

News for Life after 55

Finding Flow in Retirement

Hello Everyone. This newsletter highlights the findings of Mihaly Csikszent-mihalyi (Dr. C) in his book called "Finding Flow" and applies his ideas to our retirement.

The structure of everyday life

*If we really want to live
we'd better start at once to try;
If we don't...we'd better start to die*
W.H. Auden

Dr. C starts with guidance that living a fulfilling life will not happen by itself. We need to take charge of our lives and discover how to live in a useful and meaningful way. Know that what we do each day has a tremendous impact on what kind of life we live.

Dr. C has found that across time and cultures what people do and for how long is astonishingly similar. Most of us spend our time doing three kinds of activities: productive, maintenance, and leisure. Productive activities include work and studying, maintenance includes all the activities we do to keep our lives going such as housework, eating, and grooming. Leisure includes passive activities such as watching TV and active activities such as doing hobbies, sports, and socializing.

For those working full-time, Dr. C has found that most of us actually work 30 hours a week with the other 10 hours spent visiting, day dreaming, and planning activities irrelevant to work. So the question becomes, when we retire, how can we best use these 30 hours a week that are given to us?

What engages us and brings us joy?

Dr. C shares that beyond the threshold of poverty, additional financial resources do not appreciably improve the chances of being happy. To really improve our lives and to experience real joy, Dr. C challenges us to find and bring deep involvement or flow activities into our lives.

What is flow?

When we like what we do and are motivated to do it, focusing the mind becomes effortless. What we feel, what we wish, and what we think are all in harmony. When we are engaged in flow



activities we often lose track of time. We are completely caught up in what we are doing. Athletes refer to it as *being in the zone*. Religious mystics refer to it as *being in ecstasy*. Artists and musicians refer to it as *experiencing aesthetic rapture*.

When does flow occur?

Flow occurs when the following are true:

—When challenges are met with the skills needed and required

—When we are faced with a clear set of goals that require appropriate responses

—When our skills are fully involved in overcoming a manageable challenge. (If the challenge is too high, frustration and anxiety occur. If it is too low, boredom and apathy occur.)

When these conditions are met, time seems to pass by in minutes. Life comes into its own. And when we look back on what has happened, we are often flooded with gratitude for the excellence of that experience. And not surprisingly, we see increasing growth and complexity in our consciousness.

What activities create flow?

Flow is generally reported when we are doing our favorite activities such as gardening, listening to music, weaving, cooking a good meal, driving, mountain climbing. For example, the climber will likely feel flow when the mountain demands her full strength, the singer when the song demands the full range of his vocal ability, the weaver when the design of the tapestry

is more challenging than anything attempted before.

According to Dr. C, rarely do we experience flow in passive leisure activities such as watching TV or relaxing. And almost any activity can produce flow provided the relevant elements are present: clear goals, immediate feedback, and the skills needed for the action required.

If we engage with these activities in the 30 hours given to us each week in retirement, the conditions of flow will become part of our everyday life. We can achieve optimal experiences and we will constantly grow while enjoying what we are doing. Such a deal, is it not?

How we feel when doing different things

Let's look more closely at what we feel while doing different activities. From his research, Dr. C has found that passive leisure (such as watching TV and relaxing) in small doses does improve our lives, but there is a point of diminishing returns. To truly improve the quality of our lives, flow activities that involves mental concentration are needed.

Work is often a source of flow where challenges and skills are high and goals and feedback are clear and immediate. (This may be why those who love their work choose to keep working.) When we retire, this can translate into flow activities at home such as an encore career, hobbies, traveling, taking a class, socializing, or recreating. Dr. C has found that some people experience flow while driving more than at any other time.

Dr. C has also found that when we engage in active leisure—doing a hobby, homesteading, getting involved with exercising, playing a musical instrument, going out to a movie or restaurant—we are more often in flow than any other part of the day.





