



Good Business: Leadership, Flow, and the Making of Meaning

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

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Since Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi published the groundbreaking **Flow** more than a decade ago, world leaders such as Tony Blair and former President Clinton, and influential sports figures like Super Bowl champion coach Jimmy Johnson have all been inspired by the book. In today's corporate upheaval, a new business paradigm is evolving. While many CEOs are being exposed for their greed, truly visionary leaders believe in a goal that benefits themselves as well as others. They realize that it is their vision and "soul" that attract loyal employees willing to go above and beyond the call of corporate duty. And their employees are realizing the same thing: while 80 percent of adults claim they'd work even if they didn't have to, the majority of them can hardly wait to leave their jobs and get home. **Good Business** starts with the premise that this is an age in which business and work have replaced religion and politics as central forces in contemporary life. The book reveals how business leaders, managers, and even employees can find their "flow" and contribute not only to their own happiness, but also to a just and evolving society. It identifies the factors crucial to the operation of a good business: trust, the commitment to fostering the personal growth of employees, and the dedication to creating a product that helps mankind. **Good Business** is sure to become a must-read text for anyone who values the positive contributions of individuals in the changing world of business.

Good Business: Leadership, Flow, and the Making of Meaning Details

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Author : Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

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Jeremiah says

A good moral basis for business...alot more links to institutional religion than I would have expected. Here is a person that believes in the power of human institutions, and I think i agree with him. This is the cornerstone of corporate social responsibility. It would have been really good if he actually proposed some new measures of business success like intangible asset valuation, that would have reinforced and addressed the pressures of the quarterly earnings call. I really enjoyed reading this book.

Kathy Nealen says

Business perspective on Csikszentmihalyi's flow. Some examples are duplicated from the earlier Flow text. Notable Quotes: "Nothing destroys the morale of a group as quickly as knowing that self-serving, cynical employees are promoted ahead of those who love the work for its own sake and believe In helping the entire organization realize its potentials." ... the success of business might enable it to spread and to take over our entire lives, like vigorous cancer cells that devour the healthy organs of the body. In that scenario the only measure of value will be financial success, and the only good that which increases profit. . . . if business continues to be oblivious to the responsibilities attached to the power it has acquired, the immune system of society is going to reject the free-market paradigm."

Tara Deland says

I liked this better than Flow.

Take Aways

Three things necessary to achieve flow; Goals are clear, Feedback is immediate, A balance between opportunity and capacity

Csikszentmihalyi argues that with increased experiences of flow, people experience “growth towards complexity,” in which people flourish as their achievements grow. Creating a workplace atmosphere that allows for flow and growth can increase the happiness and achievement of employees.

However, there are barriers to achieving flow in the workplace. ex one's job expectations and how it fits into the grand scheme are not clear, limited feedback can reduce motivation, assigned task isn't challenging or seem important

Barry Davis says

Subtitled Leadership, Flow and the Making of Meaning, this insightful book speaks of the “psychological capital” contained in Flow and its significance for business, work and life. Humans need, per the author, to combine differentiation (understanding how they are unique) with integration (interaction with the world

around them). Divided into three sections, the author begins by focusing on the relationship between Flow and Happiness. Flow, per “Mike,” has clear goals, immediate feedback and provides a balance between opportunity and capacity. Two diagrams are presented in this section to show the critical balance between challenge and skills to move from boredom (no challenge, too many skills) and anxiety (more challenge than skills) to Flow (challenge and skills are matched).

The second section, Flow and Organizations, combines quotes from visionary leaders coming from organizations as diverse as Patagonia, Motorola, Amway and Templeton Investments to show how concentrating on the deeper issues beyond shareholder earnings creates extraordinary businesses. Mike speaks of hundred year managers that "have a vision that gives life meaning, offers people hope for their own future and those of their children."

Finally, in Flow and Self, the author speaks of the “soul” of business. As a person of faith, I take a different tack on this topic, although he has much to offer in this area. Mike describes the “stuff of great souls” as including optimism, integrity, ambition, perseverance and integrity, populating this discussion with numerous quotes from leaders who embody these characteristics and seek to “walk the talk.”

This exceptional book closes by providing practical guidance on helping the reader to develop strengths and discover opportunities to create flow in life as well as providing a strong challenge for each business to “truly fulfill its potential to help make life happier for all.”

Hisham Hafiz says

The central idea of this book is "flow", a state of mind caused by deep engagement in a physical or mental activity. In "Flow" all of one's being is focused and the passage of time cannot be felt or perceived. Reaching "flow" is essential in business if one wants to look forward to work, enjoy what he is doing, and excel in it. There are several advices in how to reach flow and how to help employees reach it.

Although the book contains powerful ideas and excellent arguments which are supported by true life examples, and I felt the book lacked structure, the idea is one: how to reach flow and create an environment which entices others to reach flow. Despite being a short book, it felt like one long chapter, the audio version at least. The author begins by explaining what is "flow" and how did he arrive at discovering such concept, but from there on the rest of the book seemed to be examples and applications of flow. I found it hard to see how the chapters were logically progressing to a conclusion other than the one made in the beginning which is: flow is necessary to enjoy work and succeed in it.

