



3 Brains for Success

Find your triggers and get into flow

by Wanda Ropa

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Things Are Different Now

“We’ve moved from an economy built on people’s backs to an economy built on people’s left brains (or linear, analytic thinking) to what’s emerging today: an economy and society built more and more on people’s right brains – where creativity resides.”

~ Daniel Pink

The world has shifted. All the old paradigms of success are being tested and put on trial as we watch in disbelief. As individuals and a society, we are now faced with redefining how we will thrive in these new and ever-changing times. In the last twenty years, we have learned a lot about our minds and some of the reasons we do the things we do.

Fifteen years ago, [Daniel Goleman](#) talked about the new rules for work as he wrote about [emotional intelligence](#). According to his findings, it was no longer enough to have intellectual ability and technical know-how to do our jobs; it was now about personal qualities, such as initiative, empathy, adaptability, and persuasiveness.

Ten years later, [Daniel Pink](#) cited further evidence of change, in [A Whole New Mind](#), when he acknowledged that we moved from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age. With globalization and shareholders demanding more ROI, large corporations, small business owners and employees alike are experiencing uncertain economic times. Only one thing is certain, increasing your marketability increases your chances of thriving in this current economy.

So, how is the new economy working in your favor? Because now you're in the driver's seat.

All the qualities that make us most human are the very qualities that are most in demand. As these old vestiges of predictability are dissolving and the gates of changeability are opening, we have two choices. Wait and see what happens before acting or start identifying what tools and resources will help us navigate in this myriad of uncertainty. How can you find your road map for success in career, relationships, and life when the world has turned upside down? One way to start is to frame our shared experience.

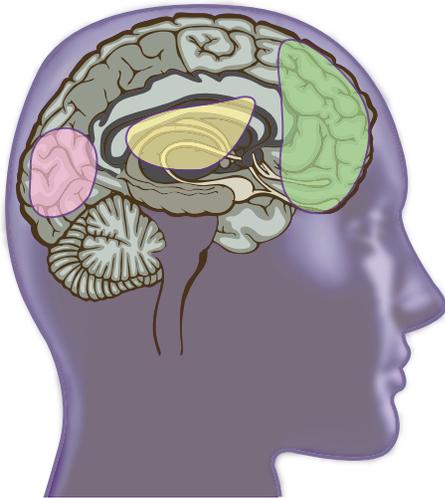
It feels like we have all stepped onto a "Rotor-ride" or more currently known as the "[Grav-iron ride](#)" where the world has been spinning and our floor has dropped out. However, the ride hasn't stopped, most of us are still spinning. Yet, we can't operate in the same way. As you are becoming aware, it's not business as usual anymore. The floor or foundation disappeared when the economy and marketplace shifted and historic business structures tumbled down the rabbit hole.

Actually, there is good news. You have all the equipment necessary right now. That's right, you do not need to purchase any resources or shop the frenetic sales. How can that be possible? It's about learning to leverage your 3 brains.

Why 3 brains? Most people refer to one. In order to achieve success in your career, your work, relationships, and your life, you will need to start to work with all 3. It might help to get a preview of what is involved.

Just like when you purchase a new computer, you usually receive it with an operating system and a few software programs to run all the different applications. The configuration will vary based on your needs. Just like a computer, you have been hard-wired with certain aspects that are present at your birth. What this means is that you do not have to actively run any of these programs, it runs on its own or autopilot.

With recent advances in neuroscience, researchers now know that our intuition (our gut feeling) is really our adaptive unconscious and our emotions drive the majority of our actions and how we respond to our daily experiences. [Dr. Timothy Wilson](#), in his book, *Strangers To Ourselves*, acknowledges, "The adaptive unconscious is more than just a gatekeeper, deciding what information to admit to consciousness. It is also a spin doctor that interprets information outside of awareness." [Dan Hill](#), in his book, *Emotionomics*, provides evidence of the new mental model, using our three-part brain.



