

**A Primer on Flow and Attentional Leadership™:
Exploring the Principles and Practices for Discovering
One's Best Self and Leading Others Towards Greatness**

By

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For

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Preface

As a student of the United States Naval Academy you are most likely familiar with the experience—even the concept of Flow. Some call this “being in the zone” while others use words such as “optimal performance” or “peak experience”.

To be accepted into the world’s greatest service academy you have had to discover that place where little could get between you and your goal—where you put everything together to be fully engaged and focused in the moment. Can you remember such a time?

On the playing field, in the testing center, late nights of study, purposeful extra-curricular activities, difficult physical challenges... have all been places and arenas where you have prepared yourself to be at your best—using a variety of principles, practices, and tools (even if you weren’t aware of them) to be “at one” with your Moments of Performance (MOP’s) in order to compel that outcome you envisioned in your mind. Perhaps the acceptance letter from the USNA was one such image you envisioned before it actually happened.

In my study of great performers (i.e., athletes, pilots, surgeons, attorneys, dancers, police & fire fighters, educators, you name it) their disciplines are unique, but their preparations and strategies to be their best were very much the same.

While there are hundreds of books and thousands of articles on the subject of Flow, my goal here is to provide you with a comprehensive and working model of this desired state, access to resources to help you discover your current strengths and challenges for being in flow, and a basic toolkit for Finding Your Flow at the USNA and other life arenas as your personal and professional ambitions unfold and evolve.

As you learn the many and varied dimensions, principles, strategies, and practices for finding your own flow, make sure and draw the connection between those things that help you lead yourself to how you will lead others. Recognize that the principles are not only universal, but also scalable as you grow your influence exponentially—leading individuals, teams, within organizations and communities—even beyond.

My Introduction to Flow

I once asked my father to describe a time in his life when he was at his very best. Without hesitation, he said that his four years serving as a PT boat commander in Europe and Africa during WWII were when he had his most profound and engaging personal experiences.

This was a surprise, so I dug deeper and asked, “What made the war so profound for you?” It soon became clear why those years were transformational for him. For him, war was a time of great personal sacrifice, uncertainty, stress, and fear. But it was something more: he felt great purpose, as his days were bound by clear roles and measurable goals. He was driven by powerful motives, and he received precise feedback on his actions. Such tasks as pursuing the enemy, managing other men, being ready for action at any time took full powers of mind and body. They pushed the limits of his mental, emotional, and physical capacity, all for a higher cause, something bigger than



himself—the greater good of his country and the world. For much of those years, my father was in the zone, *in flow* in a very *Meaningful Life Arena* (MLA).

In my life-long pursuit of such special moments, I have learned that almost any activity in any MLA can become a time and place for the expression of personal excellence—or what many call *flow*, *peak experience*, or *being in the zone*. These enjoyable states often set the stage for higher performance or satisfaction and the use of our greatest gifts or talents (*self-actualization*). Once you experience flow, you find it highly attractive—everything seems to fall into place. These moments are so desirable that you may seek to engineer your life around them.

You may wish that you could tap into flow at a moment's notice, only to find that when you need it most, flow can be elusive—it seems to come and go, enter and exit, without invitation or announcement. Still, I believe that finding your flow is possible—even probable—when you become aware of and commit to certain **deliberate practices** in your MLAs.

Think about the many *meaningful arenas* of your life: work, school, home, social, church, even hobbies, and ponder these questions: Are you now performing at your best? Are you getting the most out of your life and your relationships? Can you see yourself as the high performer you were designed to be? Are you engaged in the moment? Are you self-confident? Are you learning and growing across a wide range of experiences? Are you becoming the person you want to become? Does your personal philosophy of life (ethos) maximize your energy, commitment, patience, joy, and gratitude? Are you your own best coach?

In exploring the many arenas wherein individuals experience flow, and the many strategies they use to replicate flow experience, we see that people can experience flow in vast array of life arenas as they employ different personal strategies that work for them.

Clearly flow permeates many different activities. Since flow is a dynamic and holistic experience, finding flow means engaging the whole self. No individual strategy is solely responsible for getting individuals into flow, and mastering every strategy may not guarantee a flow experience—as each situation may require a unique combination of strategies to address the challenges at hand.

When talking with athletes, lawyers, doctors, teachers, salespeople, parents—any group of people—about when they have flow experiences, they describe them taking place in arenas that include athletics, music, art, in relationships, taking a test, fixing a broken boat, speaking in front of a large group, and yes—even in combat. Both exceptionally negative as well as exceptionally positive experiences can stem from the same places and activities.

In *my research*, I probed into people's flow experiences, interviewing them to identify the principles, practices, and strategies they use to access and stay in a flow state regularly. I discovered that people have a repertoire of personal strategies—from controlling tension to visualization and from getting fired up to developing personal rituals—for finding flow.



Flow Strategies

Flow is often depicted as an elusive experience, happening spontaneously; however, many people experience and replicate flow in a variety of activities as a result of intentional planning, preparing and employing attentional *flow strategies*—specific ways that help them enter a highly engaged, highly focused flow state. These strategies facilitate greater effectiveness and enhanced performance in any arena.

Most individuals develop flow strategies or habits haphazardly or accidentally, not intentionally, but could find flow more often if by placing their *attention* with *intention*—what I call Attentional Leadership™. Attentional Leadership™ suggests that whether you are leading yourself towards flow, or leading others, you are placing your attention where it needs to be, when it needs to be there, for as long as it needs to be there, until it's needed elsewhere within any performance arena or system. But let's start with the basics, recognizing the distinction between being technically competent vs. all of the human factors that contribute to flow and high levels of performance.

Developing the X Factor

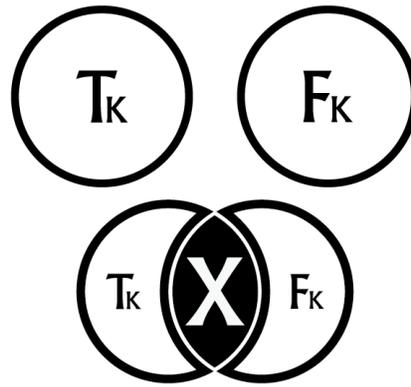
In the study of peak performance I distinguish between two kinds of principles and knowledge: *Technical* (Tk, aligning to the physics of the moment), and *Flow* (Fk, the synergy between the technical and the human side of the performance equation).

Every *meaningful life arena* (MLA) has its own set of *Knowledge, Skills and Abilities* (KSAs). For example, in tennis there are nine KSAs: serve, forehand, backhand, forehand approach shot, backhand approach shot, forehand volley, backhand volley, drop shot, overhead smash. For a battleship XO, technical KSAs might include advanced skills in navigation, seamanship, mechanical engineering, weapon's deployment, and others. These are distinct skills as compared to that of a doctor, lawyer, accountant etc.

As stated, each MLA requires unique *technical skill* sets. But as you will see throughout this article, the principles of flow are quite different. These flow skills include such principles and related practices such as purpose, vision, goals, feedback, motivation, resilience, focus, and many others. These flow skills, as distinct from technical skills, apply to every arena. Technical KSAs, when linked with flow KSA's, give you a distinct advantage over individuals who simply focus on their technical skills or game. When asked about his fifth set experience at Wimbledon, famed German tennis player **Boris Becker** commented that by the time anyone gets to the fifth and final set, it is no longer about the tennis. At a certain level, most high performers have the same basic technical competency levels, albeit different methods of delivery. After hitting a million forehands and backhands, conducting 2,000 surgeries, assembling 5,000 cars, crowning 8,000 teeth, filing 10,000 tax returns, cooking 50,000 meals, or completing 2,632 consecutive baseball games (done by Cal Ripkin, Jr.), people develop expertise and proficiency in their craft. They exceed that 10,000-hour threshold where expertise/mastery is acquired— if their practice is intentional.



