

# Dr Adam Fraser

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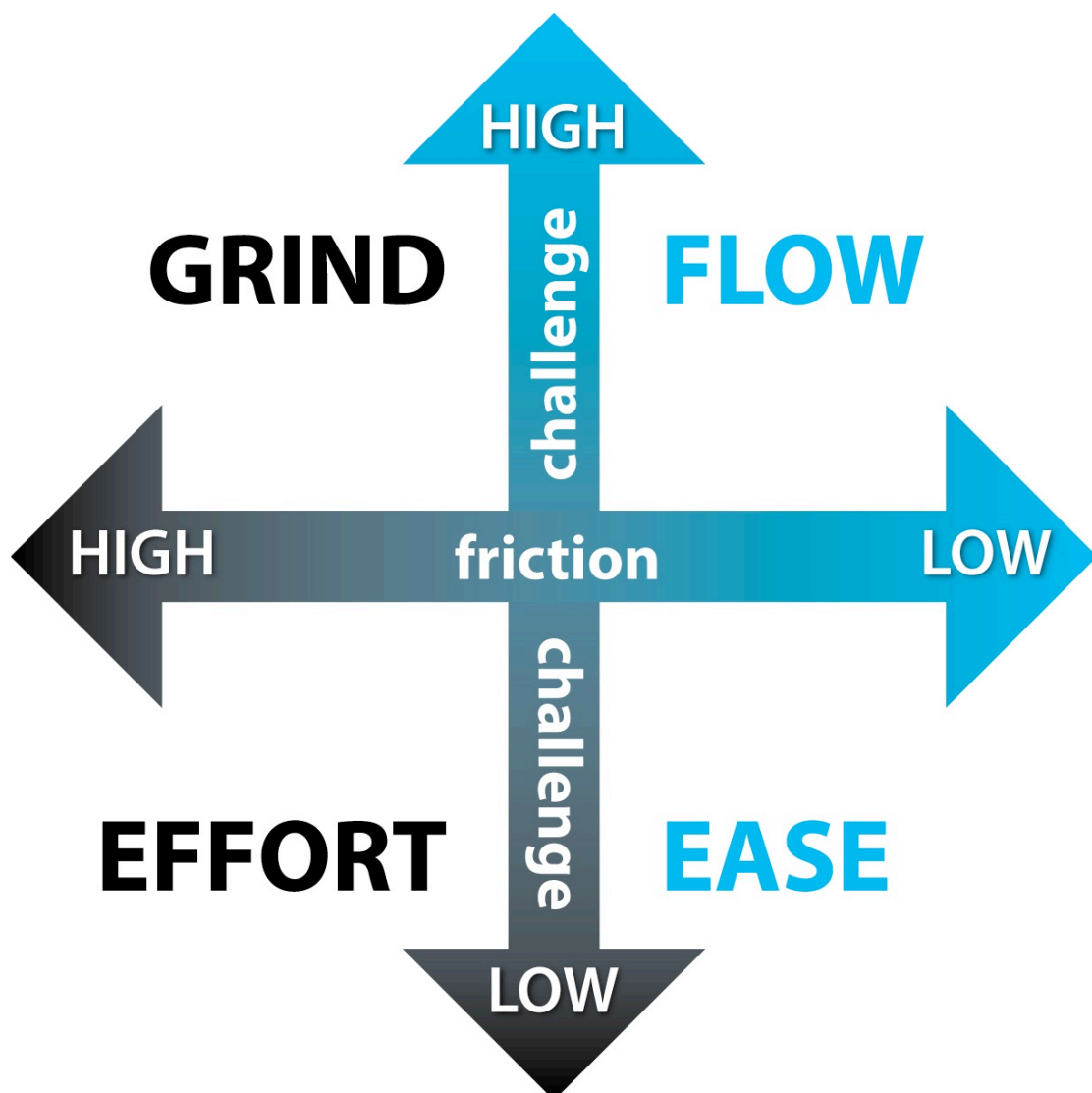
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# Finding FLOW

In my experience I have found that people tend to move between 4 states of performance. They are:



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Poor health, high levels of stress, burn out and a lack of engagement, is often blamed on the speed and pace of life. However the speed is not the problem, the problem is how we respond to that pace and pressure.

The solution is not to slow down the solution is to get more FLOW!

## The Axis

**Challenge:** Challenge is the vertical axis and looks at your external environment. When you have a lot of pressure and stress on you Challenge is high. When you have a low amount of pressure and stress Challenge is low. Ideally we want a mixture of high and low challenge in our life.

**Friction:** Friction is the Horizontal axis and looks at your internal world made up of your psychology and physiology. This axis looks at how your internal world is coping with the external pressure. When you have high friction the external world is wearing you out wearing you down, when you have low friction the external world is having minimal impact on you.

