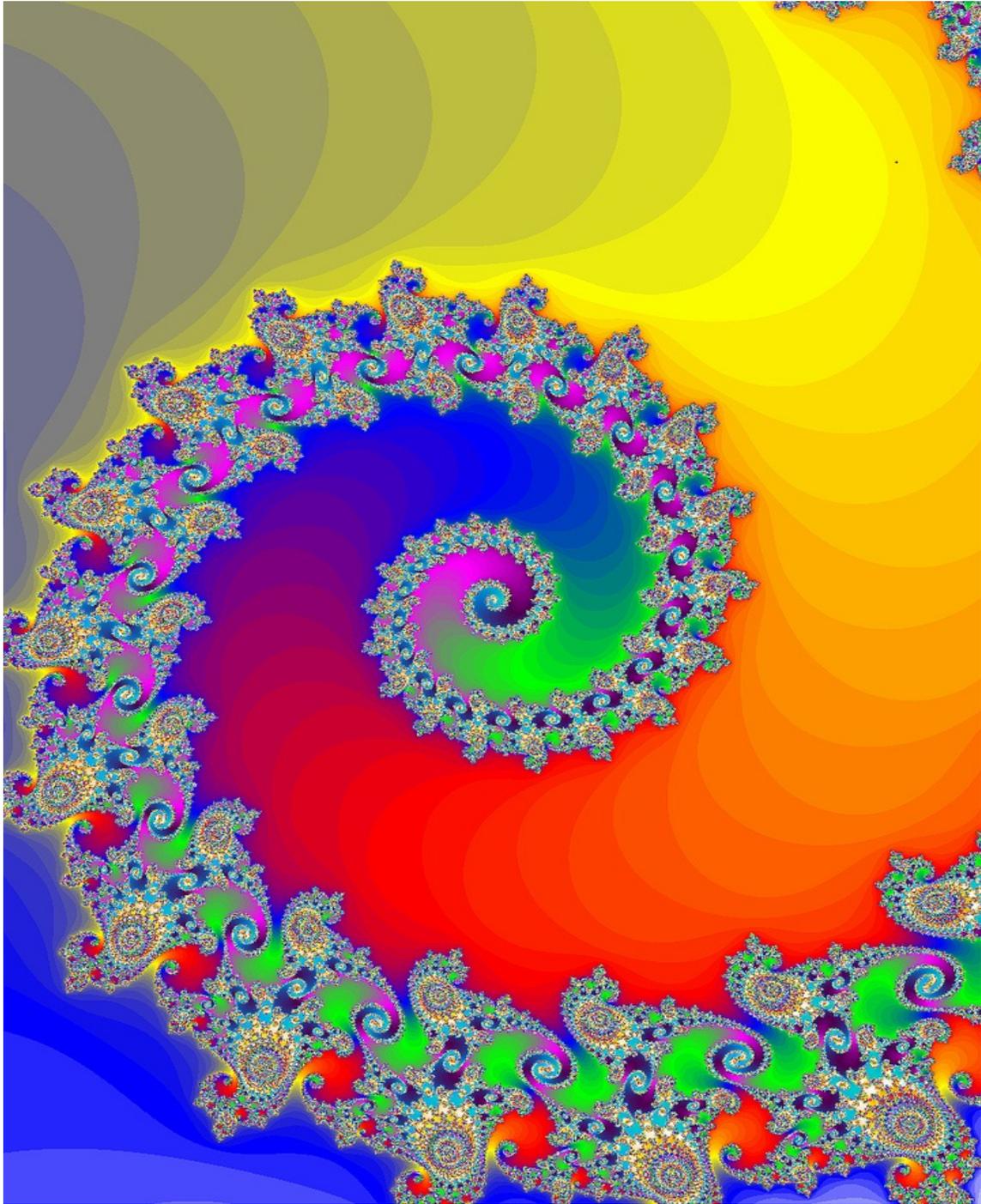


# Drive Cutting-Edge Progress by Improving Inner Engagement



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# Preface

## The issues

This book addresses a number of troubling issues that are prevalent in modern work environments: First, individual employees feel unfulfilled, and they have trouble relating their personal goals to organizational goals. Second, they're not highly motivated, and they tend to distrust management, which seems primarily interested in profit, sometimes even at the expense of ethical decision making. This lack of a 'moral compass' has been in the spotlight for years now in both corporate and governmental environments. Third, management has trouble sustaining, much less optimizing, employee motivation, especially in the current economic downturn.

Individuals striving to accomplish personal projects outside organizational boundaries have similar issues: What are my goals and priorities? Am I too materialistic, driven by profit, or even too goal-oriented? Is there an optimal way to go about accomplishing my goals, a way that would at least foster productivity, learning, and health and well-being at the same time? What is the somewhat mystical 'zone' of peak performance that athletes talk about, and how might it be related to getting things done? Is there a way to characterize the zone that might make it more accessible? Is there a reliable way to elicit more experiences of "playing in the zone?" Can I somehow bring the challenges and enjoyment of sports into my everyday game of life? If so, what might be the playing field, and how would I keep score?

In general, what is cutting edge performance, and how does one 'get there'? Individual contributors and management alike suffer from the lack of a vision and operational method of optimal work, or more generally, peak performance, which provide and actively foster a natural meeting ground for both personal fulfillment and corporate results, and which inspire people toward peak performance, self-actualization, and optimal well-being.

## Summary of the book

We optimize work progress not by focusing on 'externals' nor by focusing our attention on results, which doesn't guarantee improvement of well-being and quality. The driver and key to sustainable business success is continuously improving employees' 'internals', perspectives and qualities of experience, particularly one's inner, moment-by-moment involvement or engagement. Since inner, experiential involvement in the current scenario is directly proportional to employee well-being, productivity, and quality of product and service, tracking

and improving experiential involvement is both an indicator and a driver of all aspects of progress. By focusing on improving inner involvement in our work, we can increase productivity, well-being, and quality—all at once.

## **Introductory definitions and principles**

### **Progress**

One could say that our understanding of the word *progress* determines our priorities in life. Thus the Introduction defines two broad types of *progress*--outer, conventional progress, and inner, experiential progress. *Conventional progress* is what people are normally preoccupied with, whether in personal life or in organizational projects. However, unlike the simple accomplishment of conventional tasks, *experiential or learning progress* represents a lasting improvement in our resources, faculties, or capabilities, in effect raising the ceiling on our productivity and well-being. This unusual distinction between simple task accomplishment and experiential progress allows us to see the leverage gained by the development of our capabilities, and even more importantly also allows the possibility of readily improving our health and well-being while getting things done, instead of wearing ourselves out pushing to accomplish conventional things. We'll discuss how to enable this in Chapter Two.

### **Engagement**

*Engagement* is now a popular topic in the business world. However, engagement has been defined in many different ways, leading to a lot of confusion. So the Introduction distinguishes two main types of engagement, *behavioral or outer engagement*, and *inner engagement*. Most of the current literature on involvement or engagement focuses implicitly on outer engagement, often not even defining the term. However, in this book *engagement* usually refers to *inner, or experiential involvement*, sometimes defined simply as the degree to which one is preoccupied or experientially absorbed in whatever is at hand.

Since our state of mind creates our state of results, it's clear that our inner engagement is much more important than behavioral engagement. However, even among those advocating for improving engagement in organizations, there seems to be little appreciation for the value, methodology, and measurement of *inner engagement*. So Chapter Two includes an extended phenomenological example showing the vast potential for improving inner engagement.

### **Employing the power of self-actualizing motivation**

The concept of self-actualization was brought most fully to prominence by Abraham Maslow:

“Self-actualization means experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption.” (Maslow, 1971, pp. 43-44)

Andrew Grove, former CEO of Intel, wrote, "Once someone's source of motivation is self-actualization, his drive to perform has no limit. . . . unlike other sources of motivation, which extinguish themselves after the needs are fulfilled, self-actualization continues to motivate people to ever higher levels of performance. . . . The most important type of measure is feedback on his performance." (pp. 163-8) An example of how to set up a truly internal self-actualizing feedback system is provided in the extended work example in Chapter Two.

Since self-actualization is our most powerful and lasting motivator, why do we wait to employ it until our other needs have been fulfilled? We may never ‘get around to’ our personal transformation, even though it may be the most important 'project' that we have. What if we put energy into this personal growth, self-actualization, or self-realization project now, first thing? We take this approach, as shown in Chapter Two.

Andrew Grove had some suggestions about how the competitive spirit of self-actualization can be brought into the workplace ‘playing field’: “Imagine how productive our country would become if managers could endow all work with the characteristics of competitive sports. . . . Turning the workplace into a playing field can turn our subordinates into "athletes" dedicated to performing at the limit of their capabilities." (Grove, pp. 168-171) For examples of how to set up self-challenging ‘playing fields’ at work, see Chapters Two and Four. For the general four-step approach, see Chapter Five. Additional perspective on "Building an engagement playing field" at work is in Chapter Eight.

### **Improving engagement drives inner and outer progress**

Research now shows that *inner engagement* in whatever is at hand is proportional to the worker's well-being, productivity, and the quality of the products and services delivered. Thus you can drive balanced, overall personal and organizational progress and well-being by focusing on increasing personal inner engagement/involvement. This seems to be what we all *naturally* do when performing at our best. (See the phenomenological example in Chapter One.)

Tracking involvement or engagement in the current scenario is a "peak performance principle" that can be used while doing any task, as you switch between tasks, or even when there is no apparent task at hand. By consistently improving performance variables measuring our engagement--such as 'flow', 'glow', and 'zero'; or energy, concentration, and awareness, as explained in Chapter Five--we can clear away obstructions and realize our goals. See Chapters Two and Four for examples of how it is used moment by moment at work.

## **A four-step approach for driving and measuring progress**

With our projects, is there a general approach that can we use to accomplish our conventional goals at the same time we accomplish our experiential goals and improve our health and well-being? If a company supported its employees focusing on increasing their experiential involvement in their current work scenario instead of being preoccupied with the bottom line, the likely outcome is that productivity, well-being, and quality in all parts and processes of the company would gradually and simultaneously increase. To implement this approach, and to resolve many of the issues raised in the beginning of this Preface, we suggest a four-part approach detailed in Chapter Five.

## **What's the zone of peak performance?**

What is the character of peak experience, or the zone of peak performance? Are there unconditioned, irreducible, core aspects of experience? How are these aspects related to our 'normal' conditioned experience, and to our ordinary activities in the world? Is the zone a state that both carries inherent fulfillment and facilitates optimal productivity?

Research on the zone of peak performance shows that we function optimally in the 'zone' without the influence of 'normal', complex layers of conditioning. Highlights and main points of this chapter appear under the Chapter Six title. The complete text for the chapter is available in the Members area of the Time-Chi website at [www.time-chi.com](http://www.time-chi.com).

## **Building an engagement playing field**

Chapter Seven discusses how inner engagement is a leading indicator of all sorts of progress, while the bottom line is a lagging indicator of productivity. Once we know that the 'goal' of increasing engagement is complete participation and absorption in whatever's at hand, we can take two approaches: (1) dissolve obstacles and limitations, and/or (2) add to the valued features of experience. You can drive balanced, overall personal and organizational progress--including improving quality, and employee well-being--if everyone focuses on increasing their own engagement rather than focusing on the scoreboard, productivity, or the bottom line, all of which are partial, superficial, and lagging indicators. We thus have an approach to optimal work and peak performance which fosters a natural, unimposed meeting ground for both personal fulfillment and organizational results.

## **The Full Range of Our Participation, or "Who are we anyway?"**

Personal and cultural conditioning enable us to function normally and pragmatically within a culture, but they also limit what we perceive and do in rigid, habitual ways. Are we simply the product of our conditioning, including our psychological 'resistance' to getting things done? Or are we something bigger, more expansive, as suggested by research on peak experiences? Other than our ordinary conditioned state and the 'zone' of peak performance, are there other states it can be helpful to familiarize ourselves with in order to get an overview of what's possible for us as humans?

Chapter Eight describes three main levels or states, including our normal condition and the zone of peak performance, that characterize the range of engagement or participation possible for us as humans, and provide an indication of the changes necessary as we make the transition from 'normal' to optimal.

# Introduction

## Definitions and Principles

### **Definitions: The outer, conventional world and the inner, experiential field**

Whatever we do in life, it has two aspects, the *outer, conventional world* of objects, results, and events, and the *inner world* of our experience, perception, and states of mind.

Today business and Wall Street focus on conventional productivity and the "bottom line," a means of measuring the 'outer' financial health of an organization. However, as Timothy Gallwey clearly pointed out, the *inner* game holds the key to the *outer* game of our lives. "As everyone who has excelled in any sport knows, winning in the long term is largely a function of one's state of mind."

However, "as a culture, we [Westerners] have put much more emphasis on mastering the outer game and making changes in the external world. . . . our understanding and control of the Inner Game has not evolved equally." (Gallwey, p. xx) A main objective of this book is to help improve our understanding and control of the inner or mental game and how it drives both inner and outer progress.

### **Definitions: Outer and inner progress**

It can be helpful to define two broad types of progress, corresponding to the outer, conventional world, and the inner, experiential world. If your concern is productivity or the delivery of services, you are focusing on what may be called *conventional progress*, or *performance goals*, typically measured by the 'bottom line', profits, speed, or quarterly results. On the other hand, if your concern is the quality of experience or personal change, you are focusing on what may be called *learning goals* or *experiential* or *transformational progress*.

Gallwey points out an important, but seldom recognized difference between conventional performance and learning or experiential progress: "The [conventional] performance goals may or may not require any change in capability on the part of the performer. They each describe a single external accomplishment. The learning goals, on the other hand, represent changes in

capability. Each learning goal has the potential to contribute to the attainment of countless future performance goals. The difference in leverage between the development of a capability and the accomplishment of a specific task is largely underrated in a performance-oriented culture." In other words, in the West we favor task accomplishment over experiential progress, seldom taking advantage of the leverage gained by the development of our capabilities.

Of course, both types of progress will usually be of interest, and may be monitored and measured for a project. Since on any long-term project, a preoccupation with conventional progress can easily (and often does) lead to poor motivation or even apathy, burnout, and health issues, it's advisable to somehow balance one's focus on conventional progress with a focus on an inner, experiential progress. In fact, it's recommended that a long-term experiential objective be given priority over conventional goals. We'll discuss how to do this in Chapter Two.

Significantly, Gallwey turns around the usual priority of outer performance over inner progress in asking, "Can we play a satisfying Inner Game and at the same time meet the requirements of the outer game?" He replies: "play to learn, to play to fulfill your own potential . . . you will actually get better performance." My research and practice has verified this. Hopefully you will find it rewarding to put these principles into practice with your own objectives.

### **Definitions: Inner and Outer Engagement or Involvement**

*Engagement* is now a popular topic in the business world. More and more research shows that driving progress by improving engagement--as contrasted with being preoccupied with the bottom line--drives not just productivity, but employee well-being and quality of products and services as well. (For a discussion of this, see Chapter One.) However, engagement has been defined in many different ways, leading to a lot of confusion.

We can distinguish two main types of engagement, *behavioral* or *outer*, and *inner*. Behavioral or outer engagement consists of certain observable, often organizational or social actions. For example, one might join a group concerned with the disarmament movement. This type of engagement is often noted in black-and-white terms--that is, you're either involved in a movement or you're not. Most of the literature on involvement or engagement focuses on this behavioral type of engagement.