What can set us apart, then, is our flow into peak performance. Beyond technical knowledge (Tk), *Flow Knowledge (Fk)* can make all the difference in your MLAs, giving you the coveted **X-Factor**—the special competitive advantage that you seek as you seek to be the best student you can be while positioning yourself as a peak performer within the U.S. Navy.



Once you discover the principles of Personal Flow—even your own **Personal Flow Formula**—you can then apply the same principles and explore their relevance when building Interpersonal, Team, Organizational—even Community Flow—thus scaling your influence as you place your attention with intention, or as my late friend Steven R. Covey stated—to expand your *circle of influence*.

The best way to understand the concept of flow is to tap into it, so let's take a few moments and peruse your significant flow moments and achievements.

Take a few minutes and read the phrases below while pondering both when and where this experience took place. ***These pro-flow instances are times when . . .***

- Your mind wasn't wandering.
- You were not thinking of something else.
- You were totally involved and absorbed in what you were doing.
- Your body, heart, mind and spirit were completely engaged.
- Nothing seems to bother or get at you.
- You were less aware of your problems and yourself.
- The stars seem to align and everything just fell into place.
- You seemed to have all of the skills you needed to do the job.
- You were in complete control of the situation.
- You felt highly energized to be doing what you are doing.
- You didn't see yourself as separate from what you were doing.
- Time seemed to fly by or stand still.
- You and your activity seemed to be one.

Take a moment if you like and write down, not only when and where you had this experience, but what you believe were the “Principles at Play” that contributed to this experience.

<p>When did you experience flow?</p>	
<p>Where did you experience flow? Briefly describe the performance arena and/or the circumstances leading up to your flow experience.</p>	
<p>What do you believe were the Principles at Play that contributed to your flow experience?</p>	

If you were to ask your classmates to discuss where, when, and the arenas where they experienced flow prior to entering the Academy, you might be quite surprised at their stories. After interviewing so many different people, I have discovered that there is hardly an arena where flow cannot either be found or generated.

Variety of Flow Arenas

Here are just a few examples of the many arenas and activities in which flow may manifest. As you look through these examples, be looking for the Principles @ Play and what seems to be contributing to—even compelling a flow experience.

Skiing. Canadian Olympian Kim Alleston said this about her low experience: “For me skiing was always about separating my body from my conscious mind and letting my body do what came naturally. When this happened, things went surprisingly well, almost as if my mind would look at what my body was doing and say, ‘Hey, you’re good.’ But at the same time not make any judgments on what I was doing because it was not “me” that was doing it—it was my body. By not making any judgments, it was easy to stay in the present.”

Bullfighting. Spanish bullfighter Juan Belemonte said this about his flow experience: “All at once I forgot the public, the other bullfighters, myself, and even the bull; I began to fight as I had so often by myself at night in the corrals and pastures, as precisely as if I had been drawing a design on a blackboard. They say that my passes with the cape and my work with the muleta that afternoon were a revelation of the art of bullfighting. I don’t know. I simply fought as I believe one ought to fight, without a thought, outside of my own faith in what I was doing. With the last bull I succeeded for



the first time in my life at delivering myself and my soul to the pure joy of fighting without being consciously aware of an audience.”

Cross-Stitching. One young woman said this about her flow experience: “Friday, I was sitting there thinking that I would like to do something different. I got my pattern and material. I was thinking about the material and kept going until midnight. My husband asked, “Aren’t you going to bed?” and I replied, “What time is it?” He said it was midnight. I was so into it that I forgot about the time; in fact, I was not conscious of anything around me. I just kept going. The next day I was so motivated, I did not make breakfast, and I kept cross-stitching all day. When my husband came home, I forgot to make dinner for him.”

The Bosozuku Run. Participants in the “bosozuku run” describe it as an enjoyable, playful experience with clear rules, excitement, and other core components of flow. Ikyua Sato studied it and wrote: “You are walking down the streets of Tokyo and you hear the rumbling of 50 or more motorcycles. You watch as rowdy teenagers on wheels take over the roads, disrupt traffic, vandalize buildings, abuse citizens, and commit other types of dysfunctional activity. While everyone around you is in a state of panic, you notice that the young hellions seem to be enjoying themselves. What is it about their actions that is so attractive to them?”

Sailing. Sailing showcases many components of flow. Prior to any voyage, the captain and crew chart a clear course and objective (goals). The objective of the day is established. The boundaries, of course, are defined by the physical dimensions of the ship, but also in the clear rules and the roles as they are defined for each passenger. The natural obstacles provided by Mother Nature (wind, weather, waves) produce unique challenges and complexity that need to be addressed on a moment-to-moment basis. Each movement of the ship is assessed and compared to the course at hand. Navigation equipment (GPS/compass) provides instant feedback as to the progress of the vessel. As this symphony of behaviors evolves, the entire crew takes part in a complex web of experiences that trigger intrinsic enjoyment and excitement.

Surfing the Net and Gaming. Many of us spend much of our time on the internet, and some of us enjoy video-based gaming. Such games provide children and adults with all the aspects of flow, but without the physical exertion (excepting the Wii, of course). Web-site designers take special note of methods and strategies to draw attention and keep people on their sites. Like any other medium, games and internet resources command attention, provide clear boundaries, and offer challenges that keep us interested, motivated and focused. From virtual worlds (Second Life), staying connected (Facebook), buying and selling (eBay), to watching (YouTube), and so on, the worldwide web is an environment where flow is abundant.

Working. Many people describe flow in their work. In fact, the workplace fosters flow almost three times as often as leisure activities. For example, Susan, a sales rep from an upstart company, seeks to land her first big deal. In preparation, Susan visualizes the situation and identifies her goals: to demonstrate the unique features of her company’s product and to build rapport and trust with the vendor and. While waiting, Susan takes a few deep breaths to calm her body, reminding herself of the many times she has made such a sale. Her self-talk is positive. She believes that this sale is already made and she is merely here to close the deal. She confidently enters the vendor’s office and makes the sale precisely as she visualized it.



Worshipping. In addition to the transcendent possibilities of the more familiar Western religions, a number of Eastern cultural practices describe experiences similar to flow, from the “in the moment” behaviors of Japanese tea ceremonies to the oneness of the arrow and the target in archery. Such practices and beliefs also include the idea of no practice, where entering new states of consciousness and oneness feature sitting in deep meditation or Zazen, Transcendental Meditation, and other types of passive practice.

Housekeeping. Many hotel workers find daily satisfaction through a proactive sense of personal mission or an ability to make use of internal strategies such as fantasy, or interest regulation. Such was the case with a team of housekeepers who had been cleaning rooms for a Disney hotel for more than two decades. In contrast to other workers who were bored, these cleaners enjoyed the job by taking it to another level. Instead of just checking off the boxes when completing a task, they looked for ways to improve their routine. From checking the ceiling for debris to re-arranging stuffed animals on the floor (if children were staying in the room), these super-performers were skilled at creating complexity and challenge in their everyday work.