Having said that I still do recommend this book. I believe the idea of flow is worth exploring. It is indeed a powerful concept which could help many people overcome the mundane nature of some work tasks and turn work into a meaningful and integral part of being.

Caroline Gordon says

Really enjoyed this book, it is all about why flow is so important for anyone in their job. How can companies create flow - clear goals, a good match between skills and challenge and immediate feedback. It sounds simple but like the author says, a book could be written about each of these. Some great food for thought about how we live our lives in general, pearls like seeing your life as an accumulation of those moments you

spend paying attention to particular things. So what are you paying attention to, this is creating the summation of your life. If you can pay attention to things that grow in complexity and lead to a deeper self then your life can be more fulfilling than if you choose passive activities such as watching TV. This applies more so to children, who are learning an approach to their life, build skill, deepen complexity or relax and veg out.

Dale Roberts says

The book does cover Flow in some detail but not in a way that was derivative. This text, focused as it is on business, brings a different perspective. It offers something to everyone at every level in an organisation; from leadership to entry-level graduates deciding on what is the right first-time career move or company for them.

It's principles of purposeful and meaningful business are noble but somewhat undermined by some of the example companies. That aside, its values are sound, it's arguments well-constructed and it does speak convincingly of creating a better workplace and a better world through good business. It is an important book that quite rightly challenges us all to re-think the way we work and do business.

Christopher Willey says

An acquaintance on Facebook asked "What is one thing you wish someone told you as a child?" I first said: Money, Nations, and Gods are the same as the Easter Bunny. (But in a nice, kid friendly sort-of-way.) (Thanks Harari!)

Then after seeing some more other replies I decided to write:

"Following up-protect and encourage the skills that us sapiens have by default- social & curious: show the importance of integrity; allow them to follow their curiosities; highlight the importance of self awareness as a guide, their pleasures will lead to discovery of purpose; teach them the importance of ignorance, failure, and perseverance; model collaboration and inclusivity as a problem-solving behavior; inject genuine optimism in the day to day!" Many of these words are the fallout from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's philosophies and research. I'm already utilizing these new memes.

While reading this book I was invited to give a TEDxMKE talk - And I'm honored beyond words. I'm using Daniel Pinks allegory of Mastery as an Asymptote (maths- two lines that get close but never touch). Pink's argument is based upon Csikszentmihalyi's research into autotelic pursuits. (from Greek autos 'self.' and from Greek telikos 'final,' from telos 'end.')

Later Csikszentmihalyi called this 'self-final' approach FLOW. I'm also using Kevin Kelly's 'Science as an exponential questioning mechanism. I'll also talk about the 'NOW THAT' context we live in in order to connect these two thoughts. Not a lot of original thought- but connecting a lot in order to share my understanding of our world.

This book, Good Business, mixes two current interests: How to be a proper leader in a world in dire need of leadership, while simultaneously expanding on Pink's descriptions of flow. This text mostly corroborate the ideas of Sinek - Start with Why/Leaders Eat Last. It's a nice addition to my culture.

Assuming vision for the team's pursuits have been communicated and trust established among the group, then the individuals in the group simply need time, autonomy, and resources in order to grow more complex. The groups leader then needs to establish the following:
clear goals that are adaptable

channels of feedback for both leadership and members of the group matching challenges to the group with the person with the best skills

In order to meet these needs the Leader doesn't need to know everything. That, in fact, would be counter productive. Instead they need to focus on the three "P's" of business:

People
Process
Product

Of course Csiksgentmihalyi talked about all of this 'business stuff' in relation to flow- which was super beneficial as I'm an individual that truly understands self-determined activities, boundaries, and self-imposed standards of evaluation.

FLOW - the Cliff Notes:

These are moments when an individual is in a task that is in their 'sweet spot.' That spot is somewhere between 'easy' and 'unknown' and matches all aspects of their body and mind to the task. Running 100 meter dash at the Olympic Level and Neurosurgery were two examples cited in the book.

Moments of flow are qualified as:

- The focus of attention is on a finite task
- In that focus a sense of self fallaway, so too does the world/issues/external problems
- There is a sense of effortless control over mind and body (it's not a struggle, rather it is a pursuit)
- Seconds, Minutes, and Hours are relative; often expanding (100 meter dash), or contracting (Neurosurgery) while the task is being focused upon.

I particularly enjoyed the 'step-back' moments in this text to talk about things like life, and soul. Psychic energy was another moment that got a lot of attention. The 'If/Then' that Csiksgentmihalyi sets up is this: IF we think of the brain's ability to process a finite amount of information in a given life (bits), THEN we need to understand the economy of our focus. In order to develop behavior patterns that match our psychic energy, one must: Know Thyself.