Instinctive Brain

The oldest and responsible for our survival (breathing, swallowing, heartbeat, digestion, elimination, circulation – everything needed for basic survival).

Emotional Brain

Your fight or flight command center (your amygdala) that is tuned into your memory center (your hippocampus), all part of your limbic system.

Intellectual Brain

Thought, logic, critical thinking skills, language, and conscious awareness - often called Neocortex.

Let's take a closer look at the 3 brains that comprise the whole human brain:

1. Instinctive Brain – This is the oldest part of your brain and is responsible for our survival (breathing, swallowing, heartbeat, digestion, elimination, circulation – everything needed to sustain life). Without this ancient brain, you simply wouldn't be here.
2. Emotional Brain – Contains your fight or flight command center (your amygdala) that is tuned into your memory center (your hippocampus), all part of your limbic system.
3. Intellectual Brain – Consists of thought, logic, critical thinking skills, language, and conscious awareness. It's called your neocortex, since it evolved last.

All three brains work in concert to make you who you are. But we'll focus our attention mostly on the emotional brain. It's the part of us that leads in making decisions. It's also the part of us that gets us stuck in our tracks.

Millennia ago, immediate dangers to life were generally a lot easier to identify. There were physical threats and survival was literally a life or death experience. You were either the hunter or the hunted. Predators were prevalent and it was clear when you were under attack and when you were safe. Today, as we have just entered the next decade, the dangers and threats are not as tangible. They are actually much more subtle and hidden. We were not originally designed for this complexity, which explains why our emotions propel us into perpetual states of anxiety when unchecked, resulting in stress and fear. As human beings we need predictability and control. According to neuroscientist, [Robert M. Sapolsky](#), that is not the whole story. It really is about our perception of how this affects us. In his book, [Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers](#), he explains the latest theories on stress when we expect to predict and control our environment. According to Dr. Sapolsky, "*we differ in the psychological filters through which we perceive the stressors in our world.*"

For instance, you find yourself in your current workplace and it is not always obvious who is in your court and who is there to sabotage you. What are the hidden agendas of your colleagues? Your boss? It truly is a jungle out there, but the dangers these days are more nuanced and unpredictable.

Our limbic (amygdala, hippocampus) systems are key to our ability to handle various risks. [Gregory Berns](#), a leading neuroscientist, dives deeply into this detail in his book, [Iconoclast](#). According to Dr. Berns, iconoclasts are who they are because of their unique perceptions, ability to accept risk, and social intelligence. The amygdala is critical to their ability to accept risk.

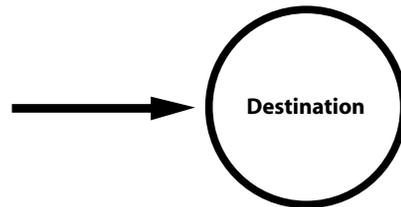
In his recent and timely book, [Linchpin](#), [Seth Godin](#) elaborates and calls this a key force of resistance that acts to hold people back from becoming truly indispensable. Once again, we see how this older part of our brain can work against you in achieving your goals and making a difference.

Testing the Old Paradigms of Success

The big question: If all of us are born with creative talents, what distinguishes the men and women who are recognized for their creative achievements in diverse fields, such as science, engineering, marketing, art, music, manufacturing, literature, poetry, architecture, to name a few? Similar patterns exist with every individual, from every walk of life. The differences lie in how they uniquely respond to life's stimuli and triggers, based on the resources and tools they possess. How does one achieve success and happiness? Is there a user manual? Is there a turnkey approach that provides a step-by-step procedure to achieve success in work, relationships, and life?

Change is inevitable. For instance, if you stood still in the middle of the closest street, the world would change around you, without any effort. How can success and happiness be tested if there are no fixed variables, parameters, or outcomes? Over the past 25 years, after researching and testing diverse theories of success and happiness, I began to see emerging patterns that revealed the vital elements needed to create this road map to success and happiness. My key discovery was that you couldn't engage in a makeover or force yourself to act, be, or live opposite your natural self, without discomfort, pain, or struggle. Experiencing this angst first-hand fueled my quest to discover the fundamental process for finding true success and happiness. The model below provides a clear road map of easily getting there without all the accessories and distractions that one usually experiences in today's world.