Ironing. The craze called “Extreme Ironing” is an international competition where individuals iron their clothes in unusual environments such as on a mountain, rafting down a river, or while scuba diving. This new sport beautifully demonstrates the value in applying flow theory—taking simple tasks and giving them unexpected twists.

Reading and writing. Many people get lost in recreational reading or while studying specific topics. Reading and writing are common arenas for experiencing flow, likely because of the number of students, academics, and professionals who read and write daily. For them, this strategy often stimulates the experience of flow. There are endless ways for the mind to be inherently creative or focused on a particular subject, making writing a logical way to find flow.

Playing, Listening to or Dancing to Music. Listening to and playing music can stimulate, relax, induce creativity, and positively influence other affective and cognitive dimensions. Individuals use music—from classical and jazz to hard rock and modern pop—in many ways to generate the right mood or environment conducive to experiencing flow.

Several people list dancing as a flow-inducing experience. Both the physical and interpersonal nature of dancing comes across in the interviews. In some instances, the connection with the audience is an important part of finding flow when dancing. Like other flow arenas, both personal and interpersonal opportunities exist for experiencing flow.

Deep conversations and family relationships. Several people experience flow when speaking or communicating with other people, including friends, family members, and colleagues. There are many contexts for interpersonal flow experiences. Some individuals experience flow at parties while others find flow in deep conversations with children or spouses. Interpersonal communication can generate intense focus and interest, two components of flow. Consistent with deep conversations, family relationships were mentioned as a distinct type of relationship as compared to friendships.

Studying, taking tests and teaching. Many individuals experience deep focus and flow while studying and taking tests, as they prepare exhaustively to demonstrate their knowledge. Like athletics or musical competition, test taking seems to mimic the feel and experience, challenging the student to prepare and execute performance on demand.



Teaching also facilitates flow for many people as teachers create interpersonal connections while conveying a message.

Worship in church or nature. Several people experience flow in their church service. For example, one man was called to be a Patriarch in the LDS Church and give people blessings that are recorded, transcribed, and studied by recipients for the rest of their lives for guidance and deeper self-understanding. Also, many people experience flow as a consequence of being in nature. Flow in natural settings seems to invoke an inner peace or sanctuary where individuals feel free and connected with some greater purpose. Natural settings and the mountains facilitate the flow experience and deeper feelings of spirituality. Faith-based *Spiritual Strategies*, including Meditation, Prayer, and Letting Go, enable many individuals to tap into a higher source, feel the spirit, and be directed by a higher power. Many people speak of flow in the context of tapping into a higher power or spirit—humbly submitting to something greater.

What These Examples Show

While most of us do not think of cleaning hotel rooms or ironing clothes as extreme experiences, ***these examples reveal much about our ability to engineer our everyday environments to facilitate flow.*** In contrast to the more typically engaging flow-worthy activities such as sailing, basketball, art, dance, flying, fighting fires, and so on, we see that flow can be experienced in almost any arena. Recognizing even one flow arena in your life will help you apply the principles and develop strategies for finding flow in other arenas. This is stark contrast to historical psychological techniques designed to close the gaps of a troubled childhood. Instead, our goal here is to tap into the best moments of your life that reveal all that you were designed to for—and more!

Positive Performance Psychology

Positive and flow psychology differ philosophically and methodologically from traditional psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy, which deals with problems, deficits, trauma, depression, anxiety, fear and other issues that keep us from functioning optimally. Flow refutes the notion that endlessly wallowing in the past, searching for hidden motives and desires is the gateway to a successful future. Deficit-based, get me out of the ditch, history-focused methods are often highly ineffective, even harmful, to people who seek a practical, solution-oriented, behavior-driven approach to personal change. Flow psychology focuses on positive and practical strategies for improving performance and producing results. Such strategies include setting goals, modifying thinking patterns, understanding and managing emotions, time maximization, maintaining optimal physical health, self-actualizing, and many others. Is there a place for digging into one's past? Sure there is, but perhaps there is an opportunity to cultivate one's positive history of successes, significant lessons learned from mistakes, and gratitude for the challenges of life to a slightly higher ratio than simply exploring new imperfections that none of us can ever eliminate completely.



So, instead of thinking back to when you didn't make the swim team or were rejected by a sweetheart, I encourage you to **visualize your most important life successes** in order to tap into positive emotions and your best life experiences. As you spend more time looking towards the sun than the dark side of the moon, you progress from where you are today and maximize your potential, raise the performance bar, set a personal best or gain a competitive edge. This is just one of many new strategies you will learn from the theory and practice of flow.

Now that you have some basic familiarity with your own experiences along with a few diverse examples, let's take a look at what all the books and research say are the key factors of flow.

The Big Nine Characteristics

After listening to the flow stories of thousands of people worldwide, I detect several common flow principles at play. I find that people tend to experience flow in similar ways, and they describe their flow experiences using similar words and phrases. These descriptions help us to understand the essence of flow experiences and to have a keen sense of the immense value that flow can add to our personal life and professional career.

Here are the **nine classic characteristics** that best describe the flow experience:

1. The activity has clear goals and objectives. When individuals describe their flow experiences, they often mention having a clear goal or blueprint of what to do. Clear goals provide boundaries that help you channel your energy and focus on the objective at hand. Also, individuals in flow are often said to be "mindless." This duality, a combination of direction and detachment, of being in the moment, brings about flow.

One of the most thrilling goal-setting stories of the 20th century was the United States' quest in the 1960s to land a man on the moon and return him safely to earth by the end of that decade. This goal was made public in a speech by John F. Kennedy after the Russians launched Yuri Gagarin into space. NASA then clarified its focus and unified its organization around this single goal. Late one night a senior director was walking the corridors of an office complex and saw what looked like an unauthorized man hovering about. When he inquired as to what this man was doing, the unknown figure stated, "Helping to put a man on the moon, sir!" He was the night janitor working late and making his own contribution towards the singularity of purpose.

2. The activity provides clear and immediate feedback, thus creating a coherent demand for action. Feedback mechanisms are common to most natural and man-made systems. They help monitor results, make adjustments, correct course, and re-direct attention towards meaningful goals through measures and standards. Feedback is vital for perpetuating the flow experience and meeting the demands of the task at hand. For example, many extrinsic and intrinsic motives drive surgeons: getting "specific answers," "a dramatic cure," and "a clear resolution" was essential for their performance.

As in any sport, feedback helps us understand how we are doing, what we need to adjust, and how we can succeed at the activity. For example, curing people is for surgeons a sign that their skills are adequate to meet the challenge. Flow is just as



applicable in groups, organizations, and societies. Hence, whether you make a poor golf shot, blow a sales call, or mess up a professional presentation, your capacity for receiving feedback and making adjustments are vital to maintain your conscious attention and to move more efficiently towards your target. We need to learn from, adjust to, and re-engage with the many challenges that show up moment by moment. This requires constant monitoring of attention at the right place, at the right time, for the right duration—the essence of Attentional Leadership™.