However, in this book *engagement* usually refers to *inner*, or *experiential involvement*, sometimes defined as the degree to which one is preoccupied or experientially absorbed in whatever is at hand. A high degree of involvement implies *flow*, *glow*, and *zero*: an effortless yet powerful flow of events, a melding of objects and individuals, and a sense of openness

pervading the entire work scenario. A low degree of involvement implies that individuals and objects are felt to be separate, intense effort is required to get small things done, or the work scenario has a heavy or inert feeling. (See Chapter Six on “What’s The Zone of Peak Experience and Performance?”)

Even among those advocating for improving engagement in organizations, there seems to be little appreciation for the value, methodology, and measurement of *inner* engagement. To see an example showing the vast potential for improving inner engagement, you can examine the account of a work period in Chapter Two.

While inner engagement is also occasionally seen in simple black-and-white terms--whereby one is either 'involved' or 'not involved'--it can be defined and used more precisely as a multivariate performance variable measured along one or more dimensions of the experiential field (see step 2 of the "General four-step approach to accomplishment, creativity, and change" in Chapter Five).

*Outer engagement* behavior, such as attending meetings, is often correlated with improvement in *inner engagement*, such as an intention to contribute more to the organization, but these two types of engagement aren't always closely aligned: it's well known that people can just ‘act the part’: "talk the talk" outside, but still not "walk the walk" inside. On the other hand, it's pretty obvious to most of us that "Our state of mind creates our state of results." (Hansen and Allen, p. 28) Thus of the two, inner engagement is prior, much more important than behavioral engagement.

### **Definitions: Peak performance, peak experience, the 'zone'**

When people talk about ‘being in the zone’ they’re talking about *peak performance*, an exceptionally rewarding or successful way of doing something, such as sports or work. *Being in the zone* is an example of *peak experience*, which Abraham Maslow defined as “a generalization for the best moments of the human being.”

Maslow used the term *peak experience* as a kind of generalized concept because he “discovered that all of these ecstatic experiences had some characteristics in common.” (Maslow, 1971, p. 101) “The person in the peak-experiences usually feels himself to be at the peak of his powers, using all his capacities at the best and fullest. . . . He feels more intelligent, more perceptive, wittier, stronger, or more graceful than at other times. He is at his best . . . . This is not only felt subjectively but can be seen by the observer.” (Maslow, 1962, pp. 105-6)

Although these preceding statements provide useful descriptions, it's not clear what these states are, nor how they differ from ordinary experience. Because of this lack of understanding, for most of us, the zone is a nearly magical state of supernormal performance that, at best, we might 'fall into', almost accidentally. Precisely what this state is, and how we might foster its more regular appearance, is largely a mystery. This is unfortunate, since the term *zone* represents the most fulfilling and productive human experiences. How can we hope for more 'super' moments—during work, education, sports, spiritual pursuits, etc.—when we know so little about the zone?

Suppose we pick some of the statements people have made about the zone, and compare them to our 'normal' Western experience. What might we discover? What is the nature of the zone? How can we characterize it? Is there anything in common to all zone experiences? What if there are several very different kinds of zone experiences? Anything we can learn will probably be helpful in finding the zone ourselves, or at least in avoiding any dead-ends 'on the way' to the zone. These questions and others are taken up in Chapter Six.

### **Definitions: Self-actualization need, self-actualizing motivation**

*Self-actualization* is a term that has been used in various psychology theories, often in slightly different ways. The term was originally introduced by Kurt Goldstein for the motive to realize one's full potential. In Goldstein's view, it is the organism's master motive, the only real motive: "the tendency to actualize itself as fully as possible is the basic drive... the drive of self-actualization." The concept was brought most fully to prominence in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as the final level of psychological development that can be achieved when all basic and mental needs are essentially fulfilled and the "actualization" of the full personal potential takes place. ( See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-actualization> ) According to Maslow, "Self-actualization means experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption." (Maslow, 1971, pp. 43-44)

Andrew Grove, former CEO of Intel, discusses motivation--especially self-actualizing motivation--in his book *High Output Management*. "How does a manager motivate his subordinates? For most of us, the word implies doing something to another person. But I don't think that can happen, because motivation has to come from within somebody. Accordingly, all a manager can do is create an environment in which motivated people can flourish. . . . For Maslow, motivation is closely tied to the idea of *needs*, which cause people to have drives, which in turn result in *motivation*. A need once satisfied stops being a need and therefore stops being a source of motivation. . . ." (pp. 158-9)

"All of the [ordinary] sources of motivation . . . (physiological, safety/security, social/affiliation, esteem/recognition needs) are self-limiting. That is, when a need is gratified, it can no longer motivate a person. . . . For Maslow, self-actualization stems from a personal realization that "what I can be, I must be." . . . Once someone's source of motivation is self-actualization, his drive to perform has no limit. . . . unlike other sources of motivation, which extinguish themselves after the needs are fulfilled, self-actualization continues to motivate people to ever higher levels of performance. . . . A virtuoso violinist who continues to practice day after day is obviously moved by something other than a need for esteem and recognition. He works to sharpen his own skill, trying to do a little bit better this time than the time before, just as a teenager on a skateboard practices the same trick over and over again. The same teenager may not sit still for ten minutes to do homework, but on a skateboard he is relentless, driven by the self-actualization need, a need to get better that has no limit." (pp. 163-4)

"Once in the self-actualization mode, a person needs measures to gauge his progress and achievement. The most important type of measure is feedback on his performance. For the self-actualized person driven to improve his competence, the feedback mechanism lies within that individual himself. Our virtuoso violinist knows how the music should sound, knows when it is not right, and will strive tirelessly to get it right. . . . What are some of the feedback mechanisms or measures in the workplace? . . . The most important form of such task-relevant feedback is the performance review every subordinate should receive from his supervisor." (pp. 167-8)

However, a performance review is typically the opinion of others--and this is very different from the feedback mechanism available "within that individual himself" mentioned just above. An example of how to set up a truly internal self-actualizing feedback system is provided in the extended work example in Chapter Two.

Grove had some additional suggestions about how the competitive spirit of self-actualization can be brought into the workplace 'playing field': "Thus, our role as managers is, first, to train the individuals...and, second, to bring them to the point where self-actualization motivates them, because once there, their motivation will be self-sustaining and limitless. . . . Imagine how productive our country would become if managers could endow all work with the characteristics of competitive sports. And the best way to get that spirit into the workplace is to establish some rules of the game and ways for employees to measure themselves. . . . This is key to the manager's approach and involvement: he has to see the work as it is seen by the people who do that work every day and then create indicators so that his subordinates can watch their "racetrack" take shape. Turning the workplace into a playing field can turn our subordinates into "athletes" dedicated to performing at the limit of their capabilities—the key to making our team consistent winners." (Grove, pp. 168-171) Again, for examples of how to set up

self-challenging 'playing fields' at work, see Chapters Two and Four.

**Principle: Improving engagement drives inner and outer progress, or actualizing values drives inner and outer progress.**

The secret of doing things well while learning and feeling satisfied, is:  $IE = k * WB * P * Q$

In words, *inner engagement* in whatever is at hand is proportional to the worker's well-being, productivity, and the quality of the products and services delivered. Thus you can drive balanced, overall personal and organizational progress and well-being by focusing on increasing personal engagement/involvement, not by being preoccupied with the scorecard, productivity, or the bottom line.

More fully, the key to all types of progress--both inner and outer--is (1) to keep one's conventionally designated goals in mind, and then (2) focus on optimizing inner involvement, engagement in whatever's at hand. This seems to be what we all *naturally* do when performing at our best. (See Chapter One.) We concentrate, integrate our energies, and build our awareness, moving toward absorption in the task at hand. Then the results take care of themselves. "When we keep our eyes on consistently operating our business by aligning with our core values, the scoreboard does in fact take care of itself!" (Blanchard, p. 49)

We could reword it this way: *Actualizing values drives inner and outer progress*. When people perform at their best, their attention is primarily on qualities of the immediate experience of working, or on what could be called *inner performance values* (see Chapter Five)--but they are not preoccupied with measuring or tallying the products and services they are producing or delivering. Again, as Blanchard says, when people do their best, "all of their attention is on what they're doing . . . . The results just seem to flow from this focus of energy . . . . Lots of companies seem to watch only their scoreboard--the bottom line." (Blanchard, p. 3)

Timothy Gallwey asks, "Can we play a satisfying Inner Game and at the same time meet the requirements of the outer game?" His answer is that if you "play to learn, to play to fulfill your own potential . . . you will actually get better performance." Gallwey's publisher says that his books "have led many to realize that the Inner Game holds the key to the outer game of their lives." "As everyone who has excelled in any sport knows, winning in the long term is largely a function of one's state of mind."

Still, rather than our states of mind, most of us are quite obsessed with the conventional, or the ordinary things and activities of life. But then we've lost touch with the most effective

means for realizing our goals, both inner and outer: changing our perspective, the qualities of our experience, and getting completely engrossed in whatever is at hand.

As Tarthang Tulku said, "Caring for our work, being really involved in it, is the secret of doing things well and of deriving satisfaction from whatever we do." Hunt and Hait wrote, "When we . . . are totally absorbed by the activity at hand, we become our most positive and productive selves." (p. 66) By consistently improving performance variables measuring our engagement--such as 'flow', 'glow', and 'zero'; or energy, concentration, and awareness, as explained in Chapter Four--we can clear away obstructions and realize our goals. See Chapters Two and Four for examples of how engagement measures are used moment by moment at work.

The following organizational environment will foster a natural, unimposed meeting ground for both personal fulfillment and organizational results, and inspire people toward peak performance, self-actualization, and optimal well-being--all at the same time: Define a playing field in which people can endlessly challenge themselves to both improve and progress no matter what task or role is at hand. Whatever they can do to dissolve limitations--and in particular to decrease the holding strength of our complexes, negative habits, and other experiential structures (which are absent during peak performance--see Chapter Six on the *Zone of Peak Experience and Performance*)--will help deepen engagement, contribute to their improving performance and fulfillment, and approach the 'zone' of peak performance. Employees can challenge habits that limit progress while participating in a naturally inspiring search for essential qualities of experience such as flow, 'glow', and openness.

Tracking involvement or engagement in the current scenario is a natural "peak performance principle" that can be used while doing any task, as you switch between tasks, or even when there is no apparent task at hand. In addition, as discussed under the *self-actualization* definition, it gradually relieves management of the need to motivate employees, and decreases the friction commonly experienced between employees and management.

**Principle: Awareness brings change (ABC).**

Given that being completely involved is the secret of doing things well, to excel with whatever task is at hand, we try to become aware of, and somehow deal with, any and all obstacles and limitations--anything that keeps us from a totally engrossed state.

But rather than simply trying to get rid of, or suppress these obstacles, Gallwey suggests that "Before you go about trying to change something, increase your awareness of the way it is,"

being aware of the variables that matter. "As you notice what distracts you, your priorities become clarified and focus is strengthened. This is the heart of practicing the Inner Game in any activity. As focus increases, self-interference decreases, and performance inevitably improves." . . . "Paradoxically, it is conscious acceptance of oneself and one's actions as they are that frees up both the incentive and the capacity for spontaneous change."

Tremendous awareness and perseverance are required to break bad habits. Still, it's often said that "What we can measure, we can manage." Or perhaps we could say, "What we can be aware of by means of measuring, we can manage and change." Awareness brings change.

"When we experience this kind of focus [of awareness], excellence in performance seems to happen magically, almost effortlessly. If we could learn to understand the nature of this kind of full attention, we would be able to perform much better in whatever we do, learn faster and more comprehensively, and enjoy ourselves much more in the process."

Gallwey seems to view this more intuitive 'focus' as a simple contrasting alternative to our 'normal' self-awareness and self-image, when our minds are "filled with self-criticism, hesitation, and over-analysis, our actions were awkward, mis-timed, and ineffective."

# Chapter One

## The Peak Performance Principle

*What if a company supported its employees focusing on increasing their experiential involvement in their current work scenario instead of being preoccupied with the bottom line? The likely outcome is that productivity, well-being, and quality in all parts and processes of the company would gradually and simultaneously increase.*

### Main points:

- Most businesses these days proudly state that they are "results-driven," even though focusing primarily on results can negatively affect employee well-being. Seldom is there any emphasis on the fulfillment, health, and well-being of employees.
- Focusing on results actually distracts us from immediate feedback on how work is currently being done. To work well and improve, we obviously need a real-time, instant-by-instant connection with what's going on around us, which can only be provided by our immediate experience.
- Increasing productivity results from noticing the transition points where your experiential involvement could either increase or decrease, and from choosing a direction of increasing involvement.
- *Increasing inner involvement is the key principle for increasing productivity*, yet we don't often realize its importance, nor its depth of application. Approach peak performance by driving *experiential involvement* as high as you can.
- Periodically recall your recent experience as if you were viewing a videotape replay, and look for ways in which you weren't completely involved, just as tennis players look for ways to improve their stroke.
- A high degree of *experiential engagement* implies (1) glow or integration: a melding or identification of worker and objects worked on, (2) flow or unobstructed energy: an effortless flow of events, and (3) zero or spaciousness: an unrestricted sense of openness pervading the entire scenario (see Chapter Six on *The Zone of Peak Performance*).
- *Work capacity* can be increased by confronting conflict at transition points and choosing productive directions, we change. Our energy is no longer so divided, so we are more available for whatever we approach thereafter.
- *Improving involvement improves productivity, well-being, and quality of services and*

*products*. And measuring and tracking involvement in the current situation is a powerful working principle that has the important benefit that it can be used while focusing on *any* task, as you switch between tasks, or even when there is no apparent task at hand.

- Conventional measures should be used to measure progress, but if they are used along with the practice of tracking involvement, the tendency of employees to ignore their own learning, health, and well-being would be played out less frequently.

### **In the games of life, where should we focus?**

Most businesses these days proudly state that they are "results-driven." The primary emphasis is on productivity and financial goals. Sometimes there is a secondary emphasis on quality. There is very seldom any emphasis on the fulfillment, health, and well-being of employees.

However, emphasizing results or the bottom-line scoreboard can adversely affect employee well-being. By focusing on results without a balanced attention to well-being, employees may produce a great deal during a long work crunch, yet burn out in the process. So focusing on results, frequently touted by organizations as a kind of overall 'best practice', does not guarantee optimal employee well-being or even long-term productivity.

Moreover, focusing on productivity, or the bottom line, as a measure of what was completed during some previous period of time such as a quarter of a year, is actually a lagging indicator. It provides some limited feedback on how well previous work was done, but actually distracts us from immediate feedback on how work is currently being done. Focusing on results might be likened to driving by looking in the rear-view mirror. Being preoccupied with previous results leaves us out of touch with what's happening right now--information and perceptions that are essential for real-time improvement of performance. As Kenneth Blanchard asked in *Managing By Values*, when you're playing tennis, what kind of results can you expect if you keep focused on the scoreboard--measuring profit or 'results'--rather than the ball? (Blanchard, p. 49)

To improve our performance in real time, we obviously need a real-time, instant-by-instant connection with what's going on around us. How else can we immediately and continuously adjust to change? And what can possibly provide this feedback except our own immediate experience? But oddly enough, our immediate experience seems to be the last 'place' where people focus when trying to improve their performance, let alone being valued as a field rich with opportunity, or even the best place to focus.

Is this because our cultures teach us to be externally oriented rather than making full use of our inner resources? Because work environments still foster a policy of "check your personal life at

the door?" Because people don't understand how important it is for our productivity and our sense of fulfillment and well-being to be absorbed in what we're doing? Because people don't know the full range of experience culminating in complete involvement? Because we don't know the methods or techniques needed to "get into the zone of peak performance?"