Road Map to Success and Happiness

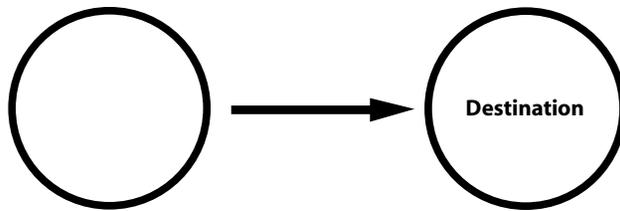


Follow me and take a quick diagnostic and baseline of **where** you currently are. Starting with the circle on your right, the first element of this framework is clarity about your vision, or long-term vision. Because if you don't have a destination, how do you ever know if you get there? Without this perspective, you are on the nowhere road. Do you know where the nowhere road leads? Exactly: nowhere. You will not get to success on this road.

You must first figure out WHERE you're going. On a scale of 1-10, ask yourself and choose the number below that estimates how clear you are about your vision, or how much clarity exists about your long-term vision. Circle the number below:

(Extremely Unclear) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Extremely Clear)

There are no right or wrong answers. Wherever you are on this scale, just tells you where you are at this moment. The good news is that with just a few tweaks and adjustments, you can easily reach total clarity or 10 on this scale. That's the first step.



Now let's draw a circle on the left side of the paper. This circle represents your immediate situation or clarity of your current state. Right now, you may or may not be thinking that you actually know. Whatever situation you are facing, you probably know some of your strengths and talents and have achieved varying levels of success. What you're discovering is that it's not enough. You're right. Let's take a look at your situation, and take your current assessment and put it on steroids.

The second key element of this model is about knowing all of your strengths and talents, what truly makes you tick, and knowing how to package yourself, leverage your talents in the marketplace and the world to get the results you truly want. Aahh, but if you don't really know yourself, you may be expending a ton of effort in the wrong areas, which may account for less than expected results.

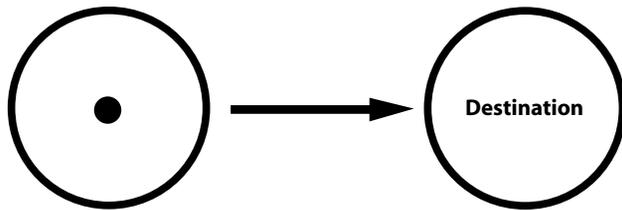
So, now let's figure out where you really are. On a scale of 1-10, ask yourself and choose the number below to represent how close you are to knowing what you need to thrive, package yourself, and leverage your talents in the world to achieve the results you truly desire. Circle the number below that estimates how close you are right now.

(Extremely Unclear) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Extremely Clear)

Again, there are no right or wrong answers. Wherever you are on this scale, just tells you where you are at this moment. The good news is that with just a few tweaks and adjustments, you can easily reach a 10 on this scale.

Once you're clear on both scales, it's just about figuring out what tools and resources you need, developing a personal strategic plan and starting to move on your plan. With clarity, the decisions are easy. Yes, you need to be clear in order to achieve your goals. However, this is only part of the picture. All the visioning, exercising the power of intention, affirmations, and visualization will only take you so far.

Many experts will tout the benefits of using such a process without helping you to really discern the root cause of why you are not experiencing the results you may be expecting. Just like you can't diagnose what's wrong with your car unless you look under the hood, the same holds true for human beings. However, this process is not painful and can easily be achieved if you are really ready to get to the truth and if you're open to being creative and looking at things a little differently.



