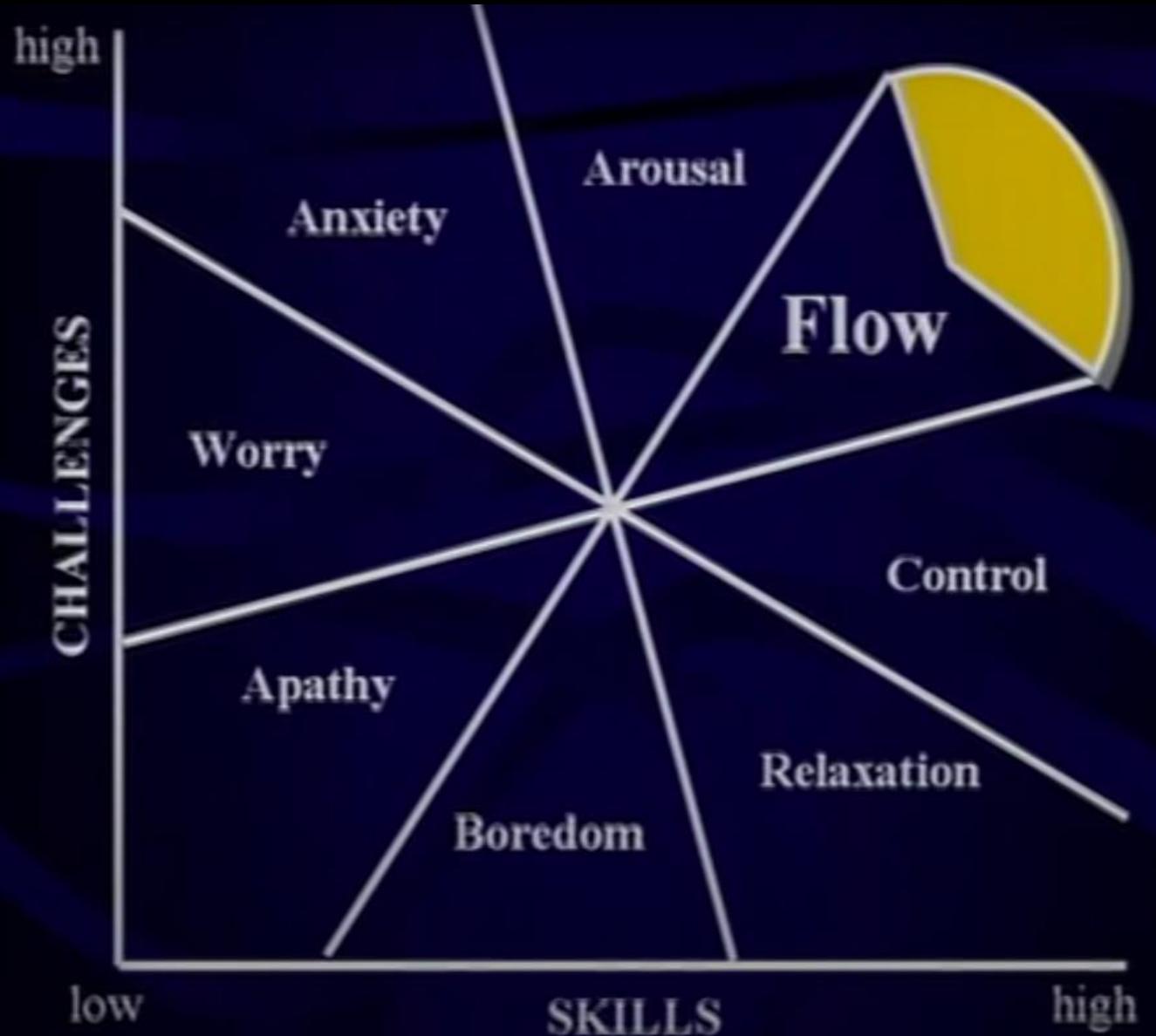
“GOLDILOCKS TASK”

- The sweet spot for Flow and mastery where the task is not too easy, not too hard, but just right.
- Balance between challenge and skill
- Avoid anxiety and boredom
- Prime yourself for Flow

