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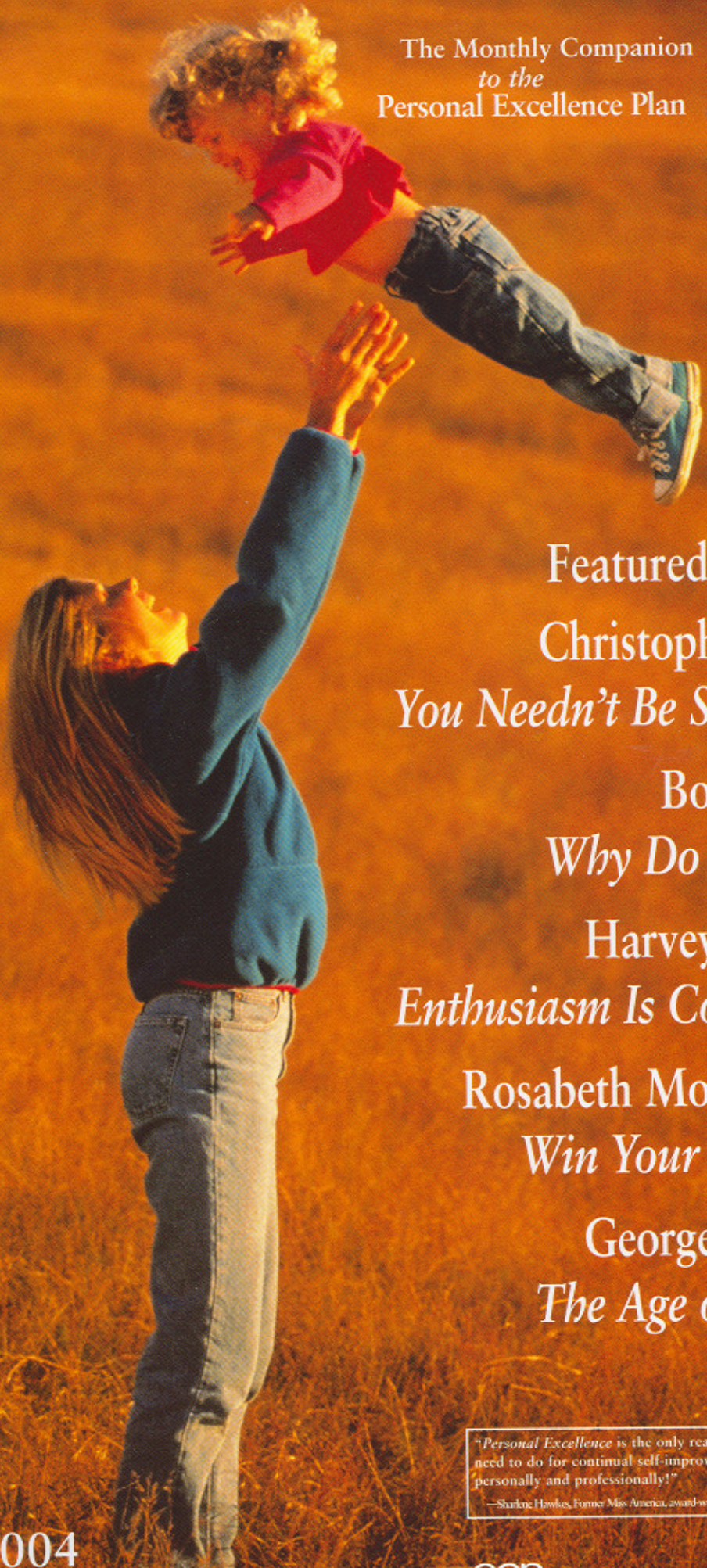
Plan and
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Personal Excellence

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to the
Personal Excellence Plan



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"Personal Excellence is the only reading you'll need to do for continual self-improvement both personally and professionally!"

—Starkie Hawkes, Former Miss America, award-winning ESPN broadcaster



Finding Flow

Be your best self.



by Bruce H. Jackson

CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME when you were totally engaged, where time did not register, your performance seemed effortless, you felt at one with your activity and enjoyed it without considering outside reward or recognition? If so, you have experienced “flow.”