If you're ready, just follow me to better understand what really is at work. Let's go back to the left circle. Start by drawing a dot in the center of this left circle. This dot represents **you**. Whatever your current circumstances, you are smack dab right in the middle of your immediate situation, for better or for worse. You may be restless, searching for more, but let's call your current situation your safety zone. So, if you were to be catapulted outside your safety zone without a plan, funding, support, or resources, you would not feel comfortable. Every time you shift out of your safety zone, whether you initiate the change or someone else does it for you, there's a part of your brain that gets automatically triggered. This older part of your brain, the Mammalian brain, is triggered. Specifically, it's a part known as the [amygdala](#). You may be more familiar with the fight or flight response. Here's some interesting news: If you just went into fight or flight, you could easily shift back and forth.



In fact, let's look at a wild animal and its amygdala. It's so simple for them. Animals are natural masters of shifting from fight to flight with ease. When have you ever observed a lion that was conflicted, stuck in gears between fight and flight?

How about human beings? Have you heard that your mind is your own worst enemy? Through our evolution we were able to handle all kinds of physical dangers. However, when was the last time you faced the danger of a saber-toothed tiger on the road or in the hallway at work?

Centuries ago, this part of our brain - the amygdala - worked great. It was really healthy to exit stage left or become some creature's dinner. In modern times, the dangers and threats in the world are not as tangible or easily recognizable. They are actually much more subtle and hidden, so now when you shift out of your safety zone, for whatever reason, your amygdala triggers. But instead of fight or flight, you find yourself in the 'freeze,' amygdala overdrive, or the deep freeze.

[Joseph LeDoux](#), in his book [The Emotional Brain](#) refers to the high road and the low road of the amygdala. He calls the amygdala the unconscious "danger detector" figuring prominently as the central player in the "hub in the wheel of fear."

DOCTOR LIZ ARD



However, what is even more common in our society is what I call the “freeze.” When we want to make even the slightest change or improvement in our life, the amygdala is triggered, or our natural alarm system is activated stopping us right in our tracks. We become immobilized and nothing gets done, no self-improvement.

Once this happens, you find yourself in the quicksand of your mind or it appears you have detoured on the nowhere road with obstacles and impediments preventing forward progress and only offering frustration and angst in your path.

Are you experiencing a recurrent theme of starting, then stopping, and then starting, only to stop in your tracks once again? Are you frustrated and feel that you will never make any changes? So many of my clients start coaching when they feel stuck. All their previous efforts haven't worked. Many books tout the importance of affirmations and a positive mind set to move forward. Yet, for whatever reason, every time you want to make a change, you don't get very far.

Many of us believe we should follow Nike's slogan and *“Just do it.”* We blindly accept that if we are motivated and set our minds to change, we should be able to make massive sweeping changes without difficulty. So, why do we keep getting stuck?

Why Your Mind Keeps You Stuck

According to Dr. Robert Maurer, Associate Clinical Professor at UCLA School of Medicine and author of [*One Small Step Can Change Your Life: the Kaizen Way*](#), *"change is frightening. This fear of change is rooted in the brain's physiology, and when fear takes hold, it can prevent creativity, change, and success."* When the amygdala is triggered, it effectively slows down our rational and creative thinking patterns. When we're in 'fight or flight' mode, logical reasoning goes out the window. What are we left with? Our fear. This fear triggers anger, which ensues in attack posturing or escapism. How do we find the secret trap door to get out of this place and stop the discomfort?

Remember, when our amygdala is triggered, we can become immobilized, so nothing gets done, no self-improvement, no change occurs. What's interesting to note is that once your amygdala is triggered, your critical thinking skills, logic, decision making, and creative problem solving is diminished, and we react on auto-pilot with thinking patterns that have been created to respond to our amygdala triggers. For instance, you may experience self-doubt, skepticism, worry, and resistance to the task takes center stage.

Maurer suggests an alternative. The kaizen way is outmaneuvering this natural pattern, in a sense outmaneuvering your amygdala.