Even among those who are interested in the currently popular concept of *engagement* as a means of improving well-being and productivity, little value is put on what Peter Senge calls "the subtlest aspect of the learning organization—the new way individuals perceive themselves and their world." (Senge, p. 12) We tend to 'look past' our role in modeling and interpreting what's happening in our lives, presuming that what we see and think is just a 'faithful' or accurate representation of what's actually happening. However, our minds and senses prejudice and 'filter' reality, so our changing experiential field may hold tremendous opportunity for improvement.

Despite our preoccupation with the bottom line and other kinds of conventional measures, almost everyone knows that focusing on increasing *inner engagement or involvement* (see the definitions in the Introduction) is the natural way we 'buckle down' and 'get into it' when we have to get something done. By improving inner engagement, or involvement, you can very predictably move from one to the next of seven experiential states, representing increasing engagement: (1) avoiding the task, (2) holding back, (3) being resigned to doing it, (4) getting into it, (5) being involved, (6) being absorbed, and (7) being completely engrossed. Everyone this has been discussed with experiences progress the same way, in this natural progression from detachment toward peak experience and peak performance.

This way of 'getting into' one's activities is a matter of common sense, but we may not be aware of the numerous (particularly nonpsychological) possibilities available in approaching the zone. So let's take a close look at the following example of some of the steps one can take to successfully improve involvement and productivity.

### **What are we naturally doing when we make progress?**

Suppose you're preparing a speech, and you're really into it, very involved. You write down a few key ideas that you want to present, visualize yourself giving the speech, and check the list of ideas to see what is missing. You realize a few points are missing and write them down.

Then you feel a little puzzled about the order of the ideas. There's some momentum to write more ideas down, and there's also some motivation to feel the confusion. You are stuck and don't know how to proceed. You look at the clock and wonder if you should take a break. You

feel your involvement in the task decreasing, and consider ways to completely avoid the task.

You've reached what can be called a *transition point* where your productivity can either stop completely, or continue gradually and maybe even improve. You know that taking a break now would waste time. You'd still have to face things when you came back.

So you drop the distracting thinking about escapes and concentrate on the task again. You remember that you were confused about the order of ideas. You realize it was actually the confusion that you wanted to avoid. But this time you let yourself get confused. Your thoughts go back and forth about how to proceed, and then you get some insight on rearranging the ideas to be presented.

Now you're really involved again. The work's momentum picks up again and gradually accelerates beyond your productivity before the confusion arose. Now the writing really takes on a life of its own. Ideas come easily, and insights are frequent, surprising you again and again. The material seems completely original, coming out of thin air. You wonder at the spontaneity of the writing process and the value of the content written, and feel satisfied as you participate in this process.

Little bits of pride arise, and then, full of confidence, you congratulate yourself on your improved progress. You notice, however, that this self-congratulatory narrative has decreased your involvement and slowed down your work. The self-talk could continue, but you know the flow of the work would diminish. You also realize that congratulating yourself on "your" progress doesn't make much sense, since it didn't feel like "you" were the source of the flow when *it was going* so well. So you relax and let go of the pride, which clears your mind.

What facilitated these instances of improved work flow? Could we simplify and say that increasing productivity resulted from noticing the transition points where your experiential involvement could either increase or decrease, and from choosing a direction of increasing involvement? Isn't this the natural, common sense way that we use to improve productivity without even thinking about it?

### **Increasing involvement is the secret of increasing productivity**

In projects like this there seem to be countless opportunities for improving the degree to which we are absorbed in the current work scenario. As we deal with those that are obvious to us, before long we are presented with transition points that are more subtle.

Most books on time management and productivity improvement don't identify any particular 'best practice', and don't propose anything like what might be called a "peak performance principle." However, a strong case can be made that increasing involvement is the secret of increasing productivity. "Caring for our work, being really involved in it, is the secret of doing things well and of deriving satisfaction from whatever we do." (Tarthang Tulku, *Skillful Means*, pp. 13-14.)

### **The object of the game: Approach peak performance by driving experiential involvement as high as you can**

Is there a limit to how much our productivity can be improved in this way? Who knows? You can take this question as a challenge, and recognize that your workplace is a kind of playing field where, in a sense, you are the only player. As the object of the game, you can try to *approach peak performance by driving involvement as high as you can*. See whether you can reach ever higher levels of performance by getting completely into the task at hand. Improving *inner*, or *experiential involvement* (see the definition in the Introduction) seems to directly and immediately improve productivity.

At work, or afterwards, you can periodically recall your recent experience as if you were viewing a videotape replay, and look for ways in which you weren't completely involved, just as tennis players look for ways to improve their stroke. If you felt any separation from work or the objects being worked on, if you weren't completely swept up in the flow of work, or if your work space felt a bit emotional or heavy, you have identified a way to improve your game. This way of reviewing your recent experience and noting your level of involvement provides *self-actualizing* feedback (see the definition of *self-actualization* in the Introduction) useful in directly improving performance.

A high degree of *experiential engagement* implies (1) glow or awareness: a melding or identification of worker and objects worked on, (2) flow or unobstructed energy: an effortless flow of events, and (3) zero or spaciousness: an unrestricted sense of openness pervading the entire scenario (see Chapter Six on "The Zone"). At this high level of engagement you are approaching peak performance.

As we'll see in Chapter Two, many people find it helpful to graph their percentage of involvement over time. You can estimate the current percentage by comparing your involvement in the current scenario with the full range of your involvement in past experiences, work and otherwise. One hundred percent involvement means that you have been as absorbed in the current scenario as much as you had been in past experiences of greatest absorption in a

situation. Fifty percent involvement means you have been half as involved as when you were most involved in something. Estimates are fine for the purpose of charting--don't try to somehow get the numbers 'right' or 'exact'. The real value of this kind of graphing is to become aware of opportunities for improvement and to be able to track the trend of involvement, rather than trying to identify some presumably accurate figure for the degree of involvement.

### **Increasing involvement improves productivity and also well-being**

At this point there may be a voice in the background asking “My company would benefit greatly from this, but what would I get out of it?” The answer to this is: your health and level of well-being should gradually, yet significantly improve.

Recall a time when you significantly improved your involvement in a work project by breaking through strong emotional resistance. When you broke through, wasn't there an immediate change in the sense of well-being and satisfaction that you experienced? Was there a decrease in the feeling of being at the effect of things, or an increase in confidence? Did the breakthrough boost your overall outlook on life? The increase in well-being we experience during such breakthroughs seems proportional to the amount of emotional resistance transformed.

So measuring and tracking involvement in the current scenario is a powerful working principle that improves both productivity and well-being. This natural practice has the added benefit that it can be used while focusing on *any* task, as you switch between tasks, or even when there is no apparent task at hand.

### **Improving involvement improves quality of services and products**

What if a company supported its employees focusing on increasing their experiential involvement in the current work scenario? The likely outcome is that productivity and well-being in all parts and processes of the company would gradually and simultaneously increase. But there's another benefit: increasing quality.

Noticing your decreasing experiential involvement is the foundation for continuous quality improvement. What else triggers improving a work process except a transition point—conflict, unnecessary complexity, confusion, or wasted energy or effort? These disruptions in work flow are what draw attention to something that can be changed for the better. When something 'slows the flow', involvement in the work process is lessened in a particular way that can serve as a focus for inquiry into the nature of the blockage.

Similarly, defects in a product are discernible only by means of a decrease in our involvement when we are using or perceiving them. For example, a car is a high quality product when the driver can feel one with it. (Some years ago Volkswagen advertised that in contrast to other auto manufacturers that distinguished the driver from the auto, Volkswagen's distinction as an auto manufacturer was that they considered the auto and the driver to be one.) If the steering mechanism of a race car is designed so that the driver usually feels somewhat out of control when making high-speed turns, this decrease in involvement indicates an opportunity for increasing quality. Whenever a product does not meet a customer's need or expectation, the customer is upset, and cannot be 100% engrossed or appreciative when using the product.

### **Improving involvement improves productivity, well-being, and quality of services and products**

So if a company encourages its employees to focus on increasing their involvement, the likelihood of continuous improvement of quality, well-being, and productivity is heightened. The practice of tracking involvement can be used anywhere and anytime, whereas conventional measures of productivity and quality are usually task- or process-specific. Conventional measures can and probably should still be used to measure progress, but if they are used along with the practice of tracking involvement, the tendency of employees to ignore their own well-being would be played out less frequently.

Management might fear that people would take advantage of this approach and use it as license to focus on self-improvement and personal satisfaction, causing a decrease in productivity. However, this objection, while natural, seems unfounded.

First of all, efforts to increase involvement often require letting go of personal desires and preferences. But more to the point, these efforts do not "improve the self," they require that we go beyond individual boundaries and merge with the work process. It seems we cannot reach this satisfaction we desire by approaching it as separate individuals. Any efforts along these lines would be frustrated, since the level of fulfillment in work seems to correspond precisely to the degree of freedom from boundaries.

Second, the objection that tracking involvement might cause a decrease in productivity may simply reflect business's tactical rather than strategic approach to progress. Business seems to be in such a hurry to produce, to improve this quarter's financial results, it can hardly see the possibility or importance of increasing employees' *work capacity*, the average rate at which tasks can be accomplished while maintaining one's level of well-being. Employees tend to be

viewed mechanically, as if able to produce only at a certain fixed rate. However, it may be that at this point in history, significant changes in our productivity will result primarily from improving the *work capacity* of individuals. The quick technological fix may not be sufficient.

*Work capacity* can be increased by increasing experiential involvement in whatever we're doing. If we confront conflict at transition points, work through the conflicts, and choose productive directions, we change. We gradually remove the resistance, emotional reactions, and habitual ways of acting that we carried from task to task. Our energy is no longer so divided, so we are more available for whatever we approach.

While it may be true that in the short run, focusing on improving involvement could lead to lower productivity, eventually whatever conflict preoccupied us at the transition points would be cleared up, and our work capacity would be *greater*, allowing us to accomplish everything thereafter at a faster rate. So it pays to adequately handle our conflicts and know that both we and the company will benefit in the long run. In this way we improve our quality as workers.

This peak performance principle works: *Improving involvement improves productivity, well-being, work capacity, and quality of services and products.* And employees don't need to wait for management to create this kind of playing field. Although the results are probably more powerful when backed by management, employees can focus on tracking and improving involvement (an *experiential goal*, defined in Chapter One) and still be in the same ballpark as management focusing on conventional goals and measures of productivity and quality, since there is no contradiction between conventional and experiential measures.

So how *can* we *best* improve our productivity? This point in time seems to be challenging us as individuals to become aware of our limitations and discover new levels of involvement. By doing this, we can increase productivity, well-being, quality, and our work capacity all at once.

## Chapter Two

### Case History: Monitoring a Transformational Variable

*What project do we seldom seem to 'get around to', yet is probably the most important one that many of us want to put energy into? Resolving conflict, personal growth, self-actualization, or self-realization? Meditation, or religious, or spiritual development? What if we put energy into this kind of project now, first thing? Could we place other projects within the context of this overarching one?*

#### **Main points:**

- Instead of putting things off, what if we put energy into our primary *learning, experiential, or transformational objective* now, first thing?
- First set up your own *engagement variable*, defined as *one's degree of absorption in the current scenario or the situation at hand*, and measured as a percentage from 0-100%.
- Periodically, at whatever time intervals you choose, measure and chart the engagement variable as a way to evaluate how you're doing in real time, and to drive your long-term progress toward personal growth, self-actualization, self-realization, or whatever.
- Monitoring your engagement "means being fully aware and present to the variables that matter." Notice what distracts you, or fragments your awareness.
- Whenever possible, move toward your goals and toward complete engagement as you defined it, dissolving (using any methods you know) whatever obstacles you notice.
- Rather than being obsessed with conventional results, focus mostly on your experiential field and your changing qualities of experience.
- While we may know that *improving involvement drives all types of progress*, we don't often realize the possible range of this principle's application, so this chapter's case history includes a description of some typical psychological changes as one begins, plus a few transpersonal changes that go beyond psychological methods.
- With persistence with transition-point inquiry illustrated in this example, one can very reliably approach and 'enter' the state or zone of peak performance, whose aspects are described in Chapter Six on *The Zone*.

## Shouldn't we monitor and measure our most important project first?

Someone (perhaps on a fortune cookie) said that "The best things in life aren't things." At death also, people usually view personal growth, self-actualization, self-realization, or religious, or spiritual development as having been the most important.

Instead of putting things off, what if we put energy into this kind of *learning, experiential, or transformational objective* (see the Introductory definitions) now, first thing? Then we could work on this objective now, and take up other, more *conventional* (see the Introductory definitions) tasks and projects within the context of this overarching one.

To take this approach, no matter what conventional projects you're working on, first define and monitor your own *engagement variable, E*. (Of course you can call it whatever you like, an engagement variable, self-actualization variable, self-realization variable, performance variable, etc., whatever works for you.) This is to be an experiential variable that can eventually take on a range of values approaching the qualities of peak performance (see Chapter Six on the Zone).

Now, very simply, *involvement or engagement (E)* can be defined as *one's degree of absorption in the current scenario or the situation at hand*, expressed as a percentage from 0-100%. Note that this definition is not task specific, so it can be used in any situation, and for any objectives or projects.

You can estimate the current percentage by comparing your involvement in the current scenario with the full range of your involvement in past experiences, work and otherwise. One hundred percent involvement means that you have been as absorbed in the current scenario as much as you had been in past experiences of greatest absorption in a situation. Fifty percent involvement means you have been half as involved as when you were most involved in something. Estimates are fine for the purpose of charting--don't try to somehow get the numbers 'right' or 'exact'. The real value of this kind of graphing is to become aware of opportunities for improvement and to be able to track the trend of involvement, rather than trying to identify some presumably accurate figure for the involvement indicator.

View your experience as a kind of playing field where you are the only player. As you act to accomplish things, periodically, at whatever time intervals you choose, measure and chart the engagement variable as a way to evaluate how you're doing in real time, and to drive your long-term progress toward personal growth, self-actualization, self-realization, or whatever. Many people find it helpful to make notes in a 'running journal' at the bottom of their chart as they think about their degree of engagement at each point in time.

Monitoring your engagement "means being fully aware and present to the variables that matter. As you notice what distracts you, your priorities become clarified and focus is strengthened. This is the heart of practicing the Inner Game in any activity. As focus [or awareness] increases, self-interference decreases, and performance inevitably improves." (Gallwey, Inner Game books)

Whenever possible, move toward your goals and toward complete engagement (E) as you defined it, dissolving (using any methods you know) whatever obstacles you notice. For most of us there seem to be countless opportunities to improve. As we deal with those that are obvious to us, before long it seems we are naturally presented with possible transition points that are more subtle.

This simple way of noticing your level of involvement can provide feedback very useful in directly approaching peak performance, personal growth, self-actualization, self-realization, or whatever (see Chapter Six on *The Zone*). But keep your *scoreboard* "at the back of your mind." Rather than being obsessed with results, focus mostly on your experiential field and your changing sense of moment-by-moment involvement. Then your health, well-being, and the qualities of experience will be able to shine through. In *Managing by Values*, Ken Blanchard's character Jack Cunningham asked "what kind of performance we thought tennis players would have if instead of keeping both eyes on the ball, they always had an eye on the scoreboard. . . . The harder athletes try to win, the less likely they are to find their zone." (p. 49)

## Case history of changing involvement

To clarify how this *inner engagement* variable can be used, examine the following account of an extended work period during which *engagement* increases gradually for some time, then decreases a while. In Chapter One we mentioned that while we may know that *improving involvement improves productivity, well-being, and quality of services and products*, we don't often realize the importance of this principle, nor its possible depth of application. Thus this example includes a description of some typical psychological changes as one begins, plus a few transpersonal changes that go beyond psychological methods. The numbers in the text below represent *transition points* (see Chapter One) that also appear on the accompanying chart.

