

# Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi Flow Family Badge

## Badge Description

### The Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi Flow Badge

*“The best moments occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile..”*

*Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*

Check out this quote from Brazilian soccer legend Pelé:

*I felt a strange calmness . . . a kind of euphoria. I felt I could run all day without tiring, that I could dribble through any [player] of their team or all of them, that I could almost pass through them physically.*

*Almost pass through them physically.* That sounds *really* powerful. But what is he talking about? Well, if you’ve read the name of this exercise, it’s no mystery: Pelé is talking about flow.

Sure, he may call it something else—most athletes call it being “in the zone”—but it’s the same thing. Simply, it’s a state of pure efficiency, a focus so intense and a concentration so immersive it borders on the sublime.

And here’s the good news: you can tap into it. Why bother? Because knowing how to cultivate the right conditions for flow could help you—like Pelé—become the best at your game. But tap into it how?

Well, you’re probably already thinking, *I have before*. And, yes, you most likely have. There were those moments when you were fully engaged in a challenge and afterward looked at the clock and the hours seemed to have passed in minutes, right? That’s flow. But do you remember how you got there?

The is Acton learning experience is about recognizing what flow is and what it’s not and finding out how to use it to discover and hone your talents.

But enough talk—let’s see how.

### Background Information for Your Quest

*Rarely do we feel the serenity that comes when heart, will, and mind are on the same page.*

That’s from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (it’s a tough one, so let’s say it together: chick-SENT-me-high). He’s the psychologist who wrote the book—several of them, actually—on flow. Smart guy and we could spend hours talking about his research. But this experience isn’t about academics. We just want to know how to recognize flow, and how to modify less intense modes of thought and productivity—like arousal and control—into flow-like states, so that we might deeply focus on what we’re really, really good at.

Let’s take an example of flow, say, in cooking (hey, it’s almost lunchtime and hunger’s setting in):

**Anxiety** (high challenge, low skill level). You’ve been tasked with preparing a three-course meal for a renowned, five-star chef. If he likes it, he’s going to give you a fat check and have you open a new restaurant for him. The problem? You don’t know a *thing* about culinary arts.

**Arousal** (high challenge, medium skill level). Same task, but you've been a cook and restaurant manager for a few years, and you think you might be up to the challenge. But, are your skills strong enough to impress the chef?

**Relaxation** (low challenge, high skill level). Now *you're* the five-star chef. But you've been asked to make a peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich. Easy peasy. Yawn.

**Control** (medium challenge, high skill level). You're still a five-star chef, but now, because of a national holiday, your restaurant is busier and more hectic than usual. Time to think fast. But you've dealt with this before. You're in control.

As you might have guessed, flow in this case would have been when the five-star chef's challenge and your skill level—which you've worked on for days and nights in the kitchen for years—almost merged (we'll get to that *almost* part in a second).

Now that we've learned more about flow and near-flow mental states, let's figure out how you're going to push what you're really good at into the flow state. (Need more help finding what you're good at? That is, what your gifts are? If so, check out the Acton learning experience about how to find your gifts.)

We've touched on how flow is achieved when a high skill level crosses with a big challenge. But let's flesh that out a bit. Here are some conditions that are typically met before flow occurs:

- **It's a big challenge, but not quite overwhelming.** This is what we meant by *almost*. If the challenge is insurmountable (that is, if you don't have the skill set to conquer it), you probably won't enter flow.
- **It's something you care about.** If you don't care about it (for one reason or another), there's not a big incentive to concentrate on it. And remember, flow is a state of extreme concentration.
- **There's immediate feedback.** You'll be able to tell at each step how you're doing, and, more importantly, how to adjust. To use cooking as an example again, you would know whether the meat wasn't tender enough, or whether an ingredient was spoiled.
- **There's a clear set of goals.** Objectives are explicit. There's little or no ambiguity.
- **Your skills are fully engaged.** Focus and skill are invested solely in the challenge at hand and nothing else.

Again, why bother understanding flow? Doesn't it just sound like some new-age fluff? Perhaps, but studies by Csikszentmihalyi and others have found that flow can help you discern your hidden talents *and* make it easier to persevere through the long hours of practice it takes to master them.

### Why Invest in This Badge?

Our Eagles learn that flow is essential for the Hero's Journey. If you discover your greatest gifts; learn to use them with great joy in flow; working to solve a irresistible opportunity or terrible injustice, you will be on the path to a calling.

If you earn this badge, you not only will understand what your Eagle is reaching for in the studio, but perhaps discover a new way to hone important skills yourself.

## Badge Requirements

### Your Challenge, If You Choose to Accept It

## Level One of The Csikszentmihalyi Flow Badge

You are beginning down a path to cultivate more awareness and joy in your life.

1. Watch Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's TED Talk, "[Flow." the secret to happiness](#)."
2. Explore the following resources to see which ones speak to you.
  - [Flow: Happiness in Super Focus](#)
  - [Fight Boredom and Anxiety with Flow](#)
  - ["Flow: Have you ever been 'in the zone?'"](#)
  - ["What is Flow?"](#)
  - [This blog post in Lateral Action](#).
3. Grab your journal and write on one or more of the following questions:
  - How often do you find yourself in flow?
  - If flow is so focused on living in the present moment, does this mean the past and/or future are bad?
  - In what activity are you most likely to find flow? Why?
4. Keep a flow journal for a day. Stop several times each day to evaluate an activity and where it fits on this chart. If you are in a state of flow, document why. If not, think of how you could move towards flow. Now repeat until you have captured enough flow experiences to spot your personal patterns.
5. Write a one page reflection on your most powerful "lessons learned" and what you plan to do next to make flow a more intentional part of your life.

## Going Deeper

### Level Two: Advanced Study in Flow

Are you ready for more? Here are a few ways to continue your study of flow:

- Read: Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1998). [Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement With Everyday Life](#). New York: Basic Books.
- Read: Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2004). [Good Business: Leadership, Flow, and the Making of Meaning](#). Penguin.