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## The importance of flow in practicing law

**T**he mainstream popularity of extreme sports has greatly increased over the past two decades.

There is something inherently riveting about watching athletes at the top of their game perform death-defying feats of strength.

These accomplishments provide more than just terrific entertainment value. They also teach us a great deal about the secrets to optimal human performance. These lessons go far beyond the world of big-wave riders and snowboarders and are invaluable to all of us.

In his book, "The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance," author Steven Kotler examines the research done on dozens of top athletes across a variety of extreme sports and their secrets to achieving the impossible.

At the heart of their superhuman successes is the concept of flow.

Kotler defines flow as an optimal state of consciousness, "a peak state where we both feel our best and perform our best." Flow is also known as "being in the zone" and is what helps us push the boundaries of what is possible, enabling us to perform beyond our limits and to radically transform the level of our game.

The term "flow" is attributed to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the former chairman of the University of Chicago psychology department and now at Claremont Graduate University. His studies focused on Abraham Maslow's research into optimal human performance and how it's inextricably linked to intrinsic motivation.

Csikszentmihalyi's research examined the different feelings and sensations among various individuals during moments of peak performance. Many of these

activities involved a considerable amount of pain, risk and difficulty. Nevertheless, participants often reported feeling they were in an optimal state of consciousness and thoroughly enjoyed the task at hand.

Their concept of time and sense of self were transformed in the process, and they felt they were one with the activity and using their skills to their best and highest use. These moments expanded their sense of what's possible and left them constantly searching for the next "flow" state.

Flow is a key component in effectively leveraging our strengths. It helps us develop a framework to tie everything together so that we can achieve an optimal level of performance and satisfaction.

Our personal and professional histories, training, the technology available to us and our mental and emotional makeup — including our grit, resilience, determination and focus — are all important factors.

When we achieve flow, we are able to take our talents and channel our efforts with a level of intensity and focus that pushes us beyond existing boundaries. Flow is the glue that holds everything together as well as the catalyst and propellant that pushes us over the finish line.

Extreme athletes test the boundaries of what's possible, often under seemingly impossible circumstances. They inspire us to optimally perform in our lives, regardless of how difficult our circumstances may be. We all need to strive for that state of flow as we attend to our daily activities, including our client projects and other matters.

When we consistently perform at a high level, we feel a greater sense of happiness and fulfillment, which in turn makes us more successful. For exceptional

### PARADIGM SHIFT



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athletes, flow is not just about being passionate about what they do and doing it well — it is essential to their survival. We should all have this sense of urgency in achieving flow in our lives.

Just as there are certain conditions that enable athletes to optimally perform, the same is true for lawyers. We need to look within and determine how we best position ourselves to perform at this level, and we must take full responsibility for how well or poorly we ultimately do.

We should view our careers as a marathon, not a sprint, and determine not only how best to win the race, but also how to experience those runner's highs that will enable us to overcome those obstacles which will inevitably arise along the way.

There are a few things to keep in mind when working toward achieving a state of flow:

1. Keep your head in the game. In order to achieve flow, you have

to maintain your focus and keep your eyes on the prize. Eliminate distractions and destructive ways of thinking that impede your determination and positive attitude.

2. Actively seek peaks in performance. We all know how it feels when we are doing something we love — it's as if time and the outside world don't exist. These are the pinnacles of creativity and moments of flow during which we perform at our best.

We should take a close look at what those activities are and the conditions under which we experience these peaks in performance and connect the dots accordingly.

3. Condition yourself like an athlete. Athletes live with a purpose — to optimally perform at their sport. They develop rituals and techniques focused on the singular goal of being exceptional at their craft.

We should look at our own lives and commit with the same level of determination and focus and develop personal habits that enable us to continuously work toward our goals. We should push ourselves to take on new, challenging projects which help us develop our stamina.

4. Be a visionary. Extreme athletes do not focus on limitations. They visualize an alternate universe where boundaries like gravity simply do not exist. We need to take a page out of their playbook and be visionaries for what is possible, rather than focusing on what isn't. This shift will also have a transformative effect on those around us.

5. Be self-aware. We know ourselves best, including our strengths and weaknesses. By being self-aware, we can navigate the good and bad within ourselves, focus on those things which optimize our performance and get ourselves on the path to flow.