### Increasing involvement, points 1-8

I have a speech I need to prepare. There's a feeling of dread. It's Monday, and the speech is to be delivered Thursday. It takes considerable effort to even think about getting started on the script. I need to get it done, but I don't want to. I could avoid the feeling of dread and the task of speechwriting, but I'm not going to be that irresponsible. So I allow the feeling to be there, and begin to make notes about the talk (see point 1 on the chart below). The sense of dread

gradually dissipates.

I visualize myself speaking a few days from now, at a point along a linear time line that extends from here in the present to Thursday. I feel time flowing strongly and relentlessly in the background. There's pressure and a subtle sense of anxiety attending the flow of time. I could focus on the deadline up ahead and the feeling of time slipping by, and make myself more anxious, but I decide to let go of these unproductive concerns and focus on the work (transpersonal point 2 on the chart). The pressure and anxiety about the deadline gradually subside as I turn toward the work a little more.

Time	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Engagement</b>					
100% absorption					
		7 8			
		6	9		
		5	10		
50% absorption	4		11		
	3		12		
	2				
	1				
0% absorption					

*Journal notes can be written here beneath the chart to provide more detail about what you experienced and numbered on the chart.*

After I get more of an outline for the talk, it begins to feel like writing this speech is a kind of “thing” that I have to do, something very separate from me, almost forced upon me. I notice my feeling that it's being imposed from outside. There's a tendency to take the idea at face value, to believe it and react to it. But from another perspective it's clear that no one is forcing me to do this. It's my decision (point 3). As this becomes very clear, I relax a bit and think about what to do next.

Although the task is no longer just an idea to me, I still experience the work from outside, as an observer who is not “into it.” The papers feel distant from my body. I am aware of a lot of other objects in the room, as well as other things that I have to do in the next few days. My

energy is somewhat scattered. The subject-object split and the scattered energy are recognized as signs that there is an opportunity for more involvement in the scenario. I could see these experiences as being normal, but from past experience it's clear that they are common, yet not "normal," and if I take them as being realistic for this kind of work, the work scenario will not improve. I relax into the situation a bit more (transpersonal point 4).

I write down some more ideas that I want to present, visualize myself giving the speech, and check the list to see what is missing. I write down a few more ideas. I feel a little puzzled about the order of these ideas. There's some momentum to write more ideas down as well as a draw to examine the confusion. I know if I simply rush to put more ideas down, I may miss something important. I face the confusion (point 5), and soon realize that a couple of the topics would be better at a different place in the talk.

Things begin to flow a little more easily. Although time is not passing so strongly from past to present to future, more work "events" seem to be occurring every minute, as if some other kind of momentum was accelerating (transpersonal point 6). I reorganize the list, then read the list from beginning to end, once again visualizing giving the talk. At this point I am considerably more involved in the work. I am not aware of other projects I have to do, or other objects in the room. I am not an observer separate from the work. In fact, there is only a slight boundary that is sometimes felt between my mind and body and the papers. When I am thinking, I am often not aware of any objects at all. The quality of thinking is different also, not so much like "I" am pushing the thoughts. Although a bit of effort is required on my part, the thoughts and the work seem to flow somewhat by themselves. And this is not just a feeling, I'm getting the work done more quickly. The insight about rearranging topics clearly came on its own, with no volition on my part. My feeling of time has changed considerably. Time has only a subtle flow apart from me and the work. I feel very little anxiety about time passing toward the deadline.

Now the writing really takes on a life of its own. Ideas come easily, and insights are frequent, surprising me again and again. The material seems completely original. The process is creative in the sense of presenting material that seems new and fresh, not arising from any apparent source (transpersonal point 7). I experience wonder and awe at the process and the accuracy and value of the content written. I feel good about being able to participate in this process. Periodically there are little bits of pride that arise as I congratulate myself on my improved progress. I have thoughts about rewarding myself by taking a break. There seem to be more points at which these interruptions and others are noticed. I could take a break, but I know I would miss the strong flow of the work and the fulfillment I am experiencing, let alone the opportunity to get so much done so quickly. There's insight that congratulating myself on "my" progress doesn't make much sense, since it doesn't feel like "I" am the source of the flow. These distractions are noticed and disappear very quickly (transpersonal point 8).

There are no noticeable feelings of anxiety, fear, or pressure. Nor is there a feeling of time passing. I am not aware of objects in the room, nor of the work as a “thing” or project. There is little felt separation between “my” mind and the thinking and writing being done. I estimate my engagement in the project at 80%. As I made the transitions from points 1-8, my work capacity has steadily improved, allowing me to accomplish more per unit of time.

### **Increasing involvement, points 9-12**

At some point, I get confused about the message I want to get across in the speech. There’s a strong tendency to avoid the confusion, and a pull to continue the momentum of the work and figure out what to write next. My mind starts to wander, and I look at the clock and realize it's almost time for my favorite TV show. I know this is the best time to do this work, but pretty soon I'm thinking about how I might be able to finish my work after the show is over and during my free time the next couple of days (point 9). Yes, it seems possible! I think I have enough time. With some subtle anxiety lurking in the background, I put my work aside, and begin to watch the show (point 10).

The flow of work has stopped and time slips by quickly again. While I'm watching TV, I'm slightly anxious, subtly aware of what time it is and how much time I have till the end of the show, when I'll return to my work. Watching television is not a flow experience now, nor is it as enjoyable as I'd hoped it would be. My mind is divided between the show and being aware that I really want to do my work. I am self-consciously watching TV here in the present, feeling anxious and guilty about a job waiting for me in the future (point 11). My experience is divided into present and future, into an anxious self and the relentless flow of time. Besides anxiety, I also feel guilty or pressured about not getting the job done (point 12). The scenario is complicated, with my awareness divided, time partitioned into present and future, strongly ambivalent feelings about what’s happening, and a persistent sense of separation between myself, the TV, and my work.

### **You can do it**

With persistence with the natural integrative process and transition-point inquiry illustrated in this example, one can very reliably approach and ‘enter’ the state or zone of peak performance, whose aspects are described in Chapter Six on *The Zone*. Abraham Maslow said: “One can learn to see in this Unitive way almost at will.” (Maslow, 1970, p. xiv) Getting into the zone doesn’t have to be accidental, or a matter of luck.

## Chapter Three

### A Lab Exercise: Sorting Cards into Books for Time

*As a way of exploring the opportunities in our 'inner game'<sup>1</sup> of work, we can experiment with a mock work situation, and see what might be holding us back from peak performance--optimal productivity, quality, and satisfaction while doing a task. This is also a great mini-lab to investigate the source of time pressure, to see how involvement relates to pressure, and to see whether physical speed is independent of our feeling of time passing.*

#### First trial

Get a book of playing cards, and shuffle them. Use a stopwatch or the second hand of a clock or watch to see how many seconds it takes to sort all the cards. When you begin, you sort the cards into books—groups of deuces, threes, fours, and so on. Try to do it in less than 60 seconds, which is the 'deadline'. In this first trial, just try to correctly sort the two decks of cards as fast as you can without racing against time.

Get ready, set, go!

After you finish, make some notes about your experience and insight. As you sorted, what was your experience? What kept you from performing better? What was the quality and depth of your involvement, or engagement? Here, *involvement* and *engagement* are measured by the degree to which one is fully preoccupied or experientially absorbed in whatever is at hand. Could you work like that all day long? If not, why? Were there any timeless spots? Did you notice any images or pressure of a deadline closing in on you?

To help better understand what happened during your card sorting, read the following excerpt from *Results in No Time* in which a man named Jed leads the card sorting exercise for his friend Michael.

Jed shuffled the cards a couple of times and handed them to Michael. "Ok.

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<sup>1</sup> *Inner game* refers to the mental aspect of life, and is a term used by Timothy W. Gallwey in his "Inner Game" series of books.

Ready, set, go!"

Michael started steadily and deliberately, putting cards on the table. Then he gradually picked up the pace, still moving quite smoothly.

"Fifteen seconds!" Jed announced.

"What? Already?" Michael said as his eyes bugged a bit. He felt anxious, as time was felt to be a limited resource. His eyes darted quickly back and forth, comparing the stacks to the cards in his hand.

"Thirty seconds!"

"Unbelievable!" Michael was feeling pressured, and wasn't sure whether he'd be able to finish in a minute. He moved jerkily as he estimated whether he had finished half the cards in 30 seconds. He concluded that he hadn't finished half.

"Forty-five seconds!"

Michael didn't think he'd make it, so he tried to hurry a bit more. Then his sorting hand fumbled when he tried to pick up the next card from the deck. That broke his rhythm, and he seemed to be a little confused. He thought he'd have to race to beat the clock now.

"Sixty seconds!"

"Bummer." Michael groaned, but kept sorting. As he sorted the last few cards, he slowed down as if coasting toward a finish line.

"About seventy seconds," said Jed.

"That was awful."

"Really stressful, eh? It looked like you were racing against time."

"I was."

Jed picked up the cards and shuffled them. "How did that happen?"

"I guess I panicked when you said fifteen seconds. I was doing fine till then, no problem with time. But you startled me. The linear view of time snapped into my mind, and I was struggling against the flow of time from then on."

"But you seemed to be doing all right till later."

"Yeah. After thirty seconds, I figured out that at that rate I wouldn't finish in time, so I tried to hurry up. And that just made things worse."

"With that kind of race-against-time perspective you might be able to force yourself and get a good time or two. But if you had to work like that all day long, I think it would eventually affect your health and well-being."

"Yeah," said Michael. "By the end of one day I'd be wiped out."

"I guess that shows how racing against time doesn't work very well. You can't win, because racing has side-effects." (*Results in No Time*, pp. 60-63)

## A second trial

Now try to improve your performance. Focus on clarifying and integrating the experiential field, or optimizing involvement. The process is one of continually dissolving experiential obstacles as they arise, more and more fully integrating and clarifying our inner resources, thereby increasing our work capacity.

This time balance the card sorting with a bit of attention on a particular way of breathing: breathe easily, gently, and smoothly through both nose and mouth, with the tip of your tongue on the upper palate just in back of your front teeth. Let the breathing be very smooth and effortless as you quickly sort the cards. [Tarthang Tulku, *Kum Nye Relaxation*, pp. 38-42.]

Get ready, set, go!

Again, after you finish, make some notes about your experience and insight. As you sorted, what was your experience? What kept you from performing better? What was the quality and depth of your involvement, or engagement? Here again, *involvement* and *engagement* are measured by the degree to which one is fully preoccupied or experientially absorbed in whatever is at hand. Could you work all day long like that? If not, why? Were there any timeless spots? Did you notice any images of a deadline closing in on you? Did the breathing continue smoothly throughout the exercise?

Here's another excerpt from *Results in No Time* in which Jed leads a second iteration of the card sorting exercise for Michael:

Jed offered the cards to Michael: "You want to go for sixty seconds again?"

"Sure. But this time I'm going to use the breathing technique."

Michael took the cards, saying "Give me a minute to warm up for the next heat." He relaxed and began to breathe smoothly through both nose and mouth with the tip of his tongue on the upper palate. During the next minute his breathing gradually slowed down. Jed started the trial: "Ok. Ready, set, go!"

Michael started quickly and smoothly, putting cards on the table keeping a bit of attention on the breathing. It felt a little unusual to move so quickly yet feel a kind of stillness of the breath.

"Fifteen seconds!" Jed announced.

This time Michael wasn't thrown off by Jed's announcement. He just went on sorting and breathing. In fact he kind of fell into a 'groove' or 'flow' where there was no noticeable effort.

“Thirty seconds!”

Michael felt a bit of anxiety about whether he was ‘on track’ to finish in sixty seconds. He noticed that linear time was just starting to take form around him with a deadline beginning to appear from the future, thirty seconds ‘up ahead’. But he didn’t buy into the persuasiveness of the form. There was no ‘point’ or ‘line’ to it. He just breathed through the rough patch and went on sorting.

“Forty-five seconds!”

There was a bit of thinking about whether he’d make it, but the thinking didn’t break the smooth rhythm. “There, done!” Michael announced.

Jed quickly glanced at his watch. “Great! Fifty-five seconds!”

“That felt pretty good! I have more energy now than when I started. I might be able to do it all day long this way.”

“Yes. You don’t seem the least bit stressed.”

“So the breathing exercise seems like a great way to keep from getting anxious when you have to get something done quickly.”

“It prevents the pressure and anxiety related to an imbalance in the head and throat centers.”<sup>2</sup> Jed picked up the cards. “I didn’t notice any effort to ‘beat the clock’ this time. Did you notice any times when you tended to get a linear view?”

“There were only a couple of ‘spots’ where linear time started to take form and cause some anxiety. But they weren’t very convincing. And it never even got close to a ‘point’—as it did the first time I sorted—where I was really involved in the linear view and estimating whether I’d win a race against time.”

“The breathing may have helped there too. The continuity of breathing seems related to the continuity of awareness. So there’s less tendency for linear time—with its splitting of a future apart from a present—to take form.”

“Jed, we talked earlier about how our sense of time passing measures how much you’re resisting

what you’re doing. I have been aware for years of how I resist doing things. But the resistance I used to notice was always in blocks of hours or minutes. I’m not used to thinking of resistance in terms of seconds as I did during the card sorting. This is a new idea for me.”

Jed continued, “Did you notice what was happening with your sense of identity while you did the sorting?”

“Before the thirty-second mark, the sorting flowed, or got into a groove. It was like I disappeared, and there was just this really open and dynamic movement. It went by itself, with no friction or effort.” (*Results in No Time*, pp. 68-73)

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<sup>2</sup> For an explanation of how we come to embody our feeling of time passing in our three main energy centers, see Randall, *Results in No Time*, p. 41.

Now do the card sorting a third time, and see whether you can improve your clock time without racing against the feeling of time passing!

## Chapter Four

### Case History: Monitoring an Emotional Intelligence Variable

*What can we do to control or regulate our varied types of emotions without having to 'stuff' them? Is there a way of learning to regulate our feelings while on the job?*

#### Main points:

- Instead of just trying to get conventional things done, what if we put energy into our *learning, experiential, or transformational objectives* at the same time that we're doing ordinary things? Perhaps we can even get our conventional goals done more quickly by attending in a balanced way to the changing qualities of our experience.
- Set up your own *experiential variable(s)*, defined with a spectrum of performance values that are likely to occur as you work.
- Periodically, at whatever time intervals you choose, measure and chart the conventional and experiential variables as a way to evaluate how you're doing in real time, and to drive your long-term progress toward emotional stability, personal growth, self-actualization, self-realization, or whatever.
- Notice what distracts you, what makes you anxious or frustrated, tends to get you emotionally upset, or fragments your awareness.
- Whenever possible, move toward your goals as you defined them, dissolving (using any methods you know) whatever obstacles you notice, and quickly drop all tendencies to get upset.
- Rather than being obsessed with results, focus mostly on your experiential field and your changing qualities of experience.

