



## Kad esi gatavs rekordam

### Phenomenon of Flow.

Shelby was right. She experienced flow, a phenomenon people often call being **in the zone** or *locked in*. Few experiences in life are more memorable than flow moments; these moments make life worth living. A great benefit of flow is that this state of consciousness is available to all people who engage their passions and commit to achieving their goals.

Running is unique in that it offers opportunities to experience flow in various settings and with a high degree of frequency. Racing gives competitive athletes a structured, challenging environment to test their skills. Trail running presents technical challenges and thought-provoking scenery in an anxiety-reducing environment. Running on the beach can lull you into a meditative trance as the waves lap up on the shore. Even flat road running can be highly pleasurable if you lock in on the rhythm of a smooth stride and the wonderful sense of lightness it creates.

Note that optimal experiences of this nature can occur any time you direct your full attention to a challenging task. Researchers have studied and validated the flow experiences of chess players, rock climbers, dancers, cyclists, gardeners, swimmers, writers, basketball players, and actors. Although the details vary by passion, flow's causes and feelings are universal.

In general, flow occurs when you believe you have the skills necessary to overcome a challenging situation. Your perception of time warps as your attention narrows to the task at hand. This attention is so sharply focused on the task that all extraneous thoughts and anxieties disappear. Clear goals drive your actions while all internal and external feedback verifies that the goal is achievable. Despite feeling invincible, you are aloof to what others think of you as your self-consciousness recedes into the background. All that matters is mastering the moment.

It is empowering, motivating, and above all else, enjoyable. Flow experiences are so enjoyable that people seek them out even at a great cost, when no promise of material return on their physical, emotional, or economic investment exists. That's because flow experiences are **autotelic**; the activity itself is reward. A runner in a state of flow runs for the sake of running. That doesn't mean that flow experiences don't produce external rewards. Many of the world-class athletes reported entering a flow state during races that produces Olympic medals and national championships. However,

those same runners will be the first to tell you it's the experience, not the outcome, that resonates most strongly in their memories.

The overwhelming sense of pleasure that accompanies these experiences helps explain why engaging in challenging activities is still so prized, even as people live in a society where laptops and smartphones make leaving the couch unnecessary. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi pointed out in his 1990 bestseller *Flow*, enjoyment comes back to actively engaging our passions. "Contrary to what we usually believe," Dr. Mike wrote then, "moments like these, the best moments in our lives, are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times.... The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile". Hence the reason a morning 10-miler usually brings a runner greater pleasure than having breakfast in bed.

As the flow experience resonates in the conscious mind, it increases the desire to pursue whatever task causes flow in the first place. This instinctive motivation leads to increased desire to perfect your skills, leading to improved confidence in your abilities. As your skill level improves, you become better able to tackle bigger challenges, increasing the likelihood of flow. It is a highly positive cycle.