3. There is an absence of self-consciousness. Individuals who describe themselves in flow are often fully connected to their activities. Individuals are either focused on themselves or on the environment. When focused on the self, individuals often judge themselves. Since our weaknesses are easily detected when we compare ourselves to a standard, negativity results whenever focus is on the self. Individuals lacking self-consciousness, however, often feel at “their best selves” and claim that in flow they are “at one” with the experience. In contrast to people who are thrown to and fro within an experience, constantly thinking and wondering about what happened last time, what might happen this time, those who are in flow feel as if they are in the driver’s seat, reacting to every moment with relative ease. While many individuals are consciously aware of themselves during any performance, those finding their flow let this go and experience the situation with a degree of detachment and an absence of self-consciousness. Neither fear of success nor fear of failure enters into the experience. Instead, the experience is what it is, without judgment, and the performer, almost as an observer, participates in this beautiful moment uninterrupted by the frailties of the human ego.

When we are focused on ourselves, we often judge ourselves, and that takes our mind off the experience at hand and into our own heads, creating negative feelings, self-comparisons, and other self-defeating mental activities that yield poor focus and sub-par results. Those who lack self-consciousness in the moment often feel and perform at their best. They let their experience happen unhindered. Canadian Olympian Kim Alleston noted: “For me, flow is a feeling of separating my body from my conscious mind and letting my body do what comes naturally. When this happens, things go surprisingly well, as if my mind looks at what my body is doing and says, ‘Hey, you’re good.’ But at the same time not making any judgments on what I am doing because it is not “me” that is doing it—it is my body, and it is easy to stay in the present.”

4. We feel a sense of control. Individuals reporting flow experiences often say things like, “I just couldn’t miss the ball,” or, “Everything just came together.” Their action and reaction patterns take place without much conscious processing. They attend to their current “reality” or stay within the present moment, acting more spontaneously and without interference. One male college basketball player discussed his experience with flow on the court: “I couldn’t miss. I was ready to be where I needed to be, at the right place, and when I shot it was just like magic. Off my fingertips every time, every time I’d look at the basket I planned to make a shot. I had no doubt in my mind that I would make it.” For many, the moment seems to take over a person’s conscious abilities, but at the same time there is a confidence in the situation.

5. We sense time distortion. There is an altered sense of time. Usually, time seems to pass quickly, although in some cases it is perceived to pass slowly). In some instances, passing time in flow experiences seems to accelerate (during an enjoyable flow



event). One woman described how she had chosen a 700-page book she'd been meaning to read, and since her husband was gone for the day, she sat down at about 8:30 in the morning and read until the book was done, eight hours later! "It did not seem that long."

The opposite phenomenon is also possible, where time seems to slow down. Michael Jordan once commented that at the end of a game, with only a few seconds left on the shot clock, he had what seemed to be an unlimited amount of time to make the final basket—that the basketball got smaller while the hoop got bigger. He claimed to have all the time in the world as he knew he could make the shot. Similarly football great John Brodie said: "Sometimes time seems to slow way down, in an uncanny way, as if everyone were moving in slow motion. It seems as if I have all the time in the world to watch the receivers run their patterns, and yet I know the defensive line is coming at me just as fast as ever." One man noted, "As an athlete, one can experience time slowing down . . . as if what you are experiencing is in slow motion."

In either case, there is a deep sense of absorption as one gets lost in an activity—the accelerated passing of time, or when something is so enjoyable that time flies by. Slow-paced flow experiences can take place during sporting events or during personal tragedies or accidents.

6. The activity is autotelic or intrinsically motivating. The flow experience brings us such great joy that there is no need for external rewards. Instead, individuals participate in certain activities for their own sake, or "without conventional reward" because they feel as if they are actualizing their potential. The activity usually contributes to their self-realization or actualization. *Autotelic* refers to loving an experience for its own sake. Autotelic activities carry few extrinsic rewards and usually no material rewards, and yet still attract participants who devote time, energy, and money to the pursuit. One female college student said, "I do not have the same desires I used to have to race while mountain biking. Now I just do it out of pure passion, for the activity itself, no other reason. I just do it because I love it." Individuals who find flow do so because they love what they do.

7. We center attention with limited distractions and high concentration power. Our attention is constantly being pulled in many directions. Since many stimuli compete for our conscious attention, our minds struggle to attend to one particular subject for any length of time. For those who experience flow, controlling attention is a critical skill. People with attention difficulties such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) often struggle to enter flow easily—until they do. However, attention issues are as much about context as ability. Both the intense reader and the daydreamer, one seemingly highly focused and the other thinking broadly and creatively, may, in fact, experience opposite kinds of flow. This is one difference between narrow focus (attending to something small and fixed) and broad focus (a soft focus where you see the broader environment or system). Because of our highly focused and competitive environments, we are now seeing an even greater emphasis on the practice of mindfulness, which is designed to take you out of your standard narrow focus. Attentional Leadership™ suggests that we must balance where, when, and how long to sustain our attention on any one dimension. And as you'll see later in this book, this process is as relevant for finding personal flow as it is when seeking relational, team, organizational, and community flow. Same principles—different context and scale. We

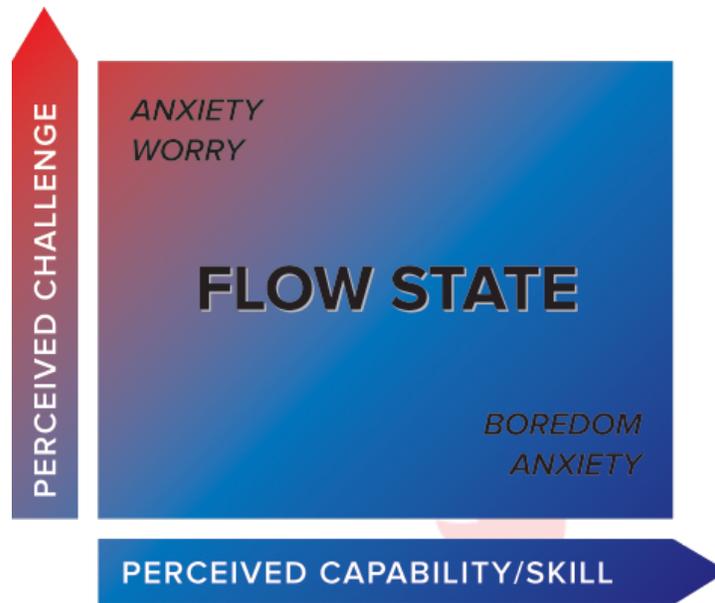


experience a loss of ego-awareness or self and feel completely absorbed in the effort or activity. Our performance seems effortless.

8. Action and awareness merge into transcendence. Merging action and awareness is essentially a fusion between body, heart, mind, ethos, spirit, and context within the moment. This fusion takes place when we are totally immersed in a task at hand and where even the tools we are using (bat, racket, piano, scalpel, computer) become part of us. The unified consciousness that results from the merging of action and awareness is a major outcome of the flow experience. D.T. Suzuki said this about awareness and the sword master: “If one really wishes to be master of an art, technical knowledge is not enough. One has to transcend technique so that the art grows out of the unconscious. You must let the unconscious come forward. In such cases, you cease to be your own conscious master but *become an instrument in the hands of the unknown* (emphasis mine). The unknown has no ego-consciousness and consequently no thought of winning the contest. It is for this reason that the sword moves where it ought to move and makes the contest end victoriously.” This beautiful quote reminds us that we don’t exercise skill as much as we “align” ourselves to the physics of the moment (think Bobby Jones).