#### Call center performance management

Consider an example scenario in which a call center customer service representative (CSR) named John just received a performance review stating that he became upset too often with his callers. His manager requested that he undertake some kind of program to improve the quality of his customer interactions. He consulted with his Human Resources department and talked to a representative named Angel.

Angel suggested bringing more awareness into John's interactions with callers with a training program called a Quality Improvement Challenge (QIC). She said that research showed that simply being more aware of certain aspects of the call would provide more control of emotional reactions.

John was willing to give the QIC a try, and asked what they needed to do first. Angel said they needed to determine some objectives that would satisfy John's manager, so they undertook the first step.

### **1. Determine the object of the game you want to play.**

After some discussion, Angel and John came up with a *conventional goal* (see the Introductory definition) of delivering good customer service phone responses (GCSRs) to 30 callers / day over the next month. That was considered good productivity in the organization. And they came up with an *experiential goal* (see the Introductory definition) of a maximum of 3 negative emotional responses (ERs) to callers per week over the next month.

Angel then checked these goals out with John's manager, who decided that--if met--the two goals would show sufficiently improved emotional control during John's calls.

### **2. Build a playing field scoreboard.**

Angel and John met again to discuss how to play and score John's Quality Improvement Challenge (QIC). Angel said that for each of the two objectives determined, they needed to define specific performance variables with a set of values that each variable could take on.

The conventional GCSR goal was easy. John could simply tally how many good customer service responses he delivered through the day, aiming for at least 30 / day.

The emotional response (ER) goal was more complicated. This was to be an experiential variable that could eventually take on a range of values approaching the qualities of peak performance (see Chapter Six on *The Zone*). Angel said that John needed to determine what kind of experience he thought would constitute a 'failed call'. He replied that it could be feeling some kind of "emotion out of control" during a call. Angel asked what other kinds of related experience would be likely to occur. John said that while he would consider them normal experiences rather than failures, related experiences would be an "emotional current" that would last a minute or two, and "emotional spike" that would last only ten seconds or so.

Angel said that those three performance values--emotional spike, emotional current, and emotion out of control--should cover one end of the spectrum of experiences, and then she asked about the other end of the possible spectrum of emotion. After some discussion, they decided on "equanimity" and "balance," neither of which had any negative emotional component, but represented a kind of "even keel." So the resulting spectrum of GCSR performance values was: equanimity, balance, emotional spike, emotional current, and emotion out of control. Angel said that these values were probably sufficient to get started on the Challenge, though it was probable that John would discover others after he started.

Angel suggested that these ER performance values should be recorded on a chart whenever they occurred during the day. She knew that this would ensure that he would pay extra attention to his experience--and any emotion, in particular--as he worked; and that whatever we can be aware of by means of charting, we can eventually understand, control, and change. She said that the real value of this kind of graphing is to become aware of opportunities for improvement and to be able to track the trend of his emotional experiences. Many people found it helpful to make notes in a 'running journal' at the bottom of their chart as they think about their experiences.

The simple chart they designed for the ER goal included work hours of the day labelled at the top, and possible ER scores (values) on the lefthand side, with a clean chart to be used for each day's scoring. The daily chart, or scoreboard, looked like this:

Time	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3
<b>Experience</b>								
Equanimity								
Balance								
Emotional current								
Emotional spike								
Emotion out of control								
<b>Conventional goals</b>	now				week's goal = 150			
Tally of good calls								

After every call, if John had no emotional blowup, he would add to the tally of good calls, going for 30 / day. And after every hour of work (marked by a countdown timer), he would recall his experience of the hour, and mark the chart appropriately.

### 3. Play and keep score over the time period chosen.

For a few days John worked, paid attention to his emotion-related experience, and found that he had plenty to enter on his chart, with quite a few emotional spikes and undercurrents. But after a few days his feelings seemed to settle down, with fewer spikes and undercurrents. He relaxed into his work a bit more, and less frequently looked forward to 'better times' (breaks, weekends, and vacations, e.g.) as he worked.

Toward the end of the first week of his Challenge, John began to see that he could refine the playing field and the scoreboard. One time he noticed he was getting a little judgmental and 'short' with a caller. During the following call he noticed he was feeling arrogant. So he added "feeling judgmental" and "arrogance" to the performance values. They seemed useful as warning signs that he was getting close to an emotional reaction.

The next day he came to work in a bad mood, and tended to neglect details in his calls. So he added "emotional mood" to the values. Finally, he noticed how "excitement" and "frustration" and "anxiety" tended to lead into emotion, so he added those to the chart. John found this gradual discovery and refinement of his tracking process, and the tracking itself, quite interesting. He felt he was learning something helpful on the job, but something that was also useful for his personal life. Here's the chart resulting from the first week:

Time	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3
<b>Experience</b>								
Equanimity								
Balance								
Excitement / frustration								
Anxiety								
Emotional mood								
Feeling judgmental								
Arrogance								
Emotional spike								
Emotional current								
Emotion out of control								
<b>Conventional goals</b>	now			week's goal = 150				
Tally of good calls								

#### **4. When the time period for the game is over, determine whether you won and review what you learned in the process.**

At the end of John's first game (one week), in his opinion his emotional balance seemed a little better. He felt a little more relaxed, and his feelings had settled down, with fewer emotional spikes and undercurrents. He was actually somewhat enthusiastic about continuing the challenge during the coming week. And his scores for both objectives showed that he won the first week of the Quality Improvement Challenge.

During the second week's game, John was generally more upbeat and even somewhat joyful some of the time. It seemed that this game was providing an opportunity to be aware of, and quickly drop all the tendencies he had to get upset. He was becoming aware of finer and finer mental agitation and frustration, and this seemed to keep anything from really building up into a 'real problem' that would have to be dealt with in any of his old psychological ways.

#### **You can do it**

With persistence with the way of attending to and charting predetermined performance values illustrated in this example, one can very reliably improve emotional intelligence, including the intensity and frequency of various types of emotional 'events', as well as the feelings of balance, joy, and equanimity in one's emotional life.

## Chapter Five

### General Four-step Approach to Accomplishment, Creativity, and Change

*With our projects, is there a general approach that can we use to accomplish our conventional goals while accomplishing our experiential goals and improving our health and well-being?*

#### **Main points:**

- Instead of just trying to get conventional things done, what if we put energy into our *learning, experiential, or transformational objectives* at the same time that we're doing ordinary things? It might be that we can even get our conventional goals done more quickly by attending in a balanced way to the changing qualities of our experience.
- Determine whatever conventional and experiential goals you have in your personal and organizational life.
- Set up your own *experiential variable(s)*, defined with a spectrum of performance values that are likely to occur as you work.
- Periodically, at whatever time intervals you choose, measure and chart the conventional and experiential variables as a way to evaluate how you're doing in real time, and to drive your long-term progress toward emotional stability, personal growth, self-actualization, self-realization, or whatever.
- Whenever possible, move toward your goals as you defined them, dissolving (using any methods you know) whatever obstacles you notice, and quickly drop all tendencies to get upset.
- Rather than being obsessed with results, focus mostly on your experiential field and your changing qualities of experience.

#### **1. Determine the objects of the personal and organizational games you want to play.**

Identify and prioritize your personal conventional and experiential goals using conventional time management practices. (For example, see <http://www.manage-time.com/103Frames.html> on the *Results in No Time* website.) Of the two types of goals, it is usually experiential goals that are neglected, although these are usually the ones that are most important for our happiness.

A personal conventional goal might be to lift weights three times per week. An *experiential goal* might be to minimize negative emotional responses (ERs) to callers to 2 / day over the next month. Another personal experiential or learning goal might be to learn how to back up one's enter PC.

Organizational goal-setting may be done privately by management, or more publicly with participation by other employees. The organization must at the very least, somehow clarify and periodically update its goals and mission, and pass this direction on to all employees. In a call center, as we saw in Chapter Three, a *conventional goal* for a customer service representative might be to deliver good customer service phone responses (GCSRs) to 30 callers / day over each month. These goals then are up for adoption by every individual employee--and it's still up to the individual to decide whether to adopt them. Some individuals may have personal ethical or moral objections.

## **2. Build a playing field scoreboard.**

Keep score somehow. When playing a game, it can be more invigorating and enjoyable to keep score, whether you're playing against yourself or against others. Furthermore, it's often said that "What we can measure, we can manage." In our approach we modify this slightly: "What we can be aware of by means of measuring, we can change." (ABC: Awareness Brings Change.) So we need to consider ways to measure our conventional and experiential goals:

### **a. For each objective or goal you determined in step 1, define specific performance variables with a set of values that each variable can take on.**

For example, for the conventional GCSR goal above, you can simply tally how many good customer service responses are delivered through the day, aiming for at least 30 / day. For the emotional response (ER) goal above, it will probably be necessary to define a set of possible experiences (performance values) for any given caller. Here is one possible set: equanimity (emotional balance), excitement / frustration, emotional undercurrent, anxiety, emotional spike, emotional current, emotion out of control.

Whatever performance values you choose, they can be recorded on a chart whenever they occur during the day. Or you can decide to take readings of all performance variables at regular intervals--every hour, for example. A chart for the ER goal could include hours of the day labelled at the top, and possible ER scores (values) on the lefthand side, with a clean chart used for each day's scoring. (See the chart in Chapter Three.) As you chart you may find it insightful to make accompanying notes underneath your chart.

## **b. Ensure that some performance values approach the 'zone'.**

If one end of the spectrum of these values does not extend close to the zone of peak performance, we recommend that a general 'involvement'/'engagement' experiential variable E also be defined. (In our example above, *equanimity* is 'near' the zone.) E is intended to implement a self-actualization drive that simultaneously promotes a person's health, well-being, work capacity, creativity, quality, and productivity. (See Chapter One.) In case you have many conventional goals this can be particularly useful to ensure some emphasis on learning and improving health and well-being rather than fostering burnout. This should help relieve the dissatisfaction now experienced by so many people: "If we pay attention only to material progress, without also developing an inner focus, it will inevitably lead to frustration and dissatisfaction." (Harary, p. 68.)

There are many ways to define a self-actualizing experiential variable—your choices will probably depend in part on your own personality, goals, and religious or spiritual discipline. Consider the core values that, for you or your organization, will guide and shape the way you fulfill your purpose. Whatever your selection, how you define engagement or involvement will determine what your suggestions are for improving them.

The transformational efficacy of a set of values also depends on the individual's level of development. What's good for most people may not help a peak performer, and vice versa. Because the spectrum of possible values is broad, this approach recognizes that each individual is, and should be, the final arbiter of which values to use for transformational and practical purposes. An individual should be free to reject an organizational value, for example, if it conflicts with the individual's values.

This advice serves both management and the individual employee. Rather than management imposing its values on others, all management has to do is to clarify what values are already 'in use' within each person, to point out how they can serve as the basis and 'starter set' for this approach, and to trust and support everyone's progress. Then this approach should serve as a genuine meeting ground for personal fulfillment and organizational results, and has real potential for breaking through the common employee distrust of management's motives.

## **c. Examples of self-actualizing performance values**

Of course, possible performance values for the E (experience, or involvement, or engagement) variable should also be specified. One simple starter set could be: denial, resignation, holding back, initiating, getting into it, involvement, absorption, being engrossed, and peak experience.

(These are conditions in the engagement spectrum discussed in Chapter 10 of my book *Flow, Glow, and Zero: Discovering the Zone of Peak Performance*.) Then at work you can periodically recall your recent experience as if you were viewing a videotape replay, determine which of these seven performance values best fits your experience, and then look for ways to improve.

For more precision, you can estimate your engagement or involvement on a scale from 0-100, where 100 represents complete absorption in whatever's at hand. The E variable can be charted separately, or on a document with other experiential variables being measured.

Here's a third way to track engagement: define it as a combined measure of three dimensions, awareness (A), concentration (C), and energy (E) (See Tulku, 1994, pp. 120-129). You can assign numbers from 0% to 100% for each of the three dimensions, and use the average of the three values for the combined engagement variable.

Fourth, you could estimate involvement as a combined measure of three dimensions: glow or integration, flow or energy, and zero or spaciousness (see Chapter Six). A high degree of involvement can indicate an experiential melding of objects and individuals, an effortless yet powerful flow of events, and a sense of openness pervading the work scenario. A low degree of involvement can mean that individuals and objects were strongly felt to be separate, intense effort was required to get small things done, or the work scenario had a heavy or inert feeling.

#### **d. Questions to help determine your performance level**

However you define your engagement system, it would probably be helpful to compose some questions to help determine your current performance level and the direction for progress.

For example, for a 'time' variable whose performance values are listed here from the zone-end of the spectrum toward the 'normal' end of the spectrum:

timelessness, flow, absorbed, engrossed, 'into it', fluid, normal linear time-flow, anxiety about time, hurried, pressured, time poverty, racing vs. time, deadline pressure, overwhelmed, panicked

Here are two questions that might be used:

- Are you timelessly involved in something, or do you notice a feeling of time flowing in the background?
- Does your activity seem to flow effortlessly 'by itself', or are you applying effort or control to something that feels separate from you?

### **e. Refine the performance values as you play the game.**

Although this second step may be the most complicated part of the 'game', we suggest just taking a 'first cut' at defining the performance variables and values and get started. Unlike many other games, in this kind of game only you make the rules. Rather than trying to get it 'right' the first time, as you play you can refine the playing field and the scoreboard and determine more precisely what you're interested in, how to measure it, and in general, how you can best get your results.

### **3. Play and keep score over the time period chosen.**

View your experience as a kind of playing field where you are the only player. As you act to accomplish your goals, periodically (at whatever times you chose in step 2) measure and chart the performance variables as a way to evaluate how you're doing in real time, and to drive your long-term progress. And it can be very helpful to make notes in a 'running journal' at the bottom of your chart.

"Practicing focus means being fully aware and present to the variables that matter. As you notice what distracts you, your priorities become clarified and focus is strengthened. This is the heart of practicing the Inner Game in any activity. As focus [or awareness] increases, self-interference decreases, and performance inevitably improves." (Gallwey)

Whenever possible, move toward your goals and toward complete engagement (E) as you defined it, dissolving (using any methods you know) whatever obstacles prevent improving performance. For most of us there seem to be countless opportunities to improve. As we deal with those that are obvious to us, before long it seems we are naturally presented with possible transition points that are more subtle.

Keep your scoreboard "at the back of your mind." Rather than being obsessed with results, focus mostly on your experiential field. We do our work while being aware moment-by-moment (if our values are sufficiently 'granular') of our chosen performance values, our inner felt experiences.

Again, don't be preoccupied with the scoreboard. In *Managing by Values*, Ken Blanchard's character Jack Cunningham asked "what kind of performance we thought tennis players would have if instead of keeping both eyes on the ball, they always had an eye on the scoreboard. . . .

The harder athletes try to win, the less likely they are to find their zone. When people are in the zone, all of their attention is on what they're doing, not on what they're accomplishing. The results just seem to flow from this focus of energy and competence. Lots of companies seem to watch only their scoreboard—the bottom line. In doing so, they take their eyes off the ball . . . . That gets them out of the zone and invites long-term disaster. . . . I've gained both increasing confidence in and, yes, genuine commitment to the priority of our values . . . . When we keep our eyes on consistently operating our business by aligning with our core values, the scoreboard does in fact take care of itself!" (p. 49)

**4. When the time period for the game is over, determine whether you won and review what you learned in the process.**

Then you can revise your goals and performance variables / values as desirable, and play again and see whether you can improve. The general 'involvement'/'engagement' experiential variable -- and possibly other experiential variables you've defined as well-- should serve as a persistently motivating means of self-actualization. Eventually you should be able to clear away all obstacles while steadily realizing your goals. And if you don't get the results you want, you can change the rules, or even change the whole game!