The entrance to the Delphic Temple in Greece (I get to say I visited this last month- yay!) has these words upon it. One cannot find flow if they are not approaching complexity. (This occurs when we mix our interests with our skills.) Self regulating your everyday actions based upon your interests and curiosities is critical for this to develop. They will need to pay attention to the moments that they are mentally active, and create a life that allows them to focus these energies with their talents. Their talents need to be honed over time, tested, and fostered. This is not an overnight effect, but the aggregate pursuit of their interests will culminate in an enjoyment of their time, attention, and psychic energy being bent towards their FLOW.

Enjoyment and Pleasure were also distinguished in a new way (at least for me.) Typically I used these words as synonyms. Simplistically speaking: Enjoyment is the endorphin fueled pursuit, and Pleasure is the hollow dopamine bumps one gets with instant gratification. While there are dopamine 'bumps' along the way in the autotelic (with no chemical payoff we wouldn't even try). Enjoyment leads to betterment of both oneself, but if applied to business, it will lead to a better culture. Then we get to enjoy the lasting serotonin and oxytocin of connections with our community.

Make no mistake- Csiksgentmihalyi's dynamic mechanism - FLOW - results in happiness.

Favorite Quotes:

"Religions evolved to makes sense of certain values by creating a mythical framework to communicate those values."

"More than we usually acknowledge we think that technology will lead us to happiness."

John Stepper says

This book is largely just an echo of "flow" (which was excellent) and comes across as a simplistic set of guidelines for business practitioners.

Though it was funded by a grant and based on research of leaders, the few examples are dominated by quotes from heads of Lockheed Martin and Monsanto ("flow companies"? Really?), a venture capitalist, and a handful of others. In an extraordinarily non-representative sample. When the aerospace/weapons manufacturer CEO waxes on about religion, that is just about too much for me.

Best advice is read "flow" and think through how you'd apply it yourself to your own business. This book won't help much.

Derek says

Generally good book on good business. I enjoy books with many examples, and Mihaly did a great job of that. A wide wide variety of company owners/executives who create a deeper meaning to why they do what they do and how they unite their employees and volunteers around them. The reason for a 4 star, a little much of the environmental push. I agree with him, but the direct way he repeatedly addressed it was unexpected in a book like this. He spent a little much time on "the rockclimber"... it was good but interesting how such a large portion of the quotes and stories were about them. Enjoyed it thoroughly, well worth the time!

Teri Temme says

I love this book! To summarize (from back cover): Balancing the material and the spiritual, these leaders have a common dedication to 3 fundamental principles: a goal that benefits society and that inspires a workforce to do its best; earning the trust and respect of employees by fostering on-the-job growth; and creating a product that benefits humankind and not one that just generates revenue. If only....

Favorite quotes:

If one is not willing to invest psychic energy in the internal reality of consciousness, and instead squanders it in chasing external rewards, one loses mastery of one's life, and ends up becoming a puppet of circumstances.

If a person reaches adulthood only enjoying activities like watching television, partying, gambling, or drugs, chances are that he is not going to be much good at anything else. In this way the pattern of energy investment learned in the early years has momentous consequences for the rest of one's life.

Oscar Romero says

I honestly had no idea about this Flow concept Mihaly was so kind to explain on his books--and on this one-- He is also quite good at explaining how it is that businesses could benefit from not only promoting flow, but also how flow can be obtained.

I strongly agree with his observations about the fact that--regardless what it is we do--we all could strive to get flow while doing it...It is after all, the best thing we can do so that we could enjoy what we do.

Very strongly recommend this book for all readers....business or non-business people.

Jonathan Biddle says

Pretty much just common sense written in intelligent-sounding prose. His overview of "Flow" was helpful, but the main reason I read it was just to say I've read a book by a guy with that last name (OK, not completely...).

Francesco says

Good reading on Flow theory and application on Business World.

How modern management can enforce durable business facilitating employees involvement ?

The book starts from flow theory baseline, analyzing what happen when we get totally captured in what we are doing, what bring us in the "Flow", the status of getting lost facing a challenge and ending with a total fulfillment feeling.

The development goes through how this happen when we are working, what context, needs, help people to feel part of something vs being demotivated executors.

Theory is alternated with interviews of CeO , business leaders , corroborating that to be successful, personal satisfaction , challenges and proper-growing skills are key elements.

Book is in my view well written, good for manager that can facilitate an environment where employees can spontaneously do more, and good for employees that can look at the work in a brighter way.

Most of the book is energizing as it stimulate thinking on where I am, where I want to go, how all this fit or not in my (everybody) personal experience, what difference managers can do. I got a bit lost in the "good" business deep dive, where the ethic part of the business, the transposition of soul concept in business world, got me a bit struggling.

Definitively recommended to all.

Donny Teeter says

This man is a genius and any information that can be acquired regarding business and life will only benefit you. The Creator of flow, defines how that and soul are essential to having the work and home life you desire.