## The Quadrants

**Grind** - This is when you are under the pump, you have high challenges in your life a high amount of stress and you are slaving away. When you are in this phase you are doing lots but you are not very effective. Because when you are a grinder you get cognitive dysfunction, they are just two big words that mean your brain don't work so good, and example is when you read a page of a document and you get to the end of the page and think what did I just read, or you forget to do things during the day you forget to return phone calls. In grind you make mistakes and things slip past you forget emails, you don't send off reports, you forget to call people back.

**Effort** - When we grind for too hard for too long we hit burn out, we fall into effort this is where the challenge is low and the friction is high everything is an effort, its an effort to get out of bed, its an effort to go to work. The most simple things feel like an effort.

**Ease** - Ease this is where you are truly relaxed, you are at peace and you find it easy to relax.

**FLOW** - This is where the challenge in your life is high but you have a low level of friction. Flow is where you are in true high performance. Flow is where

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you are working at your highest level, where you are totally immersed and absorbed in what we are doing, where time stands still and the world disappears. Flow has been described as a state of zero stress and authentic happiness.

Individuals who experience a lot of flow in their day have a greater quality of life and improved productivity.

We can experience FLOW at work, with hobbies and in our relationships.

In my research I have seen people of all walks of life exhibit flow. From CEO's running a company, musicians playing music, to butchers taking pride in making sure their products are cut to the best of their ability.

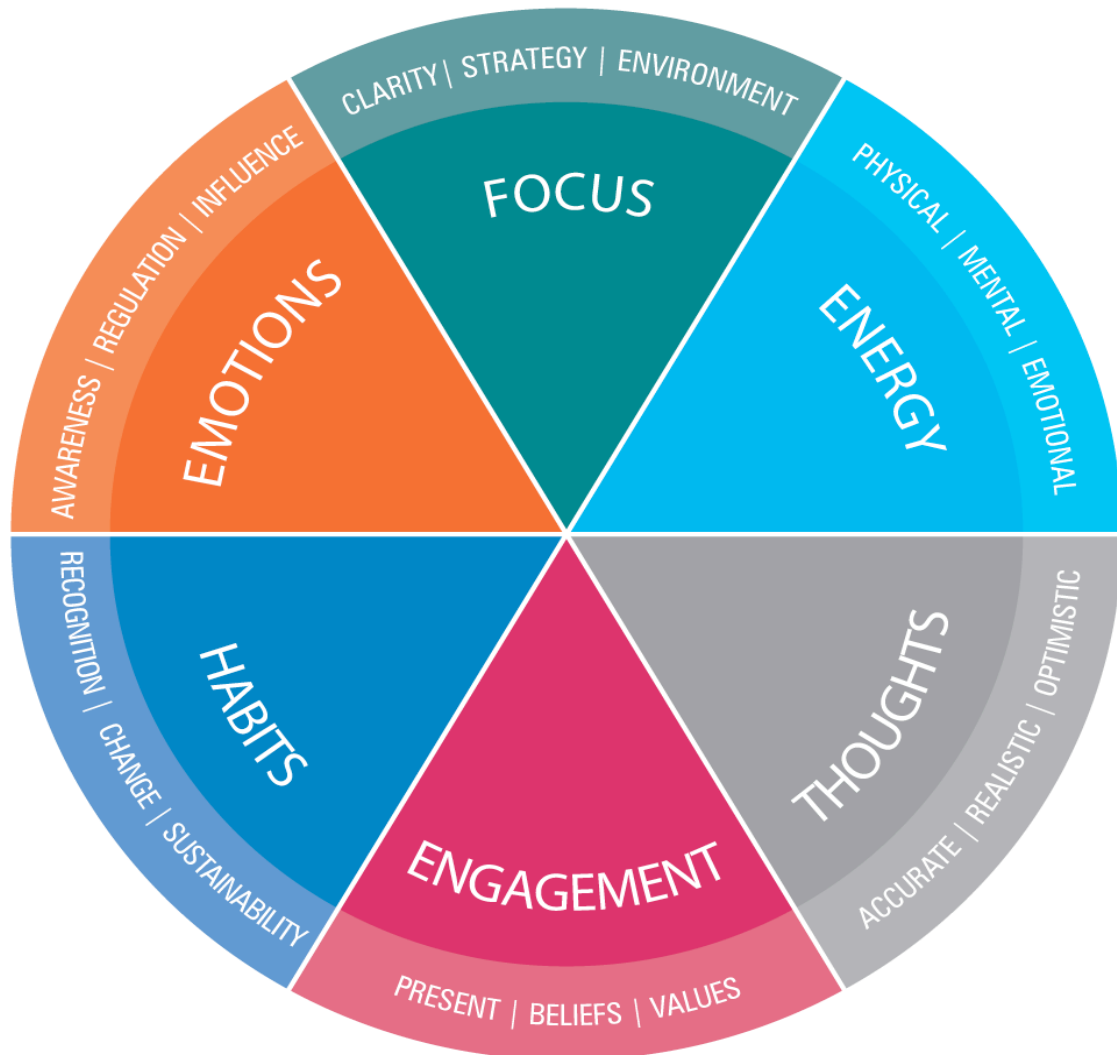
In essence FLOW is where you are emotionally engaged and completely focused on the task at hand.