You may review this approach and wonder how this can even work when your amygdala is unconscious. To see how, we can take a look at an old story from Aesop's Fables, about the Tortoise and the Hare. In that story, who won the race? The hare or the tortoise?



Let's review the Cliff notes version. The hare was fast, but he was frenetic and he sabotaged himself. You've heard the phrase, "*slow and steady wins the race.*" The tortoise was slow and maybe took one step forward, maybe paused, but he never went backward. The tortoise in this story is a metaphor for the kaizen process. It's about taking small action steps to help you move forward when your amygdala is triggered.

Instead of making sweeping massive changes that will overtax and engage your amygdala, Maurer recommends small baby steps. Tiny, minute actions guarantee success. For example, he suggests removing and organizing one paper clip off a disorganized, cluttered desk to start this process and whiz right past the amygdala. Soon, by repeating these baby steps, your brain slowly starts reformatting its hard drive and you will start seeing change at a comfortable pace. Let's take a closer look and see how you can directly apply this approach in your every day life.

Taming The Beast Within: Identifying The Danger Zones



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Are you dreading going to work? Are you finding that you hit the snooze button more and more frequently during the week? Does it feel like you are entering a dark, foreboding place every time you set foot at the workplace? Is it fraught with unseen dangers?

Whether you are a senior leader or climbing your career ladder, if you are in the wrong work environment, you will feel like you are experiencing this situation on a daily basis. If you are an attorney, an executive, or responsible for launching a new product to market, if you don't have support to help you reach your peak performance, you will feel like you are constantly at risk. **It is time to face the truth. YOU ARE in danger.**

When you want to initiate a change, or when your immediate manager wants you to stretch outside your comfort zone, your amygdala is triggered, or your natural alarm system is activated stopping you right in your tracks. You become immobilized and nothing gets done, no stretches, no professional or self-improvement. You come up with all the excuses and blame yourself that you're lazy, you're really not ready, and you will fail, and so on, only triggering your amygdala more. Remember, it is not you; it is just your amygdala! Yes, it's a hard word to pronounce and harder to understand because when it's engaged, all your logic, creativity, and problem-solving abilities shut down. You are in survival mode.

One of the main reasons it is so difficult to change your current situation is that it is much safer and more comfortable to stay in your current patterns. So even if you are restless or (miserable), that experience itself becomes your safety zone and it is difficult to change.

Let's face it; sometimes going to the workplace is shifting you out of your safety zone. Are you the only one with this experience?

If you look around the world, you will observe that most people are run by their amygdala; it's evident in the conference rooms when different groups vie for territory or meeting their agendas, above all else. Cross-functional teams seem to travel to different destinations while tasked with one major outcome. Project managers in all industries face this phenomenon constantly.

So, if your amygdala is triggering and so is everyone else's, how can you accomplish anything? You're right. It's not simple, but easy once you start becoming aware of what is really going on.

So what does this all mean? All of us have built mental structures that frame how we perceive the world and ourselves. In order to change, we need to break down these structures and reformat our hard drives (our minds).

First, things first, in the book, the [7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#), [Stephen Covey](#) advises to "*Begin with the end in mind.*" However, I recommend that you actually start with yourself and your amygdala. Everyone is hard-wired differently based on genetics and adaptive conditioning as we experience more and more of what life has to offer.

So, first begin with acknowledging that your amygdala is a very powerful tool. Just like the military with a very sophisticated defense system, your amygdala is your personal security system. However, the only way it knows how to keep you safe is to keep you within your safety zone. Any time you venture or step foot out of this defined boundary of comfort, your amygdala is activated. When the amygdala alarms go off, you can experience a range of mild to severe symptoms. Let's review what we're really talking about when this happens.

Symptoms of Amygdala Activation

- ✿ Procrastination
- ✿ Self-Doubt
- ✿ Worry
- ✿ Over-doing to over-compensate
- ✿ Workaholic mode
- ✿ Feeling Stuck
- ✿ Poor self-confidence
- ✿ Beating Yourself Up
- ✿ Resistance of any kind
- ✿ Losing Momentum
- ✿ Lackluster view of your situation
- ✿ Sad, maybe depressed
- ✿ Caustic or cynical
- ✿ General feeling of misery (remember misery is relative)
- ✿ Symptoms of Stress, including Anxiety and Dread, may lead to panic or severe fear response, if unchecked.

