



# THE ELUSIVE FLOW STATE

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## INSIGHT

# The Elusive “Flow-State”

I have experienced the “flow-state” in the past on many occasions, but have rarely contemplated it in earnest. As a result, I have spent little time attempting to actually develop it as an internal attribute.

Riding a Motocross bike is a serious hobby of mine. I started just a bit late at 50-years old. As I delved into it, I was immediately faced with incompetence, lack of knowledge and skill. Like many other high-performance, high-risk activities, there is a price to pay for mistakes. I have paid the toll more than once.

As the years advance, I have noted the whole person “remembers” the impacts, pain and lingering injuries.

These metastasize to unwanted internal tensions in my mind and body. It becomes increasingly difficult to evict these unruly tenants. Respect is one thing; gripping, debilitating fear is another.

Fear feeds on these past “negative” experiences. It’s a mental cancer. Fear comes in many forms. Fear of pain or death, performance anxiety, overly concerned about what others think, unrealistic personal expectations that lead to frustration, and a constant comparison to others based on false assumptions.

### What to do? Seriously, what to do...

First and foremost, take some time (by yourself) to “settle down”. Be content and grateful for what you have and where you are at. Chances are you can trace back all you do have and all you are to a long string of unending gifts.

If you are flooded with anxiety in your soul, you will not flow when pressured by an outside stimulus.

If you cannot flow in everyday life in the little things, what makes you believe you can flow when the heat is turned up? In any given activity, there is a hierarchy of priorities.

Unfortunately, many have concluded that mastery of those processes inherently constitute competence under duress.

The classic Martial Arts analogy is convincing oneself that mimicking a pre-defined set of movements will directly relate to an encounter filled with real consequence for errors and lack of experience attempting to adapt to the new variables. Consciously trying to recall and execute a particular sequence of technical movements is the antitheses of the “flow-state”.

The interesting thing about being in a “Flow-State” is that if you are consciously thinking about being in this state, you have left the state. It can be quite fragile and fleeting when initially touched and experienced.

As one contemplates a river that is flowing, it just does...The volume of water simply by it’s very constitution, flows around and over obstacles. Over time, the obstacles themselves are eroded and displaced by the unrelenting pressure of flow. Water travels at a speed dictated by the environment itself. It makes no mistakes in this regard. It takes no thought of its’ own speed.

## TRAINING SPEEDS

“Flow-state” as it relates to physical activities is cultivated by initially moving at a pace that you can consciously maintain a full awareness of what is happening.

What is required is mindful training at a pace where you can conduct an accurate survey of one’s own body state top-to-bottom, inside-to-out. Beyond the body survey, redirect your external video camera to your mind, then Hit the REPLY button.

Ask yourself a few questions before, during and after each repetition:

What was my mental tension level prior to the expected stimulus (performance anxiety level)?

Am I free or am I “caught” or “frozen”?

Did I speed up or over-react to fix an error or a mistake?

Was I consciously thinking (step-by-step) or did I maintain an open awareness, moment-by-moment mindset?

Did I let things happen (accept), or did I attempt to “over-control” the incoming stimulus?

Was I smiling or grimacing (smiling indicates security, freedom and enjoyment)? Be honest and quite frank with yourself.

If you are teacher, do not be afraid to “fail” in front of your students. Standing on top of the Pyramid is not an easy place to occupy 24/7.



## 4 Steps to Competency

- UNCONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE
- CONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE
- CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE
- UNCONSCIOUS COMPETENCE

I've said it many times, the fastest way to learn a complex set of movements is to go slow as regular part of your discipline. Reduce the number of variables being evaluated and master the dial on the control board. Know what can and cannot be done with that adjustment knob. Look to remove unnecessary steps and movements.

There is a reason why those who master an activity make it "look easy". Arriving at simplicity is actually a lot of work. A marble sculpture is revealed by taking away, not adding to. Constant sloppy practice results in constant sloppy responses at speed. Efficiency is to be prized and sought after. Over time, you can "turn off" your conscious mind and let the big dog run; the sub-conscious mind at full speed.

This mind is not hurried, over-excited, or over-reactive. It knows, and has played with all the "what if-then" possibilities ahead of time and reduced the solution set to the most appropriate responses.

All that being said, when an outside observer is viewing, your responses might appear to be "fast" to that spectator. Inside the vehicle of your body, things will not seem fast. In fact, you will begin to experience time dilation. Things seem to slow down. Being in the "flow-state" will not allow you to do things you cannot do. It will simply allow you to do all you can do.

The "flow-state" is not a magical substitute for experience in the environment, constant physical conditioning, and seeking additional knowledge relevant to the activity and/or equipment involved in said activity. I have realized in my own teaching; I have parked this foundational concept a bit too far away from my students and as well as myself. It is time to ride the river and enjoy what that means.