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Events & Services

The *Crafting Your Life After 55* Workshop — Come explore creative ways to recognize and align with your life purpose after retirement. A recent participant said: *A great class...one of the best I've taken.* Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation, Wednesday, September 21st and 28th 10 am to 12 noon, 301 Center St. Room 5, \$78 Resident/\$95 Non-resident. Call (831) 420-5270 to register.

(If you have a group of 3 or more and wish to set up your own workshop, contact Robin.)

The *Crafting Your Life After 55* Workbook Release 2.2 is Available

With Release 2.2, the workbook now contains all the information covered in the workshop with even more exercises. It is an excellent self-paced workshop that you can do anywhere or anytime you wish. A recent participant said: *The course presents a process, a set of activities, for participants to follow in discovering and realizing their new path in retirement. These activities provide a "safe" way to discover one's true orientation and how to achieve it.*

\$24.95 plus \$2.24 tax. Pay using PayPal or send a check to Robin Everest
1555 Merrill St., Santa Cruz CA 95062. Please include your shipping address.

Robin Everest has taught successful *Finding Your Life's Work* workshops throughout the San Francisco bay area and led Artist's Way groups in Berkeley and Marin. She retired in 2018 from teaching professional writing and career planning at Santa Clara University.

Conversely, maintenance activities such as housework and personal care and passive leisure activities such as resting and idling provide the worst rates of flow.

So the first step in improving the quality of our lives with the 30 weekly hours that are given to us in retirement is to engineer our daily activities so we get the most rewarding experience from them and in so doing find the *rhythm* of our daily life, which can often also mean going in and out of solitude.

Ordering our lives

One way we can find our rhythm is to create a weekly schedule. It is helpful to divide the day into morning, afternoon, and evening segments and see what combination of productive activities, active and passive leisure activities, and maintenance activities will enhance our lives to the fullest (tentatively planning 6 hours a day for productive and/or active

leisure activities $\rightarrow 6 \times 5 = 30$.) Dr. C recommends searching for an endeavor of real interest that allows you to learn, grow, and build as much flow as possible into your life.

Day	M	T	W	Th	Fri
Morning					
Afternoon					
Evening					

For example, my life is a work in progress, but I will share with you what I have found so far. On Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday I work three or four hours at home and at the library on my encore career, then go to the gym or run errands and then go out for a lovely lunch. On Wednesday I volunteer with a team at Grey Bears doing food preparation for the Seniors Brown Bag program and then go to Verve for coffee. On Fridays I go on outings and adventures on my own or with friends. In the evenings I prepare my

dinner, sometimes clean my house, walk my dog, and rest.

Dr. C has found that creative people are especially good at ordering their lives so that what they do, when, where, and with whom enables them to do their best work. Georgia O'Keeffe in the second half of her life in the New Mexico desert enjoyed walking at first light with her two chows before going into her studio and later spent time in her garden or with friends and ended her day with an evening walk with her two four-legged friends.

About idle time

As you can see, retirement challenges us to use our time well especially our passive, idle time, which is like salt—it can be added as a light seasoning to bring out all the favors of a dish, but too much can ruin the meal. Dr. C has found that passive leisure becomes a problem when we use it as the principal strategy to fill up free time, which can lead to apathy, a drop in our self-esteem, and depression.

His research shows that human beings feel best when they are fully involved in meeting a challenge, solving a problem, discovering something new—in other words, being in flow. He encourages us to seek out and be open to all the flow activities around us like having a conversation, gardening, reading poetry, volunteering, learning something new.

In conclusion, we have learned from Dr. C that the way to improve the quality of our life is by investing psychic energy into activities that are likely to produce flow. And the way to bring *excellence* into our lives according to Dr. C is to devote as much ingenuity and attention to creating our retirement life as we did in our jobs.

As we explore what activities we enjoy, and learn the associated when, where, and with whom we can truly begin to create a retirement life that engages us, fills us with joy, and helps us to grow.