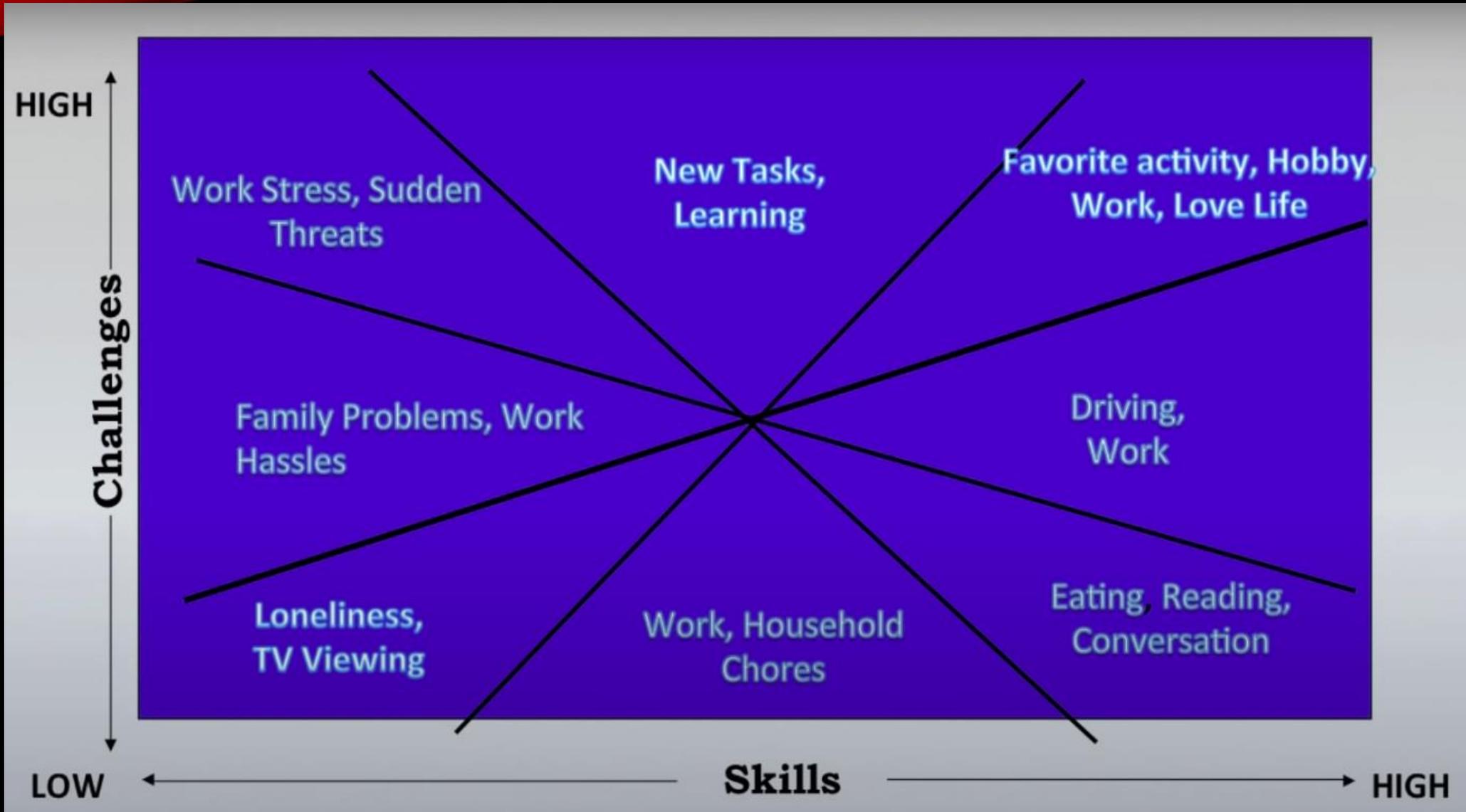


When Do We Experience Flow?

- Finding the window between **arousal** and **control**
- The Flow that results from tasks that engage our skills while simultaneously challenging us allow us to **learn and improve**
- DON'T GET STUCK IN **APATHY!**



Examples of Flow



HOW DO WE ACHIEVE FLOW?

- Practice a brief exercise that requires you to **focus**.
 - “Goldilocks Task”
 - Turn off or quiet all distractions
- Allow yourself the **freedom** to engage in your work.
 - Disarm all self-scrutiny
 - Ignore your ego and let the creative process flow
- Provide yourself with **feedback** as you work.
 - Set clear goals for yourself
 - After a finite amount of time, look back on your progress:
 - ✓ *What have I accomplished?*
 - ✓ *What more can I accomplish moving forward?*

Autotelic Experiences

/ˌɑːdōˈtɛlɪk/

1.(of an activity or a creative work) having an end or purpose in itself.

“Christopher Burney, a prisoner of the Nazis who had spent a long time in solitary confinement during World War II, gives a fairly typical example of this process:

If the reach of experience is suddenly confined, and we are left with only a little food for thought or feeling, we are apt to take the few objects that offer themselves and ask a whole catalogue of often absurd questions about them.

Does it work? How? Who made it and of what? And, in parallel, when and where did I last see something like it and what else does it remind me of?... **So we set in train a wonderful flow of combinations and associations in our minds...the length and and complexity of which soon obscures its humble starting-point...My bed, for example, could be measured and roughly classified...the precise mechanics of the window, the discomfort of the toilet...computed the length and breadth, the orientation and elevation of the cell [italics added].**” *Id. Emphasis added.*



“Wealth, status, and power have become in our culture all too powerful symbols of happiness. When we see people who are rich, famous, or good-looking, we tend to assume that their lives are rewarding, even though all the evidence might point to their being miserable. And we assume that if only we could acquire some of those same symbols, we would be much happier.”

Flow, the Psychology of Optimal Experience, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Allow yourself the **freedom** to engage in your work.

- Disarm all self-scrutiny
- Ignore your ego and let the creative process flow

“The Helping Friendly Book, it seemed,
possessed the ancient secrets of,
eternal joy and never-ending splendor;

The trick was to surrender to the flow...”

–Trey Anastasio, The Lizards

SOURCES FOR MORE READING

- *Flow, the Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990
- *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise*, K. Anders Ericsson, 2016
- *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Daniel H. Pink, 2009