If you have been experiencing any of these sensations, your amygdala is trying to talk back to you. You are in danger of leaving your safety zone. Remember, everyone has different levels of tolerance to risk. For some, paragliding, skydiving, starting new companies, mountain climbing, traveling and backpacking to third world countries is all within the parameters of their safety zones. For others, trying exotic foods, starting a new position, scuba diving, or riding a hot air balloon all trigger the amygdala.

The very next action step when you experience any symptoms of amygdala activation is...

HIT THE PAUSE BUTTON



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If you adopt the metaphor that your life is one long movie, then as you're watching it, hit the pause button for an unscheduled break. At this point, you have stopped everything.

Tips To Hit the Pause Button

- ❁ Safely stop whatever you are doing, and take a deep breath.
- ❁ If you concentrate on your breathing, it will naturally slow you down.

Once you have paused, your amygdala will stop escalating to higher alarm levels. The next step will be to calm your amygdala down.

Flow vs. Anti-Flow

To illustrate Amygdala overdrive, let me share what happened while I was attempting to post a blog article featuring the amygdala. A comedy of errors occurred when I unknowingly posted the draft version and then couldn't log in immediately to fix it. After 15 attempts with new passwords, I was able to log in and delete the draft post. What do you suppose MY amygdala was doing? On a scale of 1-10, it was escalating towards the 10! Yes, my amygdala triggers just like everyone else's but it's more about how quickly I realize it and then how I respond that impacts what happens next.

As children, we are usually pretty comfortable verbalizing our needs when we are hungry, afraid, or stuck on a problem. But as we grow and mature into adults we become socialized to the need to control our world - our immediate environment. Predictability and control are the key drivers, as well as the way we uniquely perceive our world.

University of Chicago psychologist, [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#) dedicated his entire career researching and working with "Flow" – your optimal state where you experience deep enjoyment, creativity, and a total engagement with life. In Flow, you are at your highest creative level of self. You are at your peak performance. You are on top of your game. You are in the driver's seat and making all the choices easily and without struggle or effort. In Flow, your amygdala doesn't trigger. And when your amygdala is calm, you are most likely to get into flow.

In Anti-Flow, you are no longer driving. You have relinquished your power to make choices and the decisions are being made for you instead. By not actively making choices (because you're frozen), inaction or external factors dictate your outcomes, or what comes next.

If you just experienced fight or flight, you could shift in or out. When you lose focus, you shift into the freeze and seem as though you are trapped in a time loop, constantly repeating the cycle over and over: Experiencing the same physical sensations, thoughts, and not able to be clear about what to do next.

But you can change this. Just remember: **PIA – Pause. Interrupt. Ask.** Here are the steps in a bit more detail:

First, hit the Pause button

When your amygdala is triggered, it's important to find your virtual remote control and hit PAUSE. Stop everything you're doing so that you can do the next two steps.

Continue to interrupt the cycle

By hitting Pause, you've already begun to interrupt the cycle of your amygdala triggering. By continuing to take slow, deep, controlled breaths and clearing your mind, you will interrupt the cycle long enough to get to the next step.

Ask yourself some key questions

Now fly up to 100,000-foot level by asking yourself some simple questions. Remember, that being out of flow is not YOUR fault as a person. Rather, it's just your amygdala triggering. To get back into flow, you must recognize where you really are and identify the root cause of what is really going on. Are you in defcon 5, nuclear readiness, feeling out of control, powerless to change, or stuck in many of the same patterns you have been repeating for a while? Here are more questions to ask yourself to better help you understand what is causing your amygdala to trigger as well as seeing what can stop it dead in its tracks. Write down your answers so you can refer to them later. Before things stop flowing or moving or you find you can't move forward, ask:

- ❁ Am I experiencing physical or emotional sensations from my amygdala triggering (anxiety, stress, anger, self-doubt, procrastination)?
- ❁ Is there a person, group, activity, task, experience, or situation that's obviously causing the above sensations?
- ❁ What is the easiest way to move or take action?
- ❁ What's missing from the situation that can make it easier?
- ❁ What are the containers, structures, or systems that can support my flow?