## Chapter Six

### What's the Zone of Peak Experience and Performance?

*What else is possible besides our 'normal' conditioning? What is the character of peak experience, or the zone of peak performance? Are there unconditioned, irreducible, core aspects of experience? How are these aspects related to our 'normal' conditioned experience, and to our ordinary activities in the world? Is the zone a state that both carries inherent fulfillment and facilitates optimal productivity?*

#### Main points:

- In peak experience the frequent absence of our 'typical' *self*, or *identity* stricture is usually accompanied by a remarkable sense of freedom from the habits, personality complexes, and relationship issues that are built 'on top of' the self stricture.
- Zone experiences can be characterized by the words *flow*, *glow*, and *zero*, with varying proportions of these attributes in different experiences.
- *Flow* is a dynamic, most often timeless, sense of frictionless energy or unobstructed movement. Things feel as though they do not require effort against some friction, pressure, or resistance. This is in contrast to the 'normal', lower-level sense of time *flowing* in ways that seem to require effort, strain, or struggle on our part.
- *Glow* is a multidimensional luminosity that accompanies perceiving, thinking, and knowing. Instead of apprehending particular content from a single 'point of view', awareness is felt to be nonlocated, not bound to a center, observer, or owner.
- *Zero* represents dimensionless or multidimensional, nonextended surfaces and forms pervaded by an undivided openness that reflects deep relaxation.
- Zone experiences are not characterized in the least by the presence or absence of particular ordinary objects, processes, or events.
- Zone experiences are characterized by a remarkable absence of strictures (recurring *structural features of experience*), including *size*, *world*, *felt distance*, *here-there*, and *substance*, *constant time flow*, *linear time*, *before-after*, *now-then*, *duration*, *effort/self-control*, *self* or *identity*, *inside-outside*, *felt distance*, *here-there*, and *knower-known*.
- The ultimate or deepest zone experiences--perhaps of those who are called *self-actualized* or *enlightened*--would be devoid of *all traces of all strictures*.
- Any activity is optimized during absorption in the zone of flow, glow, and zero.

- The zone is an important, natural meeting ground of the individual worker's concern with fulfillment and optimal well-being with the organization's concern with optimizing productivity and quality of product and service.

## **The zone defined**

When people talk about 'being in the *zone*' they're talking about having a peak experience that fosters, or at least accompanies *peak performance*, an exceptionally rewarding or successful way of doing something, such as sports or work. A *peak experience* is an inherently fulfilling state that Maslow defined as "a generalization for the best moments of the human being."

For most of us, the *zone* is a nearly magical state of supernormal performance that, at best, we might 'fall into', almost accidentally. Precisely what this state is, and how we might facilitate its more regular appearance, is largely a mystery. This is a sad state of affairs, since the *zone* brings our most fulfilling and productive human experiences. How can we hope for more 'super' moments--during work, education, sports, spiritual pursuits, etc.--when we know so little about it?

To do our best, it would be helpful to have a clear idea of how things look moment-by-moment in the zone. Is there some general vision of peak performance? If it's general, applicable to any person, environment, and task, it cannot logically be defined in terms of specific things, processes, structures, traits, or styles. This would align with the popular statement that "The best things in life aren't things."

Determining such a general vision may seem elusive, because rather than our usual emphasis on things, personality traits, and processes, it would focus on what Peter Senge calls "the subtlest aspect of the learning organization—the . . . way individuals perceive themselves and their world." (p. 12, Senge)

## **Personal exploration**

But don't we all have some experiences of being in the zone? Don't we all have an idea of what it means to do our best at something? What if we do something almost never done in research on the zone of peak performance—look closely at our own peak experiences to see what was essential?

Let's explore our past peak experiences a bit and see what we can learn from them:

What were some peak experiences you had? Perhaps the best athletic experiences, or spiritual experiences, or work or relationship experiences.

Take half an hour to recall a number of them, and make some notes about them. This will probably be a very pleasurable half hour. Note the essential qualities of the experiences that you recall. What was the essence of the experiences? What made them your 'best?' . . .

Can you draw any conclusions from your investigation? Do the experiences all have different qualities? Do some of your peak experiences have some of the same qualities? Do they have the same qualities but different proportions of the same qualities?

### **Research on peak performance literature**

Now we can review reports of peak experiences from people of numerous cultures and situations. Suppose we pick some of the statements people have made about the zone, and try to compare them to our 'normal' Western experience. What can we discover?

What is the nature of the zone? How can we characterize it? Is there anything in common to zone experiences? Are there several different kinds of such experiences? Anything we can learn will probably be helpful in finding the zone ourselves, or at least in avoiding any dead-ends 'on the way' to the zone. Wouldn't it be great if we can get a better sense of direction in improving fulfillment, happiness, realization, and insight?

### **The absence of numerous structures of experience**

Let's examine some anecdotes about changes in the sense of *identity* and our 'way of knowing' during zone experiences. When in the zone, what was people's experience of identity like? How was it compared to that during 'normal' experiences? Did people feel their usual sense of independence, separate individuality, and personality, or did they feel otherwise identified?

Here's a report from a Japanese swordsman: "When the identity is realized, I as swordsman see no opponent confronting me . . . I seem to transform myself into the opponent, and every movement he makes as well as every thought he conceives are felt as if they were all my own . . . (p. 130, Murphy and White) This swordsman in the zone feels identified with his opponent,

without his ordinary identity. With my 'normal' sense of myself, I feel like an independent individual who is separate from other people, rather than identified in some way; and an opponent usually seems even *more* separate, more 'different' from 'me'. Perhaps even more remarkable about this statement is that the swordsman seems aware of "the other's experience"--which usually is private, internal, or unknown--as if his own.

A judo teaching manual has a similar statement about changes in our normal identity: "When judo is practiced properly, 'there will be no curtain to separate you from your opponent. You will become one with him. You and your opponent will no longer be two bodies separated physically from each other but a single entity . . .'" (p. 32, Murphy and White) And Maslow reported that during peak experience, a person "is more able to fuse with the world, with what was formerly not-self, e.g., the lovers come closer to forming a unit rather than two people . . . The creator becomes one with his work being created . . . The appreciator becomes the music . . ." (p. 105, Maslow, 1962) Thus in the zone there is a kind of merging or fusion or unity.

Now, what happens with our 'way of knowing' during zone experience? Weightlifter Yuri Vlasov said, "Everything seems clearer and whiter than ever before, as if great spotlights had been turned on." (p. 119, Murphy and White) We can compare this to Tarthang Tulku's description of what happened with his way of knowing as he discovered a new vision of reality: "The conventional limitation that confines observation to a single 'point of view' situated in space and time had less hold. Knowledge itself seemed to be opening, like a light that had previously been obscured by now was radiating from all directions. This knowledge was . . . less a possession to be obtained than a luminous, transparent 'attribute' of experience and mental activity." (p. xlv, LOK) The latter statement contrasts our usual way of knowing and observing things from a single point-of-view (the 'knower' pole of the *knower-known stricture*---a somewhat stable structural feature of experience), with a more open way of knowing or being aware involving a multidimensional, or equivalently, nondimensional luminosity. This luminosity or unpositioned knowing could be what weightlifter Vlasov said was "clearer and whiter than ever before."

From these few statements we see that numerous 'normally present' *complexes* or *strictures*--somewhat stable structural features of experience--are not part of these zone experiences: the feeling of being a continuously existing individual separate and distinct from other individuals (this stricture is often called *self*, or *identity*), the sense of being here rather than there (the *here-there* stricture), the feeling of having a private inside realm of experience contrasted with a public area where we coexist (*inside-outside* stricture), the sense of being a positioned knower during an act of knowing (the *knower-known* stricture), and the feeling of distance or separation between physically separate bodies (*felt distance* stricture). In the last stricture, we're not talking about physical distance or separation, but the *feeling* of separation,

which can change considerably, leading us to sometimes say we feel closer or more distant from another.

Since in 'normal' experience our problems feel nearly 'everpresent', it's worth highlighting that in peak experience the frequent absence of our 'typical' *self*, or *identity* stricture is usually accompanied by a remarkable sense of freedom from the habits, personality complexes, and relationship issues that are 'normally' dependent on, or at least accompany the self stricture. In a statement expressing this, Charles Lindbergh said that for a while during his flight, he felt "free from the gravitation that binds men to heavy human problems of the world." (p. 65, Murphy and White) It's almost as if in the zone, the foundational self 'rug' is pulled out from under psychological problems.

### **Glow: multidimensional, pervasive, centerless luminosity**

Having considered various aspects of experience related to identity and knowledge, we might say, as a shorthand expression, that zone experiences can often be characterized by the word *glow*: a multidimensional luminosity that accompanies perceiving, thinking, and knowing. Instead of apprehending particular content from a single 'point of view', awareness is felt to be nonlocated, not bound to a center, observer, or owner. Peak experience lacks the 'normal' complexes or strictures of self or identity, inside-outside, felt distance, here-there, and knower-known.

### **The absence of common time strictures**

Next let's examine a few anecdotes discussing time, movement, and energy flow. In the zone, what was people's experience of time like? How did time feel to them? Did it move fast, slowly, or did it change speed? Was it somehow timeless? How did their zone experience compare to 'normal' experience?

Here's one report: "There is a common experience in Tai Chi . . . . Awareness of the passage of time completely stops." (p. 47, Murphy and White) Here's another, by football player John Brodie: "Time seems to slow way down . . . . It seems as if I had all the time in the world . . . and yet I know the defensive line is coming at me just as fast as ever." (p. 42, Murphy and White) Normally, in Western cultures at least, adults experience a very constant, even relentless flow of time among past, present, and future. We might call this stricture *constant time flow*. However, in these statements we see very different experiences, including time slowing way down, or even apparently stopping. As with physical distance and separation discussed above,

we're not talking here about physical time, but the *feeling* of time flowing, which might possibly be independent of physical time.

Another stricture usually present in our normal experience of time is what we might call *before-after*, wherein one or more events are felt to occur in a series. However, in reports on the zone we find other possibilities. Baseball player Tom Seaver reported: "As Rod Gaspar's front foot stretched out and touched home plate, in the fraction of a second before I leaped out of the dugout . . . my whole baseball life flashed in front of me . . ." (p. 47, Murphy and White) Apparently one can experience many 'normally' sequential events or memories *all at once*. Meditation master Tarthang Tulku confirms this. "The boundaries distinguishing five minutes from one second are unreal in a certain sense, and so any amount of experience constituting five minutes could also be had in one second. The 'small' interval is not really smaller, nor is the 'larger' one really larger." (pp. 41-2, Moon and Randall)

Now, considering movement and energy flow during peak experience, we find a report about football player Red Grange: "[he] runs . . . with almost no effort. . . . There is only the effortless, ghostlike, weave and glide upon effortless legs." (p. 86, Murphy and White) From golfer Bobby Jones: "I was conscious of swinging the club easily . . . I had to make no special effort to do anything." (p. 86, Murphy and White) Normally, whatever we do takes a degree of effort and involves a feeling of control during the activity, what we might call the stricture of *effort/self-control*. This stricture is usually absent during peak experience, as Maslow also reported: "[An] aspect of fully-functioning is effortlessness and ease of functioning when one is at one's best. What takes effort, straining and struggling at other times is now done without any sense of striving, of working or laboring, but 'comes of itself.' Allied to this often is the feeling of grace and the look of grace that comes with smooth, easy, effortless fully-functioning, when everything 'clicks,' or 'is in the groove,' or is 'in over-drive.'" (p. 106, Maslow, 1962)

### **Flow: frictionless or unobstructed energy and movement**

Having considered various aspects of experience related to energy flow and time, we might say, as a shorthand expression, that zone experiences can often be characterized by the word *flow*: a dynamic, most often timeless, sense of frictionless energy or unobstructed movement. In the zone, things feel as though they do not require effort against some friction, pressure, or resistance. This is in contrast to the 'normal' sense of time flowing in ways that seem to require effort, strain, or struggle on our part. Peak experience lacks the 'normal' strictures, or repetitively recurring structural features of experience, of constant time flow, linear time, before-after, now-then, duration, and effort/self-control.

## Dissolving common space strictures

Having briefly explored the zone experience of time, energy flow, identity, and knowledge, now let's consider the zone experience of space. What was people's sense of space compared to that of 'normal' experiences? Did space seem like just an empty container that separated things? Did people feel more connected or separated than usual? Was the usual feeling of size of things and regions altered somehow?

From his extensive research, Maslow wrote that in peak experience "The astronomer is "out there" with the stars (rather than a separateness peering across an abyss at another separateness through a telescopic-keyhole)." (p. 105, Maslow, 1962) Thus again, as in the swordsman's statement above, we see an absence of *felt distance*, as well as the *here-there* stricture. Missing from our 'normal' frame of reference is the *subject-object* stricture, a sense of an observer or subject or perceiver separate and distinct from what's observed or perceived or experienced.

Another aspect of our typical experience of space is the *size* stricture, whereby we feel magnitude of linear dimensions, objects, and areas--again, this is in contrast to *physical* measurement. Golfer Jack Fleck said: "I can't exactly describe it, but as I looked at the putt, the hole looked as big as a wash tub." (p. 38, Murphy and White) Size--both as physical measurement, and as *subtle feeling*--is usually presumed to be constant, but as this statement indicates, our *feeling* of size is not constant. Again, from Maslow's research on peak experience: "One small part of the world is perceived as if it were for the moment all of the world." (p. 88, Maslow, 1962) The size and typical frame of reference strictures are 'not there'. Also, the *world* stricture, whereby we have a very subtle feeling of being within a large world or universe--another feeling that is considered 'normal' and taken for granted--is not there. According to auto racer Jochen Rindt, "You forget about the whole world and you just . . . are part of the car and the track." (p. 23, Murphy and White)

Also related to space, we can consider the typical feeling that things seem to have a kind of substance or reality (a *substance* stricture) rather than, e.g., being akin to images in a dream, fantasies, illusions, or hallucinations. In contrast to the 'normal' sense of living in a substantial world, long-distance runner Bill Emmerton said, "I felt as though I was going through space, treading on clouds." (p. 17, Murphy and White) And another runner, Ian Jackson said, "My body seemed insubstantial like some ethereal vehicle of awareness." (p. 135, Murphy and White) Pilot Charles Lindbergh wrote, "All sense of substance leaves. There's no longer weight to my body, no longer hardness to the stick. The feeling of flesh is gone." (p. 116, Murphy and White) Albert Einstein claimed that "Everything is made of emptiness and form is condensed emptiness." (Einstein) Though normal, the perception of substance may be an unnecessary limitation.

Tarthang Tulku suggests that the sense of emptiness or transparency depends on our level of relaxation: "Surfaces can appear as such and still be more transparent, because—in a sense—they 'reflect' the degree of our own relaxation." (p. 16, TSK)

### **Zero: nonextended and undivided openness**

Having considered various aspects of experience related to space, we might say, as a shorthand expression, that zone experiences can often be characterized by the word *zero*: dimensionless or multidimensional, nonextended surfaces and forms pervaded by an undivided openness that reflects deep relaxation. Peak experience typically lacks the 'normal' strictures, or repetitively recurring structural features of experience, of size, world, felt distance, here-there, and substance.

