

**Life is in hyper-drive. Our default is to go faster, do more and strive higher. Evidence shows we have passed the point of diminishing returns. We have lost our minds – and maybe our bodies – to overload and confusion. The solution is to SLOW DOWN. The payback is great - higher productivity, creativity, health, happiness and sanity. In this Resilience Insight we lay down the evidence, a pathway and practical suggestions to benefit from chilling out.**

### The delusion of busyness

For those of us striving to succeed, life is dense with information, deadlines, and activity is intense. Results from our Resilience Diagnostics on thousands of people have shown that the five top risks to Resilience are:

1. Days full of activity and deadlines
2. Multi-tasking
3. Exercising less than 5 days a week
4. Disturbed sleep
5. Tiredness and fatigue at the end of the day

Is this how we get the best from ourselves?

Let's start with the Harvard Business Review June 2014 (p23) where Leslie Perlow shows how structured **time off** delivers profound productivity gains. The research showed that people with structured time off were:

- 74% more likely to stay at their current workplace
- 55% more satisfied with their life balance
- 38% faster at compiling reports
- 25% more engaged at work
- 31% more collegial in the workplace

At Boston Consulting Group thousands of teams across 77 offices have implemented structured time off. Has your business considered this?

The simple fact is that most of us are too stretched to be effective and we think that we have to try harder to make it better. This is insanity.

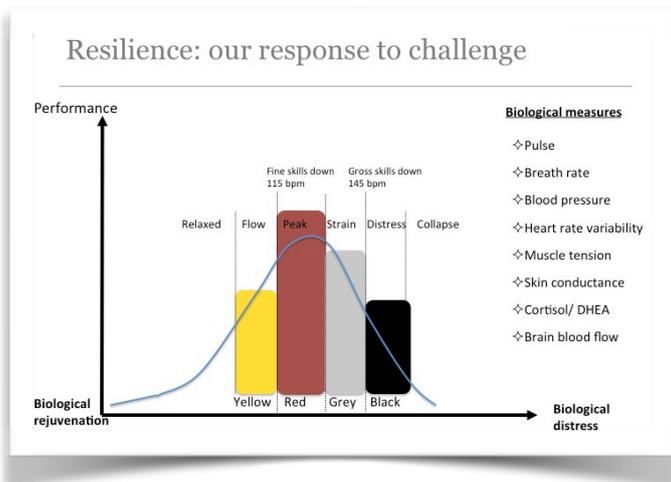
Space, time, quiet, physiological calm and a quiet mind open the door to success.

### The Physiology of overload

“Are you busy?” This ubiquitous greeting triggers anxiety: “If I am not busy something is wrong.” Heart rate increases, breathing accelerates and adrenaline surges. “Really busy” is the only safe answer. Safe you are not! Busyness – or the anxiety that you are not busy enough – opens the door to the Resilience death spiral. This causes higher thinking centres of the brain to overload, attention to fragment, self doubt to take control, emotion to switch to negative, and performance to decline.

Imagine it is 4pm and you have a heap of e-mails to deal with. At 6pm you are still grinding away at “productive” work. Is it really productive? Evidence shows that your decision-making is only 15% effective when overworked and overloaded. Data tells us that the nations that work the longest hours, are less productive. What is going on?

Thanks to sport and combat, with the benefit of biological monitoring and blunt objective measures such as wins, losses or complex acrobatic manoeuvres, the story is clear. Calm intensity is the only way to secure sustainable performance. As we push to our peak, complex performance is compromised. It cannot last.



This curve shows us five zones of performance to a challenge. On the left we are in Condition White (relaxed) – low challenge and well resourced. As the challenge increases and we hold our state of resourcefulness we enter Condition Yellow (Flow). Here we achieve outstanding results. Our focus is calm and intense. All of our physical, emotional and cognitive faculties are available. Rejuvenation can happen real-time.

As we stretch towards Condition Red (peak) we start to unravel. Condition Red is fine for brief bursts of maximal effort but it cannot be sustained. Fine motor skills, emotional awareness and rapid processing fade. Errors increase. Persistence rapidly leads to Condition Grey or strain. Rejuvenation from Condition Grey requires deep rest.

In Condition Black (distress) performance collapses. Gross motor skills, judgement and execution of simple tasks are seriously impaired. This can be a freeze reaction where we simply cannot respond to environmental demands. Prolonged recovery and even rehabilitation may be necessary to enable bounce back from Condition Black.