9. Perceived challenges are met by perceived skills. The activity provides a context where our perceived challenges and skills meet. The flow experience represents a balance between skills and challenges, when the intra-somatic and the extra-somatic come together. Whether we are confronted with a simple or a difficult task, we are more likely to enter flow when our perceived challenges are balanced by our perceived skills. In those situations, we have sufficient skill to meet the challenge. Flow takes place when the activity provides a context where our perceived challenges and our perceived skills meet—whether you are flying a fighter jet or sweeping the floor. Simple arenas often help us express complex thinking and experience flow. Think of a time when you were given a task to do that seemed boring—whether this was stacking cans in a grocery store, cleaning a floor, weeding a garden, or waiting around for someone. After a time, did boredom give way to anxiety or a desire to do something else? In contrast, think of a time when you faced an over-the-top challenge and you were not sure if you could manage it—a difficult exam perhaps, an overwhelming job, too many deadlines coming at you at once, or multiple challenges. Didn’t this also lead to anxiety?





Flow occurs when you have the skill to complete a task, when you are confident that what you know combined with your past experience means “I can do this.” The challenge may be a bit higher, where you aren’t sure you can achieve your goal, but you think you have a good chance to pull it off. These experiences teach you about yourself. They raise your confidence level and give you new insights into your capabilities.

Taking Flow Theory to a New Level

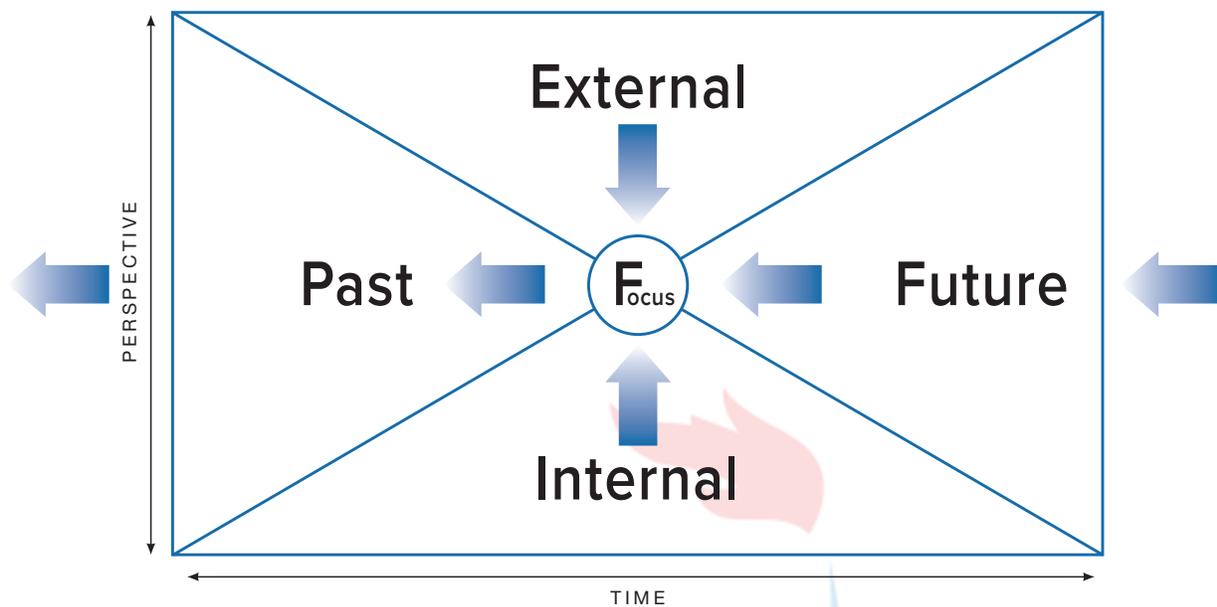
Having read the bulk of the literature on flow, and recognizing that as human beings we are the most complex forms of life on our planet, it seemed that there was more to flow—especially when seeking to engineer flow—than just nine elements. It seemed reasonable to look a little bit deeper and explore “how” people (15-95 year old’s) actually sought to generate flow.

In doing this we start with what I consider are the three main dimensions for leading yourself and others into flow: Internal, Time, and External—of which, we will break down each of the “core” dimensions into sub-dimensions, followed by specific principles, skills, and practices under each.

Internal, Time and External Dimensions

While we take into consideration each of these “core” dimensions, it is important to note that the fundamental unit of flow is a single moment in time.

As most rational people surmise, moments arrive (from the future), we engage them (focus in the present), and then they slip into the past—each one linking us (internally) to the craft and arena that we are engaged in (externally)—where Tk and Fk meet.



Within any MLA, the better you align with the Principles@Play (be they technical or performance/leadership-based), in any *Moment of Performance (MOP)*, the better your chance to find and sustain flow.

And what are MOP's? While every moment counts, some are more valuable than others (although this is extremely personal): The game winning shot, landing safely on an aircraft carrier, your first kiss, a critical conversation, making the sale, any type of test or exam... You get the point. When you experience any *MOP* (center circle), you want to integrate this experience with past experiences. By integrating these experiences, you maximize learning, confidence, and performance—while gaining the wisdom to do it all better next time.

Let's expand this simple model into the more comprehensive 12-Dimension Model of flow where we can discuss more specifically about various principles and practices that contribute to flow.

12 Dimensions of Flow

After a deeper probe into the practical side of flow—what people do to enter and sustain it—I discovered *12 dimensions* that comprise many of its core principles and practices at the personal level.

Five Internal Dimensions

The *Internal Strategies* of flow are comprised of five subcategories:

1. *Spiritual Strategies*, representing irrefutable principles and laws (Note: these can be either technical or flow principles/laws)—including strategies such as tapping into a higher power, personal humility, prayer, and the critical exercise of faith. ***Spiritual = Principles***. Principles and laws govern every arena of life. Whether these principles are technical (gravity) or human (trust), they are irrefutable and consistent despite any belief on our part. We are either in alignment to them and abide by them or we do not.

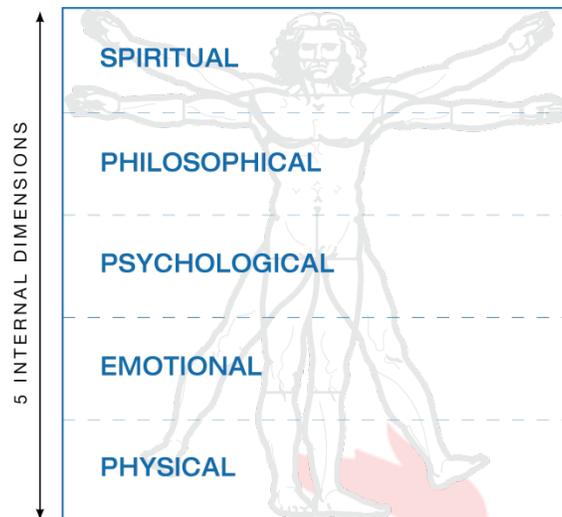
2. *Philosophical Strategies*, representing your core values acquired over time—a working “code” or “ethos” from which to make moment-by-moment decisions. ***Philosophical = Values***. Here that we choose to value certain things above others and align ourselves to the technical and human principles referenced above. To align is to succeed; to be misaligned is to fail. Here we identify rules for engagement (ethos). The philosophical self is the stuff of experience. It represents your world beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, rules and standards of action and code of conduct—all seeking alignment to principles.