It has the following characteristics:

- **Clear goals – you have a clear strategy for what you want to achieve**
- **No ego – you are not self-conscious about your performance**
- **Deep focus – you have a calm focused mind**
- **In the present moment – you are completely immersed in what you are doing**
- **Feeling of control – you feel like you have control over the situation**
- **Time distorts – you usually lose track of time**
- **Positive Emotion – you have emotions like arousal, excitement, joy and happiness.**
- **Positive Mindset – your self talk is positive**
- **Low stress – there is no stress when you are in FLOW**

The goal is to spend more time on the right hand side of the model and ideally you want to toggle between FLOW and EASE.

## Setting yourself up for FLOW



To facilitate FLOW we need to work on each quadrant of the FLOW model. So that we are:

- Focused on that moment
- Completely Engaged in what we are doing
- Have high energy levels
- Accurate, Realistic and Optimistic Thoughts
- Constructive and Positive Emotions

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Consistently implement the right habits and work on the important things

## 1. Focus

Of all the characteristics of High performers one thing they have in common is an amazing ability to focus. A sign of flow and one thing that you need to get into FLOW is the ability to lose yourself in whatever you are doing, so much so that the whole world disappears and you are lost in the task at hand.

However as a society it is considered that we are losing our ability to focus, with some researching claiming that the average attention span of an adult is 10 to 40 seconds. Researchers are now talking about a condition called Attention Deficit Trait (ADT). This is a condition where adult's brains during the day are mimicking a child's brain with ADD. The characteristics of ADT are that people can't focus, are easily distracted, multitask too many things and don't complete tasks.

There are 3 main reasons why we are developing ADT:

**Attention deficit habit – ADH** - The habits we have in our day are actually reducing our ability to focus on a task. For example, we leave our phone on in meetings, we leave our email open and every time it beeps we go and check it. All these things destroy focus

**Compression** – Now days we expect an instant response. Clients, co-workers, managers want things straight away and they will interrupt you for it.

**Multi-tasking.** The greatest enemy of focus is multi-tasking, multi-tasking suggests that you can focus on many things at once. But just in the definition of focus you can't. Reality is multi tasking is a very inefficient process and all your brain is doing is bring memories in and out of long term into short-term memory. Memory is not a parallel process like most people think it is a serial process.

What is the fall out of this?

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The brain is made up of older primitive parts which are driven by emotion and survival (Old Brain), and newer more sophisticated parts that are used for planning, strategy, creativity and emotional intelligence (New Brain).

When our New Brain has too many data points coming at it, it starts to become overwhelmed and stressed, the New brain shuts down and the Old Brain kicks in. This reduces our brains ability to perform high level functions and productivity drops.

By practicing focus and having a calm brain we keep the New brain in charge and our performance gets better.

How do we improve focus?

1. **Set up your environment** to support focus, turn off the email, turn the phone off, don't have the TV on while you are talking to your partner. Push back on the environment. Control your environment don't let it control you.

- Think about having email hours where you check email at certain points of your day.
- Start the day doing tasks, rather than cleaning out your inbox. For example between 8am and 10am focus on completing tasks without turning on your technology or accepting meetings.
- Chunk and group tasks together, for example if you are doing sales calls do them in a large chunk rather than sporadically during the day. If you are writing proposals or a presentation, shut yourself off and completely focus on that without interruption.

2. **Formally practicing focus.** An example of a formal practice is meditation or a hobby that requires your attention (music, art, dance, sport). There is a huge amount of evidence showing that meditation and/or having a hobby can greatly improve our focus and increase our cognitive ability.

3. **Practice being present.** Also know as Mindfulness or Attention Management. During the day practice focusing your attention on

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what ever you are doing. So often people are performing a task but thinking about the next thing they have to do. Start to look at where your attention is going and can you start to pull it back to the present moment. If you are writing a report focus entirely on that report without thinking of the other things you need to do in the day. Likewise if you are having a conversation with someone totally immerse yourself in that conversation don't let your mind drift. A tremendous amount of research has shown that the ability to be 'present' dramatically reduces our stress levels (as stress lives in the future). Also being present with people builds rapport with them as giving someone our undivided attention is the ultimate compliment. For the next 7 days observe how 'present' you are with:

- Tasks
- People you interact with
- When you get home

## 2. Engagement

Life is a series of transitions!