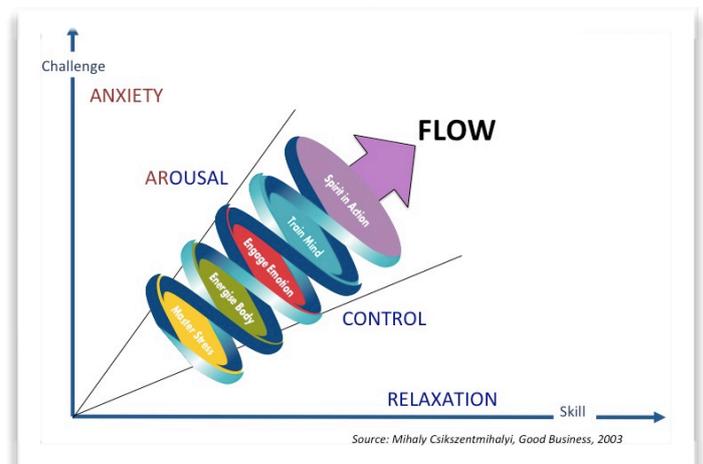
The soldier or elite athlete is trained to recognise and master each of these states but most of all to know how to get back to Condition Yellow. Paradoxically, many of us living less demanding lives, find ourselves feeling maxed out, distressed

and burned out. Few have the insight or mastery to manage and control the situation. Below we outline some tools to achieve Condition Yellow.

## Biology of Performance

What Perlow, Boston Consulting Group, Sweden (proposing a six hour workday) and elite teams everywhere are doing is to create effective time in relaxation to fully rejuvenate. Biological rejuvenation allows productivity, collaboration and increased creativity. This is step one. We need rest time, sleep, recreation time and a relaxation practice.

Step two is to stretch performance without leaving Condition Yellow. This is much more difficult. Our goal is to reach sustainable optimal performance – the state in which we can achieve the extraordinary. **Flow** is a great model. Years of research have shown how to achieve performance through calm intensity. To do this we must be able to match our



skills precisely to the performance demand.

Focus on three elements:

1. The vertical axis of challenge needs to be clearly understood and stretched. This is situation awareness. Deep knowledge of the actual situation requires practice. We have to get into situations of challenge and meaning.

2. The horizontal axis points us towards the precise skills (talent, techniques, drills and creativity) that will be needed to meet the challenge. These skills must be practiced in progressively more challenging situations.
3. The enablers captured in our resilience spiral help us to craft the precise physical, emotional and cognitive states that allow skill to perfectly execute to the stages of the challenge.

Take the example of a golf swing. The challenge is to drive the ball onto the green. To do this we must understand the course, wind, humidity and lie of the land. Experts visualise a picture of the situation unfolding. To do this requires engagement of the planning areas of the prefrontal cortex. Visualisation creates situational awareness. Second, experts must rehearse the specifics of each element of the stroke. This is skill development. Third, experts must enable the skill into the situation by mastering the resilience elements:

- Physiological calm
- Relaxed and energised body
- Positive feelings of enjoyment and absorption
- Calm and enabled mind - deactivate prefrontal cortex planning
- Liberation into the flow state - this is where the magic can happen.

The more demanding the shot, the more relaxed and absorbed the golfer must be. Tension, physical tightness, negative emotion, overthinking and slipping out of Flow destroys the potential in the shot.

So, to apply this to our daily lives requires mastery of calm intensity as the doorway into Flow. We have covered this in previous **Resilience Insights**. Let's recap:

1. Take the necessary time to relax and recover – microbreaks and deep rest
2. Get really good at **diaphragmatic breath**
3. Apply **vagal braking** in times of challenge
4. Keep the body relaxed and upright
5. Cultivate positive emotion
6. Keep the mind really focused and quiet

In our working lives this might include the following daily disciplines:

1. Securing a deep, structured **sleep habit**
2. Preparing for the day with exercise and a good breakfast
3. Taking 10 to 30 minutes for relaxation practice
4. Chunking up your day – different tasks, movement and breaks
5. Shorten your working day – perhaps aim for six hours
6. Every hour take a minute for relaxation and breathing
7. Select at least two activities for deep Flow
8. Start a conversation with your team on structured time off
9. Test the idea of driving productivity from calm intensity

The calm intense version of you is far better than the busy driven version. Next time someone asks if you are busy, reply: "Busy? No, I'm relaxed and in Flow."