Remember, when your amygdala triggers, you are in Anti-Flow. You need to recognize this and work with your amygdala triggers in order to get back into flow. The questions you asked yourself above help you do this. Once you have identified the majority of your amygdala triggers, it's then about choosing how to best respond.

One way is by running mental simulations. Imagining going through the detailed steps of an upcoming presentation, exam, or social function can make the actual event much easier. It's like practicing in a flight simulator over and over again before actually getting into a plane, or running a fire drill. When it's time for the real thing, it all becomes very routine and you are able to think more clearly.

You also need to be clear what needs to change, so you can start shifting when you find yourself in a vicious anti-flow cycle. It's important to avoid a circular feedback loop that goes nowhere. So, in order to move forward, or change things, you need to find the exit. Imagine a labyrinth – there is always an exit.

All of these steps just take practice. So, each evening it's important to debrief the day & ask:

- ❁ What worked well?
- ❁ What didn't work so well?
- ❁ What can I do differently?

More About Working with Your Amygdala Triggers

Your amygdala doesn't need to be purchased. You already have what you need built in. It's like using a master command center, acting much like a national defense system. It's critical to identify your amygdala triggers. First to recognize, your amygdala is engaged, how it shows up in your body, and then how it translates into thoughts triggering your natural response or the default actions. Soar up to the 100,000-foot level & look at what's really going on.

Find creative ways to shift from Anti-Flow into Flow - to get actively engaged or get into the driver's seat. Recognize that you can't control everything that happens to you. All you get to do is choose how to respond. If you don't choose, or go into autopilot, repeating the same way you usually respond over and over again, the choice is taken away from you. But, decisions are made. Not choosing is, in effect, a choice.

Step into the role of the consultant. A consultant always finds solutions. There is almost always a solution, even if it's one you don't want to hear.

Determine if the benefit you receive from staying stuck, or repeating your automatic response to situations, is greater than the pain or discomfort you experience. Is there an urgency to change? Use the kaizen process and take a little step, just to get moving. It's about building little successes, vs. big wins. In time, the vicious cycle is broken.

It's perfectly natural to feel angst. There is great creative power in the angst. Leverage it and take a little step. By doing this, you can begin to get traction in shifting your situation. Once you achieve a little success, you can build on this, and eventually, you will shift into larger successes and the ineffective ways of responding become extinct.

If you really feel you can't do this alone, consider coaching. If you do, keep in mind that it's important that there's a fit between you and the coach. Also, there are patterns that cannot be helped by coaching. In extreme situations when your amygdala is firing in truly destructive ways, such as anxiety or panic disorders, seeking the help of the therapist would be recommended.

Summary

10 Things to help you get into flow

1. You can't control the world around you. Events and other people will respond in ways you can't predict or control.
2. You have been socialized to expect predictability and control.
3. All you can control is your response to the situation or what you experience. Know what you can change, what you can't, and learn to know the difference.
4. When you experience dissonance or a disconnect between your expectations and the reality at hand, your amygdala will trigger.
5. Your amygdala will trigger when you are in danger of shifting out of your highest level of creative self or out of peak performance. This is an automatic response. Your amygdala is your built in security system which is part of your adaptive unconscious.
6. When your amygdala triggers, your response may be automatic and result in keeping you immobilized or continuing the cycle of not getting results. So, in other words, you are being run by your own adaptive software programs, or run by your amygdala.
7. Your own thoughts are reinforced to continue this pattern of not getting results. (like the hamster on a wheel on a cage – he is working very hard, but going nowhere fast)
8. Amygdala triggers will stimulate visceral experiences in your body, if subtle, are unnoticed and are immediately followed with a pattern of thoughts that guarantees to keep you stuck. Once your amygdala is triggered, your access to logic, creative problem solving, and decision making is diminished.