### **What can we conclude? What's the zone like?**

Now let's return to questions we brought up earlier: How can we describe the zone? Is there anything in common to all zone experiences? Anything that is missing from all of them? Are there several different kinds of zone experiences?

### **The zone is not characterized by any ordinary thing, pattern, situation, trait, or event**

First, it's important to note that essential zone experiences are not characterized in the least by the presence or absence of particular ordinary objects, processes, traits, or events. Indeed, "the best things in life aren't things." They seem to be invisible intangibles. The anecdotes mention, yet do not specify or focus on conventionally designated things or events--which of course are precisely what we ordinarily *do* focus on in 'normal' experience. No wonder the zone is so difficult to recognize, or even to adequately describe!

Perhaps we can put our finding differently: it seems that in one sense, forms, events, and appearances 'don't in themselves look different' as one becomes enlightened. It's *the way that we experience* these same things, our state or perspective that is different, as we will now discuss.

## **The zone lacks persistent structural features of experience**

Second, these experiences are characterized by a remarkable absence of *strictures*, or recurring structural features of experience. Instead of our 'normal' frame of reference--the sense of an observer or subject or perceiver with a 'point of view' separate and distinct from what's observed or perceived--zone experience shows a merging or fusion of knower and known, accompanied by a multidimensional luminosity. Absent is our 'typical' self, or identity stricture, by which we feel we are continuously existing individuals separate and distinct from each other; instead there's a sense of freedom from the 'usual' constraints of self, including the absence of complexes and personality and relationship issues normally 'belonging to' the self stricture. There can be a sense of timelessness, or of time slowing down or stopping instead of the typical sense of time flowing at a constant and unchangeable rate. We might experience many memories simultaneously instead of one at a time. Things may seem effortless in the zone, rather than requiring the effort, strain, or struggle of other times. There can be an absence of felt distance, along with a lack of the sense of here contrasted with there. 'Normal' feelings related to size and the world may not be present.

So, based on the anecdotes above, we see that peak experiences usually lack at least these complexes or strictures: size, world, felt distance, here-there, and substance, constant time flow, linear time, before-after, now-then, duration, effort/self-control, self or identity, inside-outside, felt distance, here-there, and knower-known. These are common, fundamental, stable, and restrictive structures 'normally' inculcated by Western cultures, and quite possibly by other cultures as well. Freedom from such 'normally presumed and persistent' restrictions is likely what makes zone experiences "so valuable that they make life worth while by their occasional occurrence." (p. 80, Maslow, 1962)

## **The zone is probably devoid of all strictures**

Although only the anecdotes above do not justify drawing this conclusion, we might reasonably speculate and hypothesize that the ultimate or deepest zone experiences--perhaps of those who are called self-actualized or enlightened--would be devoid of all traces of all strictures, not just those discussed here.

The following statements confirm this hypothesis:

"Since everything reverts to a state of evenness . . . there is no identifiable frame of reference. . . There is no reference point . . . ." (Longchenpa)

"We may have had glimpses of a higher destiny, but to shape our lives in accord with that vision, we must learn quite specifically how to activate an inquiry that can cut through the structures of our present knowing." (p. 71, VOK)

"The whole idea is that we must drop all reference points, all concepts of what is or what should be. . . . Movement happens within vast space." (pp. 14-15, Trungpa, 1976)

"In itself, the exhibition is simple . . . . There are no fixed points and no fixed identity, but quality and character remain." (p. 242, KTS)

"A different kind of 'space' . . . accommodates the presenting of all 'things' and undermines all sense of locatedness and directedness." (p. 271, TSK)

"Knowledge unfolds without heading in a specific direction; instead, it challenges the reference points that establish directionality." (p. 63, VOK)

So essential human experiences apparently lack all structures of experience, all persistent frameworks upon which ordinary experience is built. And 'seeing through' these structures may be sufficient to realize the depth available: "Once we let go of the substantial, we are left with the magic of manifestation. . . . We can invite a knowledge that condenses and enriches the mystery that is living reality. . . . *only the structures of consciousness* insist on covering over the mystery with the familiarity of the previously recorded." (italics mine, pp. 158-9, DTS) Just as the breaking up of clouds simultaneously brings greater light, dissolving the strictures clouding our states may be sufficient to expose the zone of peak performance. If this is true, by removing the strictures we have a very direct path to the zone of peak performance and realization.

### **Flow, glow, and zero--facets of peak performance**

As we saw above, zone experiences can also be characterized affirmatively. Having considered various aspects of experience related to time, energy flow, identity, knowledge, and space we might say, as a shorthand expression, that essential zone experiences can be characterized by the words *flow*, *glow*, and *zero*: qualities of unobstructed flow (a time dimension), luminous presence and positionless knowing (an identity/knowing dimension), and pervasive, nonextended, and undivided openness (a space dimension), with varying proportions of these attributes in different experiences.

*Flow*: a dynamic , most often timeless, sense of frictionless energy or unobstructed movement. In the zone, things feel as though they do not require effort against some

friction, pressure, or resistance. Peak experience lacks the 'normal' strictures, or repetitively recurring structural features of experience, of constant time flow, linear time, before-after, now-then, duration, and effort/self-control.

*Glow*: a multidimensional luminosity that accompanies perceiving, thinking, and knowing. Instead of apprehending particular content from a single 'point of view', awareness is felt to be nonlocated, not bound to a center, observer, or owner. Peak experience lacks the 'normal' strictures of self or identity, inside-outside, felt distance, here-there, and knower-known.

*Zero*: dimensionless or multidimensional, nonextended surfaces and forms pervaded by an undivided openness that reflects deep relaxation. Peak experience lacks the 'normal' strictures, or repetitively recurring structural features of experience, of size, world, felt distance, here-there, and substance.

Clearly all of these can be present in a given zone experience, as exemplified by Charles Lindbergh's statement: [For a while during my flight across the Atlantic it was] "as though I were an awareness [positionless knowing] spreading out through space . . . [complete openness], unhampered by time [unobstructed flow] or substance, free from the gravitation that binds men to heavy human problems [positionless knowing or awareness without personality complexes] of the world." (p. 65, Murphy and White)

### **Any activity is optimized during absorption in the zone of flow, glow, and zero**

Since our investigation here has included all peak experience, including peak performance during all kinds of activities, we can logically conclude that *all activities are best done in the zone, in the flow, glow, and zero state*. But what if being in the zone deludes us into thinking we're doing our best when we're actually not? What if we're just 'high' and out of touch with what's actually happening?

Numerous researchers confirm that being in the zone actually does optimize getting results: "The person in the peak-experiences usually feels himself to be at the peak of his powers, using all his capacities at the best and fullest. . . . He is at his best . . . . This is not only felt subjectively but can be seen by the observer." (pp. 105-6, Maslow, 1962)" "When people are in the zone, all of their attention is on what they're doing . . . . results just seem to flow from this focus of energy . . . . companies seem to watch only their scoreboard—the bottom line. . . . That gets them out of the zone and invites long-term disaster." (p. 49, Blanchard) "When we . . . are totally absorbed by the activity at hand, we become our most positive and productive selves. . . .

Engrossed in the now, we slip effortlessly into a no-boundary place in time and space, a timeless dimension where energy abounds and time is irrelevant.” (p. 66, Hunt and Hait) As hotelier Chris Conley said, “I came to realize that creating peak experiences for our employees, customers, and investors fostered peak performance for my company. . . . It’s all about where you put your attention.” (*Peak*, p. 13)

The zone state brings an inherent sense of fulfillment and well-being, and is the state during which both optimal quality and peak productivity are realized. Thus we have discovered in the zone a natural meeting ground of the individual's concern with personal goals and fulfillment, and the organization's concern with optimizing productivity and quality of products and services. This common ground is the playing field where employees and employers alike can thrive and make progress in every sense of the word.

## Chapter Seven

### Building An Engagement Playing Field

*Personal and cultural conditioning enables us to function normally and pragmatically within a culture, but it also limits what we perceive and do in rigid, habitual ways. Are we simply the product of our conditioning, including our psychological 'resistance' to getting things done? Or are we something bigger, more expansive, as suggested by research on the zone and peak experiences? Other than our ordinary conditioned state and the zone of peak performance, are there other states it can be helpful to familiarize ourselves with in order to get an overview of what's possible for us as humans? Is there an example of how one changes from one state to another? Is there a broader way to view these changes other than as a transition from one subjective state to another?*

#### The Challenges

As mentioned in the Preface, modern work environments suffer from a number of issues: First, employees feel unfulfilled, and they have trouble relating their personal goals and values with organizational goals. Second, they're not highly motivated, and they tend to think management is most interested in profit. Third, management has trouble sustaining, much less optimizing, employee motivation, especially in this economic downturn. Fourth, sometimes management is concerned with profit at the expense of ethical decision making. This lack of a 'moral compass' has been in the spotlight for years now in both the corporate and governmental environments.

How can all these issues be adequately dealt with?

#### Improving Engagement Simultaneously Drives Results and Well-being

Recognition of the importance of *employee engagement* has grown as more and more recent research shows that driving progress by improving engagement--as contrasted with being preoccupied with the bottom line--drives not just productivity, but employee well-being and

quality of products and services as well.<sup>1</sup> Engagement is a leading indicator of all sorts of progress, while the bottom line is a lagging indicator of productivity.

To better *engage* is to more fully participate, to get more involved and absorbed in whatever's at hand,  
Allowing the dissolution of obstacles and limitations,  
Adding to the valued features of experience,  
Appreciating more coherent and expansive scenarios,  
And causing the invisible seeding and generation of all sorts of eventual progress, both inner and outer.

The recent growing emphasis on optimizing engagement marks a turn toward the increasing recognition of the importance of the quality of employees' experience. Focusing on quality of the field of experience affords employees and management alike unlimited additional leverage to drive progress. <sup>2</sup>In his book *Peak*, hotelier Chip Conley wrote, "I came to realize that creating peak experiences for employees, customers, and investors fostered peak performance for my company."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> a. "Studies have statistically demonstrated that engaged employees are more productive, more profitable, more customer-focused, safer, and less likely to leave their employer."

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Employee\\_engagement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Employee_engagement)

b. The Canadian "Workplace Fairness Institute . . . research shows that successful employee engagement results in more job satisfaction, higher productivity. . . ."

[www.workplacefairness.ca/](http://www.workplacefairness.ca/)

c. A study conducted by the University of Rochester's Human Motivation Research Group found, for example, that people whose motivation was authentic—defined as "self-authored"—exhibited more interest, excitement and confidence, as well as greater persistence, creativity and performance than a control group of subjects who were motivated largely by external demands and rewards.

d. Adam Zuckerman, Senior Consultant with Towers Watson: "Research has consistently found that more engaged employees produce better financial returns for their businesses".

<sup>2</sup> Why has employee engagement become more important in recent years? "Engaged employees working in a high-performance culture give companies a real competitive edge — one that's difficult for competitors to replicate. It's one of the few things that can provide a sustained advantage, and business leaders recognize that." --Adam Zuckerman, Senior Consultant with Towers Watson. "HR leaders now realize the concept of engagement allows them to measure an important people-related component of business success. Those metrics are no longer just nice to have; they're necessary if a company expects to maximize employee and company performance." --Patrick Kulesa, Research Leader, Towers Watson. See [www.towerswatson.com/viewpoints/4077](http://www.towerswatson.com/viewpoints/4077)

<sup>3</sup> Conley, *Peak*, 2007, p. 13.

Until very recently, by ignoring the potential of full engagement, the business world has paid the price of keeping a ceiling on its effectiveness and productivity. A character named Jack Cunningham in Kenneth Blanchard's book *Managing by Values* points out the problem: Jack "asked us what kind of performance we thought tennis players would have if instead of keeping both eyes on the ball, they always had an eye on the scoreboard. . . . Lots of companies seem to watch only their scoreboard—the bottom line. In doing so, they take their eyes off the ball."<sup>4</sup>

## The Goal of Improving Engagement is Complete Absorption

Aside from the recent engagement research, it is simply common sense that the most effective way to do anything is to get 'into it', get completely engaged.<sup>5</sup> However, people often misunderstand how others use the word *engagement*. There are many different, often implicitly used definitions of *engagement*.<sup>6</sup> One of the most encompassing and useful is this one: *one's degree of absorption in the current scenario*. Note that this definition is not task specific, so it can be used in any situation, for any mission.

Using this definition, *complete engagement* is complete absorption in whatever's at hand, which is also a good general description of self-actualization and the 'zone' of peak performance. According to Maslow, "Self-actualization means experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption."<sup>7</sup> Could the *zone* of peak performance then provide a natural, inherent, and secular (rather than sectarian) 'moral compass' that seems so lacking in today's business environments? I believe so. Maslow wrote, "The empirical fact is that self-actualizing people, our best experiencers, are also our most compassionate, our great improvers and reformers of society, our most *effective* fighters against injustice, inequality, slavery, cruelty, exploitation (and also our best fighters *for* excellence, effectiveness,

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<sup>4</sup> Blanchard, *Managing by Values*, 1997, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> See my articles "Boosting Productivity, Quality, and Well-Being." An article on pp. 7-8 of *The Systems Thinker* (13, No. 10). Also see chapter three of my book *Flow, Glow, and Zero: Introducing a Vision of Peak Performance for the New Millennium*. For a copy of the first edition, download from: <http://dl.dropbox.com/u/19843470/FlowGlow%26Zero.V1.pdf>

<sup>6</sup><http://employeeengagement.ning.com/forum/topics/lets-cocreate-an-employee?commentId=1986438%3AComment%3A79660>

<sup>7</sup> See chapter one of my book *Flow, Glow, and Zero: Introducing a Vision of Peak Performance for the New Millennium*. Also, see pp. 43-44, Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, 1971.

competence)." We can also conclude that self-actualization is complete involvement in what is at hand.<sup>8</sup>

Besides helping to empower every individual worker, centering our approach to improving performance on increasing engagement relieves management of the effort involved in carrot and stick methods of motivation. These methods depend on repeatedly filling individuals' lower-level needs (such as approval and security), which can only be temporarily satisfied. In contrast, the motivation toward the complete absorption of self-actualization does not seem to die out. As Andrew Grove pointed out, "Unlike other sources of motivation . . . self-actualization continues to motivate people to ever higher levels of performance."<sup>9</sup> Thus he suggests that "Our role as managers is . . . to . . . bring them to the point where self-actualization motivates them."<sup>10</sup> "When there is a genuine vision . . . people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to."<sup>11</sup> The need for management support and motivation is gradually obviated.

## Two Approaches to Improving Engagement

Once we know that the 'goal' of increasing engagement--no matter what the specific task--is complete participation and absorption in whatever's at hand, we can take two approaches: (1) dissolve obstacles and limitations, and/or (2) add to the valued features of experience.

(1) We can use what may be the most direct approach, to simply dissolve obstacles and limitations. We try to become aware of, and somehow deal with, any and all limitations--anything that keeps us from a totally engrossed state. To recognize the obstacles it is obviously very helpful to have clear descriptions of them. However, adequately describing all the obstacles to complete engagement--in simple, clear, and shared phenomenological language--is quite a challenge. And even more of a challenge is learning to recognize and dissolve these obstacles moment by moment within one's own experiential field, as discussed in

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<sup>8</sup> Maslow, *Religion, Values and Peak Experiences*, 2007, p. xii. Maslow also wrote, "Spiritual, ethical, and moral values need have nothing to do with any church. Or perhaps, better said, they are the common core of all churches, all religions, including the non-theistic ones. As a matter of fact, it is possible that precisely these ultimate values are and should be the far goals of all education, as they are and should be also the far goals of psychotherapy, of child care, of marriage, the family, of work, and perhaps all other social institutions." *Religion, Values and Peak Experiences*, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Grove, *High Output Management*, 1983, pp. 163-4.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit. p. 168.