3. *Psychological Strategies*, represent practices such as positive self-talk, visualization, motivational tactics, changing perspective, and others; ***Psychological = Thinking***. Represented by the brain, these systems and practices include goal setting, time management, attitude, focus, creative problem solving, visualizing, conceptualizing and other practices that direct and channel our mental energies towards our highest values.

4. *Emotional Strategies*, represent strategies such as influencing affect and including practices that moderate your feelings, generate positive mood, or modify emotions; ***Emotional = Feelings***. The heart represents this dimension. Here we seek to manage the many emotions and feelings that we experience daily. Known as “EQ” or Emotional Intelligence, these systems and processes affect moods and feelings in Moments of Performance. The emotional dimension is governed by the mind and therefore, whatever the mind attends to and influences how we feel. And, of course, how we feel then influences how we act.

5. *Physical Strategies*, representing strategies primarily made up of increasing or decreasing arousal through progressive deep and brief relaxation; ***Physical = Actions***. How we act upon the world is inherently controlled by our physical body. As such, it is here that we look at influencing the physical body. In this dimension we focus on nutrition, rest, relaxation and recovery, meditation and other strategies that strengthen our physical body and our capacity to use it to act in accordance to the principles, values, thoughts, and emotions that compel our every action. *Personal Management Strategies*, managing your physiology with self-care strategies such as getting enough sleep, eating well, exercising, and balancing your activities in life, while attending to self-development and wellness.





Performing at your best and finding your flow is a physical, emotional, psychological, philosophical, and spiritual quest. Everything flows out of a balanced and aligned system. If the system isn't balanced, it doesn't flow. The five internal dimensions are where you can lead yourself to achieve your best, find personal flow, and demonstrate excellence. This may be called self-mastery or personal leadership—where leaders focus attention on various internal systems and processes in order to develop their own potential and that of others.

Five Time-Based Dimensions

I see flow as a moment-by-moment experience as we enter, experience, and exit moments of performance (MOP's). Here are five time-based sub-dimensions:

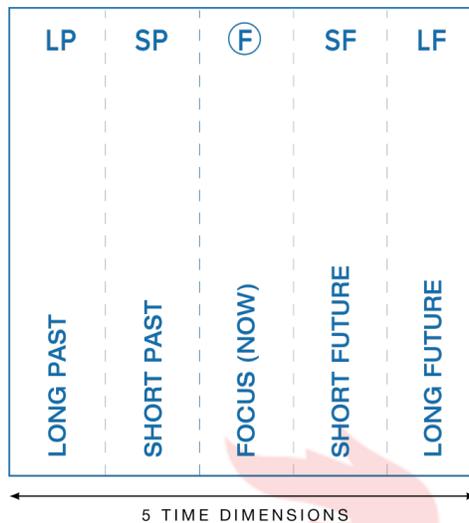
1) *Long-Future Orientation*, representing the abstract mission, vision, and legacy-building activities that help frame, fill, and seal a composite picture of any valued objective;

2) *Short-Future Orientation* represents the architecture of goals, strategic planning, sequencing, time maximization, and preparation strategies necessary to begin taking action;

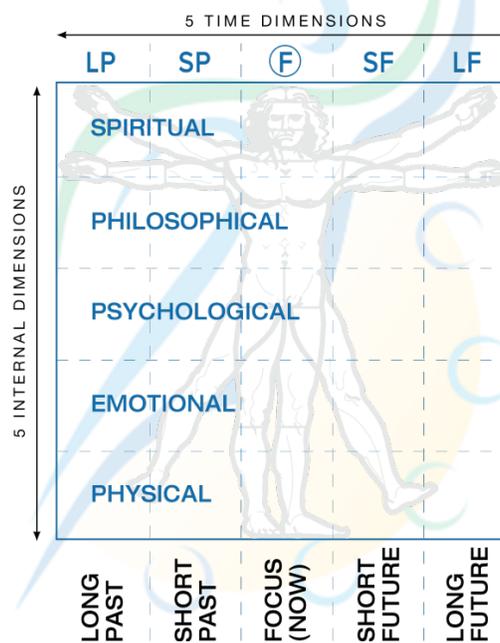
3. *Present-moment Focus* represents what you are doing “now” to act in service of these future orientations;

4) *Short-Past Orientation* is where immediate feedback is gathered, score-carding and measurement can take place, and lessons learned through reflection from every MOP you enter and exit; and

5) *Long-Past Orientation* is where all of your experiences are collected, where wisdom is acquired, where self-images and confidence develop, where all of the elements of your personal ethos are assembled and used for navigating a future informed by the past.



Put together, the Internal and Time-based flow strategies represent those interconnected dimensions that conspire to generate flow at the personal level where the individual is engaged within his/her unique meaningful life arena.



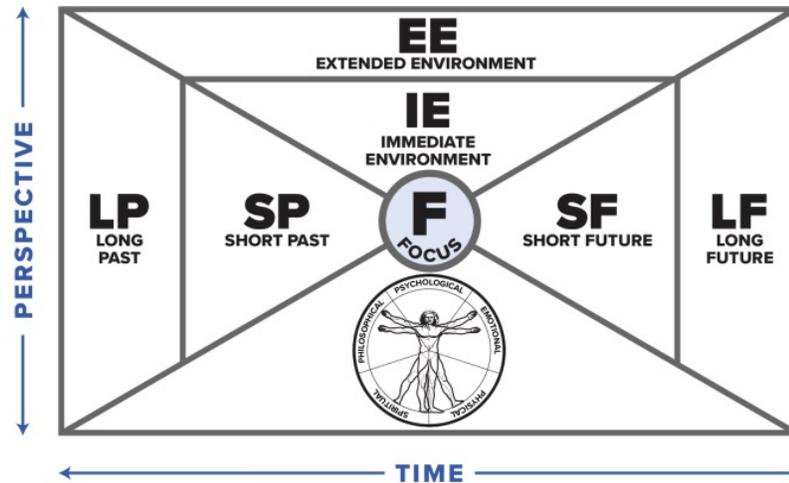
Two External Dimensions

External dimensions encompass two subcategories: *extended environment* and *immediate environment*.

1. **Immediate Environment** is where you physically place yourself in close proximity to certain people, places and things to facilitate or engineer flow experiences. Within your immediate environment you typically practice *Environmental Regulation* strategies that alter your environment to make it more conducive to a flow experience—

like modifying the temperature, organizing the furniture, or using candles; and *Interpersonal Regulation* strategies that are designed to manage external relationships—like making sure anyone directly involved in your flow arena is having a positive impact. This also includes family relations, friendships, classmates, and work relationships, which need to be healthy and stable in order to minimize any interference blocking flow.

2. **Extended Environment** represents the larger arenas in which you live and work, including the country, state, city, town, and organizations (or branch of service) wherein you spend most of your time.



My **Flow Model** represents a holistic conceptualization of flow. Combined strategies tend to enhance performance more than one isolated strategy. For example, relaxation (physical strategy) and visualization (psychological strategy) often work together. Positive self-talk (psychological strategy) and generating positive moods (emotional strategy) may also be effective combined strategies. While the fundamental premise of Finding Your Flow is that attention with intention on your “one thing”—once you discover your one thing there are correlating or companion competencies that can support your quest to perform in flow.