9. Without your logic, critical thinking skills, creative problem solving and decision making skills, you will not be able to identify, investigate, or discern the root cause of your amygdala triggers and continue to experience unmet expectations and unsatisfactory results.
10. The first step to shifting into patterns of flow and success is to identify what is truly happening. Once identified, you can then begin to creatively interrupt this automatic cycle. Think of a dryer cycle. When you are drying different garments and fabrics, you will need to interrupt the dryer cycle to keep these garments intact and maintaining wear. Results are impacted if you let the dryer take over automatically. The same is true about your amygdala and your automatic response to your amygdala triggers. Picture a scene from the 1980's TV series, "Magnum PI" when he was facing imminent danger from 2 very enraged Doberman Pinschers, Tom Selleck was saying out loud, "[Don't look at the dogs, work the lock.](#)" when his amygdala was in high alert. His threat was obvious: he was facing attack from 2 guard dogs.

Are your dangers identified? Do you know what keeps you on the nowhere road? Are you clear about what to do to help yourself achieve success and happiness? Achieve that promotion? Transition into a new career that is meaningful and that you enjoy? Start or expand a successful business? Leverage your natural strengths and abilities? Be truly happy and not work against yourself?

[Chip and Dan Heath](#), in their book, [Switch](#), acknowledge “change is hard. People hate change.” During research for their book on change, they discovered “that people have 2 separate systems in their brains: a rational and an emotional system. The rational system is a logical, thoughtful planner. The emotional system is, well, emotional – and impulsive and instinctual. When these two systems are in alignment, change can come quickly and easily (as when a dreamy-eyed couple gets married). When they’re not, change can be grueling (as anyone who has struggled with a diet can attest).”

What happens when your emotional brain takes over the wheel? Who’s really driving? Your neocortex (your logical and rational part) may have illusions or misperceptions. You may think you have things under control and know what’s going on. Was it a quick fix? Did you drive your experience? When was the last time you looked under the hood? Did a tune-up? Do you know who’s running whom? Are you really in the driver’s seat with creating the career of your dreams? The life of your dreams?

Remember, you always have a choice. The first step is to decide to get back on the road, into the car, and step into the driver’s seat and navigate strategically to reach your personal vision of success and happiness. Do you know what your amygdala is doing? The choice is yours. The decision is yours. Only you can decide.

How do you tell the difference? If you are thriving, successful and happy, you are motivated because your talents are being utilized and you are involved in activities that energize you. If you are clear about your vision, leveraging what you do best while navigating this ever-changing landscape and moving closer to meeting and exceeding your goals, then you are in flow! To fully enjoy life, that is precisely where you want to be.

However, if you are not motivated, feel drained, are working really hard but not moving any closer to achieving success or happiness, your amygdala is driving you and you are actually working against yourself.

It's time to do a tune-up and look under the hood. Take a test drive and experience being in the driver's seat by following the steps I outlined above. Remember, it just takes one kaizen step - one little step to shift and interrupt the cycle. So, hit the pause button and check if you are on the right road, or are you stuck on the nowhere road. Once you hit the pause button, you have already begun this process. Now you have given yourself a moment to decide to build your future and the life you want and deserve. It's all up to you!

“The Quicksand of Your Mind”

*Are you in struggle?
Your mind a puddle?
Are you stuck?
What luck?
In the quicksand of your mind?
Are you out of flow
And problems just grow?
What to do, to solve this riddle?
Stuck in the middle
In the quicksand of your mind.
There's only one way
Out of this unwanted stay.
Resolve to clearly see
And not live by some false decree
In the quicksand of your mind.*

- Wanda Ropa