Flow is sometimes called majestic moments, peak experiences, ideal performance states, being “in sync” or “in a zone.” In describing the flow experience, people convey a deep focus in their work or play.

Any “life arena” can provide opportunity for full engagement and joy in the pursuit of a goal. The experience of flow gives us a glimpse of our best, most productive and happiest selves—and a roadmap to peak performance.

Sadly, few of us can re-create the experience of flow because we don’t know: 1) what variables contribute to flow; 2) how to manage and act upon these variables; and 3) where to apply personal flow strategies.

Nine Components to Flow

Nine components frame the experience of flow:

1. Clear goals and objectives.

Having clearly articulated goals generates focus, directs energy, and maximizes efforts in any life arena.

2. Clear and immediate feedback.

All people, teams, and systems require feedback to course-correct and to progress. The more feedback received, the faster the progress.

3. Absence of self-consciousness.

Individuals experiencing flow describe a sense of oneness with their activity. Instead of over-thinking or over-trying, they trust their abilities to perform.

4. Sense of control.

They increase personal control by remaining focused on factors that can be controlled.

5. Intrinsic motivation.

People who experience flow usually love what they do. They are motivated for internal reasons. They participate in the activity because it is rewarding, not because of payment or external incentive.

6. Centering attention or focus.

Individuals in flow center their atten-

tion and channel their energies without external distraction.

7. Balance between skills and challenges. Highly talented people who work in a repetitive environment are often bored, while individuals faced with greater challenges than skills feel anxious. Individuals who strike a balance between their skills and challenges, even those who push the limits, engage in a new level of excellence.

8. Merging action and awareness. Individuals in flow experience a oneness of action and awareness—being in the moment while also attending to situational demands.

9. Time distortion. The flow experience is associated with both speeding up and slowing down time. For some,



time speeds up (children at play, a deep conversation, beating a deadline). Others describe flow as a slowing down of time (Michael Jordan shooting the last shot in a game, experiencing a traffic accident). Being in flow alters one’s sense of time and space as the mind powerfully focuses in the moment.

Learning from High Achievers

We can learn much from high achievers who devise strategies for finding and replicating their flow experience to enhance personal performance. In the external environment, high achievers speak of three themes: 1) finding the right flow space (a place where flow naturally happens); 2) adjusting the external environment (proper lighting, relaxing music, inspiring pictures, proper tools); and 3) man-

aging personal relationships (removing interpersonal contention and having more peace of mind).

Internally, flow is facilitated by engaging at five levels: 1) *physical* (managing stress, being in good shape, getting enough sleep, eating properly); 2) *emotional* (managing our emotions and the emotions of others); 3) *psychological* (mastering skills such as goal setting, time management, creative problem solving, attitude, attention, strategic thinking, focus, awareness); 4) *philosophical* (developing a code of ethics and personal standards), and 5) *spiritual* (tapping into higher purposes and values, dedicating yourself to a cause).

We can also identify inhibitors to flow—the inability to focus, boredom, anxiety, contention, lack of interest, lack of skill, little support, poor working conditions, too much stress, little sleep, poor nutrition, relationship problems, and lack of preparation or motivation.

Create Your Flow Formula

To replicate flow, you can apply a simple formula designed to help you focus on the most important factors.

1. Identify the factors that contribute to or hinder flow. List contributing factors and restricting factors.

2. Weigh each factor from 1 to 10. A 10 factor would suggest a strong contributor; a 1 factor would suggest a weak contributor. This represents the numerator. A hindering 10 factor would suggest a critical barrier to flow; a hindering 1 factor would represent a weak inhibitor. This represents the denominator.

3. Identify the factors that represent the most critical variables on both sides of the equation. Label each factor with capital letters (TM for time management, FB for feedback, etc.) and give each a number from 1 to 10.

4. Generate your own flow formula. Put the contributing forces on the top of the formula, and divide by the restricting forces. This is your flow formula.

Look at the factors that are the most powerful contributors or inhibitors to flow (your 10s). Circle them. These critical variables have the greatest power to contribute or hinder your flow. Set goals for those factors. Focus on the one or two “critical” contributing or inhibiting factors to enhance your performance.

Advancing productive strategies while removing inhibiting variables will increase your flow experience in every arena of your life. **PE**

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ACTION: Experience flow more often.