Finding “Your” Flow

With the 12 dimension model as a theoretical framework in place, and after boiling down more than 150 different flow strategies into 60, I converted these into diagnostic questions so that anyone seeking to find their flow could consider any “Meaningful Life Arena” (MLA) and identify what principles were working on their behalf (Flow Assets) and those working against them (Flow Liabilities). Taking the time to force rank these and other factors that each learner can add to the original 60 questions asked, comprises what I like to call the “head winds” and “tail winds” when seeking to find, generate, and sustain flow in any specific arena.

Note: If you'd like to take this assessment (Finding Your Flow *1080 °Sweep*) yourself, you can do so anytime at this website: www.fyfone.com (or you can review a shortened version of the questions within Appendix A). When doing so, you might consider the USNA as the MLA that you will keep in mind when answering the questions.

With questions answered (keeping a single MLA in mind), and force ranking of both Flow Assets and Flow Liabilities complete, I ask students and professionals alike to generate their own Personal Flow Formula. It looks something like this:

$$F = \frac{IA + EA}{IL + EL}$$

This **Personal Flow Formula** suggests that increasing your Flow = all of your Internal Assets + you External Assets divided by your Internal Liabilities + your External Liabilities. As you identify only the most highly ranked Principles @ Play within each category, you begin to get a more comprehensive picture of what's working for you and against you so you can begin to narrow down your focus and pay attention to the one or two things that would make the greatest difference in helping you find your flow within that arena.

Your One Thing

In the 1991 movie *City Slickers*, Billy Crystal, Daniel Stern, and Bruno Kirby portray three mid-career professionals struggling to get out of their corporate skin and assume more adventurous selves. Their leader is an intimidating cowboy named Curley who leads the group on a real cattle drive. During their adventure, these city slickers notice something special about Curley—his philosophy of life. They come to believe that this rather crude man has the answers they are all looking for. During a deep discussion about the meaning of life, Curley explains his simple yet profound mantra—that life is all about the “**One Thing**.” The character played by Billy Crystal wonders what that one thing was. Finally, the old cowboy says: “You’ve got to figure that out for yourself.”

To find our flow more often, follow Curley’s advice—keep your attention on that *One Thing* until the next most important thing requires your attention.



After *Ben Franklin* drafted his *13 Virtues (1789)*, he wrote: "...to acquire the habitude of all these virtues, I judged it would be well not to distract my attention by attempting the whole at once, but to **fix it on one of them at a time**; and when I should be master of that, then to proceed to another; and so on till I should have gone through the thirteen."

As you consider the many factors that comprise your new **Personal Flow Formula**, consider which of your Principles@Play is that "**one thing**" or **WIN (What's Important Now)** that you would like to change and improve. For most of my clients, they want to remove that "one" Flow Liability that's getting in their way (i.e., lack of vision, poor attitude, lack of emotional control, etc.), while others focus on growing their greatest Flow Asset.

Finding Your Flow: A Life-Long Pursuit

As you grow as a Naval Officer there will always be something new to learn, a weaknesses to dampen, a strength to sharpen, and skill to refine. Like the rest of humanity, you and everyone else is a rough stone rolling. At this moment, you may have great clarity with vision and goals, but struggle with emotional control. Or, you might be the most motivated but struggle to get the feedback you need. The key here is to recognize that your "one thing" is not the same as somebody else's, and neither is your journey. One of the key features of finding your flow is to use the process and tools offered so that you can be your own best coach, and by taking on this responsibility (to manage and master self over time) that you will always have your next "one thing" to work on throughout your career and life.

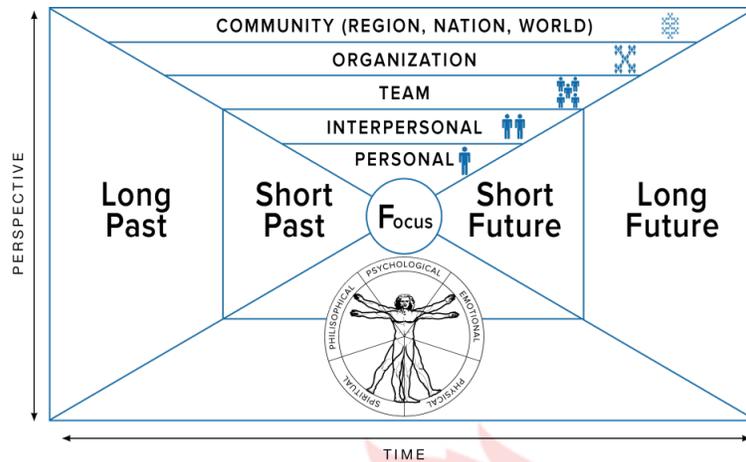
Attentional Leadership™ and Scaling Flow

While there are any number of principles and arenas for which we can explore flow at the personal level, I'd like to consider for a moment how these principles and practices can be used to influence others, even teams, organizations, and whole communities to generate flow at scale. I call this Attentional Leadership—and based on the level of leadership you attain within your career—every principle you apply to yourself can be used as you seek to scale your influence and leadership within your Naval career and beyond in relationships, teams, organizations, even communities.

While there are many definitions of leadership, I define *Attentional Leadership™* as **the capacity to influence oneself and others in the pursuit of individual, interpersonal, team, organization, or societal objectives within any meaningful life arena**. The act of Attentional Leadership™ suggests a capacity to know **where and when to place attention**—and to **sustain** attention on what matters most—moment-by-moment— within our many Meaningful Life Arenas.

In the 15-dimension model, we focus on the shift from two external themes (Extended Environment and *Immediate Environment*) to five external themes (*Personal, Interpersonal, Team, Organization, and Community*). And, we can showcase the intersections of various flow principles.

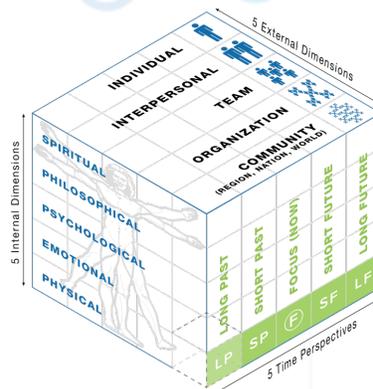




Attentional Leadership™ is both an inside-out process, leading self first and then others to expand the circle of influence and an outside-in or top-down perspective where problem solving and adaptive processes can be exercised in relationships, within groups, organizations, and larger social environments. In a complex world, it is necessary to lead from the inside-out, outside-in, top-down, bottom-up, and multiple other angles—including time and place—as circumstances require. Today *leaders must be able to work effectively and draw upon a multitude of leadership skill-sets on demand*. Instead of thinking about single competency-development (or single note thinking), 21st century leaders must address complex circumstances and see their leadership development as a musical chord or symphony of skills required to address the unique challenges of the moment.

Seeing complex systems requires a distinct solution based on the intersection of multiple variables since the exercise of leadership takes place moment by moment where attention with intention is required using available resources and informed practices to address challenges.

This *Attentional Leadership™* (AL) model provides a broad framework that drills down and parcels out the complexity into *125 discrete boxes* that identify various intersecting competency clusters—making it easier for a leader to identify knowledge and skill gaps that may be required as they address a multitude of leadership challenges moment by moment.



The AL Model represents a *new paradigm of leadership practice* as it frames leadership theories and practices based on the allocation of attention, resources, and the time needed to influence human systems and processes in multiple dimensions to achieve valued objectives.