During our day we transition between different environments and different roles. Each environment and role requires a very different and specific mindset. For example work has a very different mindset to home, an internal meeting has a very different mindset to a meeting with a client. If you are a manager doing tasks at your desk requires a very different mindset to leading and interacting with your team.

When we can align our mind set with that of the environment or role we are more engaged and get greater performance.

If we don't, the fall out can be detrimental!

I first got interested in this concept of transitions when I was doing work with some special forces soldiers. Their biggest challenge they face was not to stay alive their biggest challenge was to stay married. Some of their units have huge divorce rates. The reason

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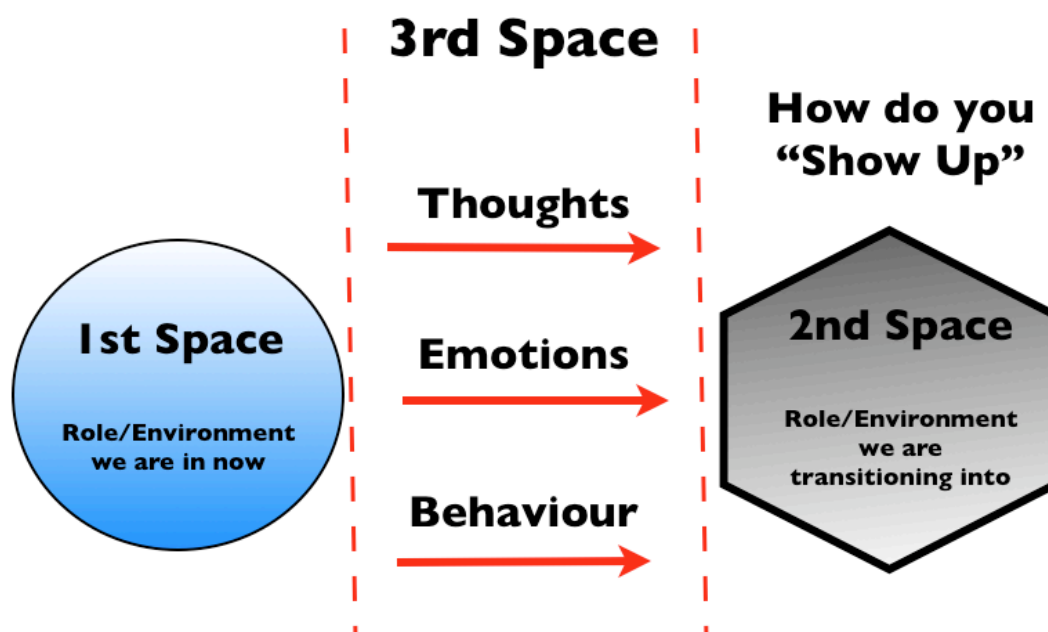
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is that their day job (if you can call it that) and their home life are incredibly different and they struggle moving from one environment to the next. In my conversations they all said, “I don’t find it hard to be away from home doing the job, the hard part is when I come home. For the first couple of weeks I really struggle reconnecting with the family, because I have to think, feel and act very differently to when I am away doing my job”.

During the day if we don’t manage our transitions right it makes it very hard to be engaged in the environment we are moving into.

In the last 14 years I have had the honour of working with people in many different fields and many different levels. What I noticed is that some people seemed to make it look easy while others seemed to make it look all so hard.

I started to research what was the difference between the two groups. What I found is that the people that make it look easy show up with the right mindset! Specifically they show up with the right: Thoughts, Emotions and Behaviour.



The question is what do we do in the transitional space between environments. This transitional space is called the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space. Do we have a 3<sup>rd</sup> Space where we regulate our Emotions, Thoughts and Behaviour to help us in the next environment.

For example the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space can be used during the transition from work to home. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Space is the gap between work and home where you adopt thoughts, emotions and physiology that will help you be more engaged at home.

Some people use the car ride home as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space. Some individuals say that the ride home is the only time of the day where I am not responsible for another human being, its my time to think about my world, I play some relaxing music and change my mindset to one that will suit home.

Other people use exercise as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space.

Also you can use the 3<sup>rd</sup> Space to transition from home to work. Most people bring negative emotions (sadness, apathy, boredom), negative thoughts (“another day at the grind stone”, “I am tired of working so hard”), and tired and depleted physiology into the work place. How do you show up in the morning?

Can you use the third place to bring better emotions, thoughts, and Behaviour into the work place.

## **Behaviour when we Show Up**

Gallup have shown that the following 12 things drive engagement in the work place.

## The 12 Elements of Great Managing

To identify the elements of worker engagement, Gallup conducted many thousands of interviews in all kinds of organizations, at all levels, in most industries, and in many countries. These 12 statements – the Gallup Q<sup>12</sup> – emerged from Gallup's pioneering research as those that best predict employee and workgroup performance.

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
8. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

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