<sup>11</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 1990, p. 9.

Chapters Two and Four. Tremendous awareness and perseverance are required.

A very broad range of these obstacles in different fields, disciplines, and arenas of activity keeps us from being optimally productive and fulfilled at work. Here is a link to a brief outline of communication obstacles that keep us from complete engagement: <http://wp.me/ps9h2-2l> And a link to a paper on the issue of the habitual and limiting Western perspective of linear time, and what can be done about it: <http://wp.me/ps9h2-2t> Besides communication and time management, other fields, disciplines, and topic areas--for example, creativity, stress management, psychology, identity, openness or space, information and knowledge--can provide questions for further in-the-moment inquiry and discrimination during any activity. Guidelines for improving engagement in number of these topic areas are provided in the Members are of the Time-Chi website at [www.time-chi.com](http://www.time-chi.com).

(2) We can add to the valued features of experience. *Engagement* can be defined, as stated earlier, as the degree to which one is fully preoccupied or absorbed in whatever is at hand. It can also more generally be defined as a measurement of one or more dimensions (for example, (a) awareness, concentration, and energy; or (b) openness, integrity, and drive/motivation), with each dimension being assigned a set of work-process or performance values that are experientially possible during a period of time.<sup>12</sup> To implement this, each individual should specify his/her personal set of performance values to be used to measure progress at work, and if desirable, during other times as well. There are many ways to do this—your choices will probably depend in part on your own personality, goals, and religious or spiritual disciplines. Consider the core values that, for you or your organization, will guide and shape the way you fulfill your purpose. Whatever your selection, be aware that your definition of engagement or involvement will determine what your suggestions are for improving them.<sup>13</sup>

### **Build an Engagement-Inquiry-based Playing Field for Peak Performance**

With either (1) a set of limitations and obstacles, and/or (2) a set of experiential performance values, you can drive balanced, overall personal and organizational progress--including improving

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<sup>12</sup> See step 2 of chapter four of my book *Flow, Glow, and Zero: Introducing a Vision of Peak Performance for the New Millennium*.

<sup>13</sup> If, because of your growing insight and realization, you periodically make appropriate revisions of your personal definitions of engagement, these performance values could gradually approach the irreducible, core values of the 'zone' of self-actualization. By thus improving the precision with which you observe the workflow, you will eventually have the granularity of feedback necessary to directly approach peak performance.

quality, and employee well-being--if everyone involved focuses on increasing their own engagement rather than focusing on the scoreboard, productivity, or the bottom line, all of which are partial, superficial, and lagging indicators.

To try it out, view your experience as a kind of playing field where you are the only player. The object of the game is to approach peak performance by driving engagement--in whatever way you have defined it--as high as you can. To do this, as you work, use any questions you wrote for approach (1) to determine whether your level of engagement is limited or obstructed somehow. Or perhaps equivalently, occasionally notice where you are in the range of performance values you defined for (2). If it seems like the situation is optimal, that you're in the 'zone' of peak performance, you can simply enjoy things and go on. However, it's often easy to identify a limitation on complete involvement in the situation. There are usually many opportunities for most of us to improve our level of engagement.

If you become aware of a limitation defined in (1), or perhaps equivalently, if you are aware of a performance value (defined in (2)) that is low, do whatever you can to either dissolve the limitation or raise the performance value to a higher level. You may know various methods for making appropriate changes either during a break or while you continue to work.

With this approach we can define a playing field in which people can strive for self-actualization, and endlessly challenge themselves to both improve and progress no matter what is at hand, no matter whether the circumstances are personal or organizational. In general, whatever we can do to dissolve limitations--and in particular to decrease the holding strength of our complexes, negative habits, and other experiential structures--will help deepen engagement, contribute to our improving performance and fulfillment, and approach the 'zone' of peak performance.<sup>14</sup> By redefining success and progress in this way, we thus have an approach to optimal work and peak performance which fosters a natural, unimposed meeting ground for both personal fulfillment and organizational results, and which inspires people toward peak performance, self-actualization, and optimal well-being--all at the same time.

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<sup>14</sup> "Seeing through the 'realness', the substantiality of these structures may be sufficient to remove all the obstructions to realizing the depth of magic and mystery available: 'Once we let go of the substantial, we are left with the magic of manifestation. . . . We can invite a knowledge that condenses and enriches the mystery that is living reality. . . . *only the structures of consciousness insist on covering over the mystery* with the familiarity of the previously recorded.'" (italics mine, pp. 158-9, Tarthang Tulku, 1994).

## Chapter Eight

### The Full Range of Our Participation or, “Who Are We, Anyway?”

*Personal and cultural conditioning enable us to function normally and pragmatically within a culture, but they also limit what we perceive and do in rigid, habitual ways. Are we simply the product of our conditioning, including our psychological ‘resistance’ to getting things done? Or are we something bigger, more expansive, as suggested by research on peak experiences? Other than our ordinary conditioned state and the 'zone' of peak performance, are there other states it can be helpful to familiarize ourselves with in order to get an overview of what's possible for us as humans? Is there an example of how one changes from one state to another?*

#### **Levels representing the full range of human experience**

Besides our 'normal' conditioned consciousness, what other states are possible for humans? It could help to consider the full range of possibilities. Is there a comprehensive catalog of states?

So far, the only candidate I've seen for a clear description of the full range of human development, with its incredibly varied views and focal settings, is Tarthang Tulku's series of books on the Time, Space, and Knowledge (TSK) vision. These books describe three main levels of human functioning: “As an organizing principle for an inquiry into time, space, and knowledge, it can help to think in terms of three different levels. The first level starts from our common, everyday views of how these facets of our being operate.” (p. xxix, SDTS) The third level is an enlightened state that we might compare to the so-called 'zone' of peak performance described in Chapter Six. A second level, an intermediate level that occurs during our development from the first to the third level, is also described in the books. The following section has a summary of these three levels, drawn from the six books of the TSK series: *Time, Space, and Knowledge* (1977), *Love of Knowledge* (1987), *Knowledge of Time and Space* (1990), *Visions of Knowledge* (1993), *Dynamics of Time and Space* (1994), and *Sacred Dimensions of Time and Space* (1997).

Before we examine these levels, let's take a look at why Tarthang Tulku describes them in terms of time, space, and knowledge. According to the author, "Time, space and knowledge are the most basic facets of human experience." (KTS, p. xv) "We are partners with space through

physical existence, partners with time through actions, and partners with knowledge through awareness. Though these three facets of being may be neither 'absolute' nor 'ultimate', they constitute the 'stuff' of our lives—starting points for an inquiry that can transform our being." (LOK, pp. xx-xxi)

Focusing on time, space, and knowledge—rather than the self—affords a new approach at the outset. "Conventional knowledge today focuses on the self: what the self needs, what it understands, what it is capable of. Suppose that we shift this focus, looking in a more neutral way at how our being functions." (SDTS, p. xiv) "When we place these three factors—space, time, and knowledge—at the center of our being, something quite remarkable happens. Knowledge comes into its own, informing experience and existence in a very powerful way." (p. xv, SDTS) "The starting point for such transformation is to investigate time, space, and knowledge in our own experience, challenging the restrictive ways that we have learned to think of them." (SDTS, p. xvi)

Now we examine the characteristics and limitations of level one.

### **Summary of level one**

This is the 'normal' way we are and operate after we have matured, that is, after our ordinary Western conditioning is complete. This level is sometimes also called the *ordinary* level:

Time is divided into moments and seems to flow linearly and out of our control, from past to future, at a constant rate. Within this flow we are limited to occupying a kind of 'moving spot' that we call 'the present'. We seem to 'have' time, yet sometimes feel like we're running out of time, and can't stop the relentless flow that causes us anxiety, friction, overwhelm, and pressure.

Space is seen as an indefinitely extended 'nothing', with distance felt between things within space. We and things feel substantial, independent, and persistent, 'occupy' different locations in space, have size, volume, edges, and an 'inside' and 'outside'. We have a kind of private mental, or personal space, but this seems less 'real' than physical space. Personal space seems independent of others and other things, and yet seems to change somewhat, depending on our feelings and connections with others. Our experience of space can feel restrictive, confining, and pressured, rather than open and free.

Our knowing or 'seeing' is limited to a particular 'thinker' position or 'point of view', with

a felt separation or 'distance' from what is known. Knowing and knowledge usually seem to be located primarily inside our heads and minds. An act of knowing takes some time, and involves directing knowing from its source 'here' toward distant objects and events. We collect experience and information by these acts of knowing, and build up models, systems, and theories. Very often our knowing and perceiving is inaccurate and biased, depending on our unresolved emotional difficulties (conditioning) and current desires and fears.

We believe we are the independently capable selves felt at the center of our lives, the selves that apparently are responsible, do the thinking, make the decisions, and sometimes have problematic conditions. We believe and feel we are the central character in the ongoing story of our lives unfolding against a backdrop of time and space.

### **Summary of level two**

'Timing' occurs as a succession of experiences in the same 'spot' or 'field', rather than establishing an extended 'world out there'. Things, places, and processes become appreciated as being very fluid. Subject and object alike are seen as projections of the underlying energy of second-level time.

The 'quantity' of second-level 'space' is indeterminate. While objects and the observer are distinct and independent, they are also known as interdependent and co-referring. There's an increase in personal freedom, less psychological pressure, and greater physical relaxation. All going from place to place which validates the picture of a spread out world, actually occurs as a succession of 'timed out' experiences in the same 'spot'.

Knowing is not so much a possession, but a luminous, transparent 'attribute' of experience and mental activity through which 'existence' and 'non-existence' jointly emerge together with dichotomies such as 'subject' and 'object', 'observer' and 'observed'.

### **Summary of level three**

Different times are not linked, in a way that irrevocably separates them, by their respective positions in an infinitely extended temporal series. The 'series' is a fiction. There is no 'going' and no separate places. It is as though all the friction in the world

were removed.

While all familiar things are separate and distributed over ordinary space, delineated partly by differences in position, they are all intimately connected insofar as their Great Space dimension is considered. Space is not contrasted to objects, and 'distance between' becomes meaningless. All existence and experience is like an apparition.

We develop a mode of 'seeing' which is not limited to a particular position or 'point of view' at all, dissolves the 'distance' between knower and known, is not a meaning but is unlearned or nonlearned learnedness, and which is beyond the concern for 'getting', approaching, or defining.

This brief depiction of level three from the Time, Space, and Knowledge vision is consistent with the zone of peak performance (see Chapter Six ). And it's worth noting that here also we find no complexes, personality, or identity, much less conditions like emotional upset, doubt, and separation that are common with level one.

### **Three ways of experiencing a feeling**

To see more clearly how these three main levels of functioning are related, we can depict what happens as you change the way you relate to a particular feeling from a first-level to a third-level way. Although any feeling could be used, in this example, we take the example of a feeling of pain in the shoulder. The pain is presumed to be the same energy in the descriptions of all three levels—it is *the way* the pain energy is experienced, or the overall view of the energy, that is different.

One: At level one, our usual way of experiencing, the pain is usually labeled, often as something negative, and is experienced as located in a particular place in the body, in this case in the shoulder. You, identified as the self, are not merged with the feeling, but are related to it as a feeling that you have. Your experience of time is linear, flowing relentlessly in one direction. Space is experienced as extending in three dimensions.

Two: At level two, the feeling is not experienced as so clearly locatable as in the first way of experiencing. The feeling is in the same physical location, but one experiences the boundaries of the feeling to be more open or less definite. There may be a shifting back and forth from seeing the feeling as negative, to relating to it as simply neutral energy. One senses the surrounding space differently—not so extended, more open, less fragmented, and less container-like. Similarly, the sense of oneself as the observer of the feeling is more spacious. Rather than an

intellectual way of relating to the feeling, there is a simple, nonverbal observation or sensing of it. There's also a sense of time slowing down.

Three: At level three, there is simply the pure energy of the feeling, with no labeling, and no identification of location in the body. There is no feeling of oneself as an observer separate from the feeling. Awareness is merged with the feeling-energy, which is not experienced as negative. There is no sense of time passing, and no experience of space as a container for things and events. Space is simply nonextended openness that accompanies and permeates the feeling.

## **Ocean of Knowledge**

The quality of our participation with time, space, and knowledge in the three different levels above corresponds to differences in the quality of our experience in the following metaphor:

Imagine that you live within the depths of an 'ocean'; you are completely permeated by it. It gives to you, and you take what it offers, acting in ways that are expressive of the purity and power of the water. The results of your actions remain within that same sphere, flowing freely back into the water. But the 'ocean' is vast, unbridled power, not limited or constrained by anything, and constrains nothing. It permits everything, even ways of relating to it that are very limited and 'stand-offish'.

Let's suppose that you become identified with one of these narrow, aloof ways of interacting with the ocean. It's as though you have drawn above it, ignoring the qualities and depth of its waters. You don't even "acknowledge" that depth; you don't knowingly interact with it. But you can never completely sever your connection, so you can never avoid depending on it and interacting with it in some way. The result is that the ocean leaps up and slaps you in the face with the peaks of its high, jagged waves. This is the only form of contact your aloof stance will permit.

Perhaps you come to live on the very peaks of these waves and look across to the peaks of other waves around you. You pretend that reality is comprised only of what floats there on the peaks, that there is no 'underneath', not even any supporting water, except perhaps in some abstract sense. Even so, part of your new existence is the constant, shocking sensation of being struck by ocean sprays.

Perhaps you take this unpleasant experience as meaningless, just a 'background phenomenon'. But it won't go away. Always churned about by the waves, out of phase with the rise and fall of other peaks, it is hard to relate satisfactorily to others. The

structures you build seem unstable, subject to some relentless, destabilizing power, and you are always struck in the face by the surging water.

If, eventually, you relax your obsession with scanning across the peaks, and become willing to give more attention to the water itself, to acknowledge it in a participatory sense, you can delve deeply into the ocean. Then, much to your vast amazement, the annoying stinging sprays and the undermining influence of the waves ceases. Your awareness is not restricted to maintaining contact with tiny, erratically jumping objects separated from you by unbridgeable distances.

'Beauty', 'peace', 'security', 'fulfillment', 'intimacy', 'knowledge', 'communication', 'coexistence' all come to acquire meanings very different from what they had for you on the surface. This 'ocean' and its 'waves' are only rough metaphors for the range of space and time as they are seen by different types of knowledge, different degrees of participation. Frustration, loss, and separation may have been typical themes for the knowledge of the surface, which was subject to the waves. But nothing can be lost or exhausted for that knowledge which remains attuned to the depths of space and time. Everything that fulfills and delights, and everything that stimulates knowledge to become more sensitive and encompassing, is perfectly preserved there. You can see why it's so important that we be totally 'in' or 'within' time, space, and knowledge. (DOT I, pp. xxxi-xxxiii)

"Time, space, and knowledge do not act in one particular way . . . [it depends on our engagement, and on] how deeply we acknowledge our connection with them. Whether we acknowledge them or not, we are using them, *and they are using us*. Just because we ignore them, depending on them only unconsciously, doesn't mean that there's no interchange. We are still bound to time and space; we and they are inseparable companions. If we ignore our connection to them, we relegate ourselves to lives of a kind of menial, trivial service: the only way we allow ourselves to be used by the universe at large." (DOT I, p. xxx)

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