Implications for Future Leaders

Attentional Leadership™ seeks to answer the question: “What’s Important Now (WIN)?” for individuals, relationships, teams, organizations, and communities. AL asserts that influence happens through physical (tangible), emotional (affect), mental (constructs/ideas), philosophical (values), and spiritual (principles/ scientific truth’s) means. Where attention is placed with intention, influence is exercised—with change the by-product. AL recognizes that one’s capacity to influence (at any level) is transacted moment by moment, with future intent informed by past results. These *Internal* (physical, emotional, mental, philosophical, and spiritual), *External* (self, relationship, team, organization, and community), and *Time* (long-future, short-future, focus/ moment, short-past, long-past) have an inter-connected relationship—providing a binding and bounding framework from which to explore influence and leadership from the inside-out.

Final Thoughts

As the nation’s most promising and emerging leaders, you have the opportunity to exercise significant influence and leadership. As you have already discovered this journey begins with the pledge to serve something higher than yourself, yet doing so requires you to be your best self—to be principally centered, philosophically grounded, mentally agile, emotionally resilient, and physically robust. It requires that you can envision for the long-term, set goals, strategize and plan for the short-term, focus and execute with intention moment by moment, hour by hour and day by day, learn from mistakes and be accountable in all that you do, and learn and cultivate the lessons and wisdom of your past.

Succeeding personally opens the door for exercising your influence and leadership as you engage with others, work in teams, serve in organizations, and also the broader community. By building your capacity to place your attention with intention in a never-ending cycle of learning, improvement, and growth, may you discover your inherent potential, flow and purpose within the Navy and your many other Meaningful Life Arenas’.



Appendix A

Take the 1080-Degree Sweep

With expanded *self-awareness* we can identify our own vital flow factors and see which one or two might be keeping us out of flow. To boost your self-awareness, try doing a 360-degree internal analysis, a 360-degree external analysis, and a 360-degree time-based analysis of a current flow arena. This is what I call the *1080-degree sweep* of the MLA you wish to improve.

This comprehensive assessment broadens your awareness of the factors that affect flow as you address key questions pertaining to your past, present, and future. These questions were derived from 128 individual strategies as revealed by surveys and in-depth interviews with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences. They represent all 12 dimensions in the Attentional Leadership™ Model.

When answering these questions, remember that while we cover the most prevalent concepts and strategies used to facilitate flow experiences, this list is not all-inclusive. You might add other factors specific to your state of flow.

(Take the assessment online at: www.1080sweep.com.)

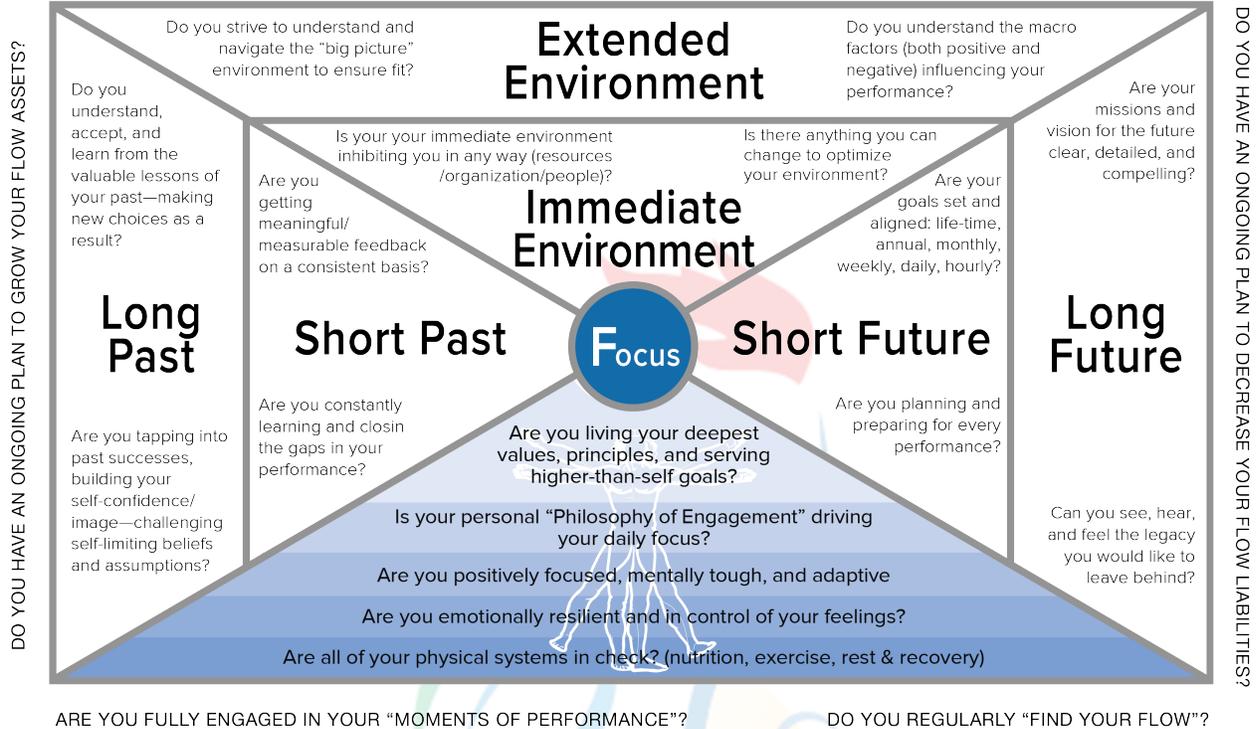
After you have taken the assessment, identify your “one thing” and use this app to set your goals, measure your results, learn new skills, explore various exercises, and store all of your leadership development exercises in your own personal account.

Godspeed on your lifelong journey as an officer in the U.S. Navy and in every personal and professional arena that you engage and serve!



Appendix B

Monthly review questions:



About the Author

Dr. Bruce H. Jackson has dedicated his career to the development of individuals, teams, organizations, and communities that seek to maximize influence, leadership, and change. Bruce has worked with colleges/universities, Fortune 500 companies, and non-profit institutions to develop and implement principles of performance, leadership, and change—for students, professionals, and public servants alike.

Bruce is the founder of The Institute of Applied Human Excellence—a training, assessment, and coaching firm dedicated to helping individuals achieve peak performance. He wrote *Finding Your Flow: How to Identify Your Flow Assets and Liabilities—the Keys to Peak Performance Every Day* to increase awareness, clarify driving principles, and engage in strategic and focused change. The Finding Your Flow™ training program has been delivered to corporate and university audiences world-wide.

Formerly with Korn Ferry/Hay Group Dr. Jackson directs the C. Charles Jackson Foundation and Charlie Academy—advancing leadership centers, programs, online training, and research throughout the world to develop a new generation of influential leaders.

Bruce earned his doctorate in Human and Organizational Systems from Fielding Graduate University, where his research led to the development of Attentional Leadership Theory™ (ALT)—a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to categorize and implement leadership theories, tools, and practices for leaders at all ages.

Prior to achieving this distinction, he earned master's degrees in Counseling Psychology (Boston University), Business Administration (University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Management), Organizational Development (Fielding Graduate University), and Public Administration (Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government)—all of which provided a broad and deep understanding of human capacity building, leadership development, and organization effectiveness within diverse arenas.

Bruce, his wife Marta, and their three children currently live in Highland, Utah.

For a more comprehensive biographic profile see:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/brucehjackson/>

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