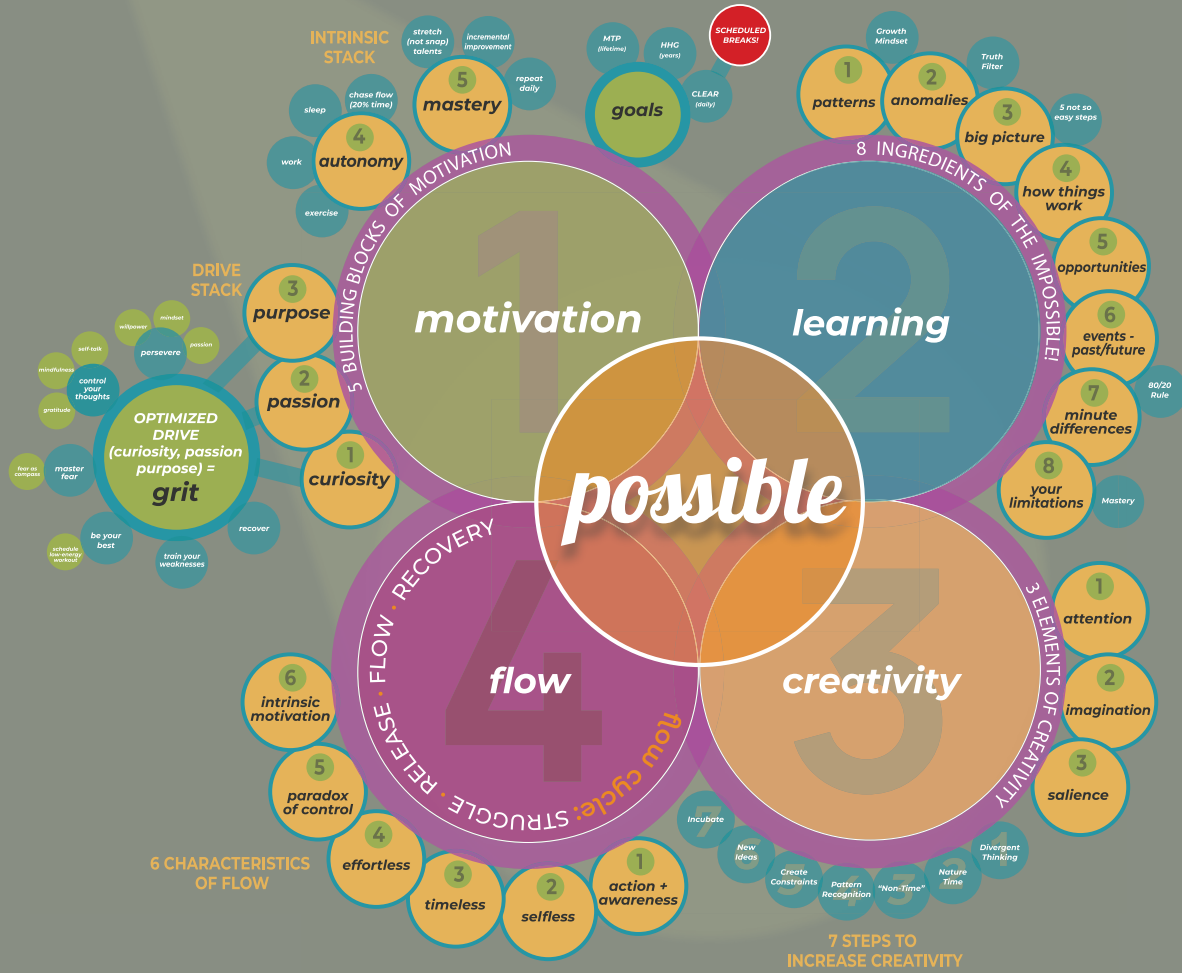




# EXPLORATIONS & PRACTICES

the ART of IMPOSSIBLE  
by Steven Kotler  
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# IMPOSSIBLE



The Art of Impossible, by Steven Kotler

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*Drive/Curiosity:* **TASK 1: The List!** Write a list of 25 things you are curious about (be specific, not general topics).

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25. \_\_\_\_\_



**EXERCISE: Feed your curiosities.**

Play in the intersections 20-30 minutes per day.

*Kotler tells us that, “a slow-growth strategy takes advantage of how the brain processes this information. Incubation = pattern recognition. Over time, this develops expertise, which leads to less work.”*



## **EXERCISE: Go Public.**

Kotler instructs us to, *“light the fire with a series of public successes. Positive feedback from others can fuel our purpose. Social reinforcement increases the brain to release more dopamine and increases curiosity and passion. Simple conversations will be fine. Teach people about what you are learning. Relating to others helps your purpose to survive and thrive.”* And, he adds, *“purpose creates a forcefield and protects you from yourself and the threat of you being swallowed whole by your new passion. Purpose acts as a rallying cry and attracts others to your cause.”*



*Drive/Purpose:* **TASK4: Putting purpose into practice.** Write down 15 problems in the world you would love to see solved. Kotler asks, “what keeps you up at night? Be as specific as possible.”

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14. \_\_\_\_\_
15. \_\_\_\_\_



*{The more you optimize the 3 components of “Drive,”  
“Grit” will naturally develop.}*

### **EXERCISE: The Big Picture.**

Fuel your purpose, first as a hobby, on nights and weekends. This will take the pressure off of you relying on this new venture to pay your bills. Once momentum and income increase, your new purpose can become your new career if you wish.

## **EXERCISE: Autonomy**

List some actions you can take to gain more autonomy with: exercise, work, sleep, and chasing flow (20% time). Schedule these on your calendar.

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## **EXERCISE: Mastery**

What are the next, small but immediate steps you need to take to obtain mastery and expertise (remember to stretch your abilities, not to the point of snapping them). Get these on your calendar, and take steps daily.

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*Goals:* **TASK:** How are the 3 strata of your goals stacking up? Take a moment to list some here.

**Massively Transformative Purpose [MTP]** (*may take a lifetime*) \_\_\_\_\_

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**High, Hard Goal [HHG]** (*may take years to accomplish*)

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**Clear Goals (daily task list)** *Establish what's **your maximum** number, then write this list at the end of each day, for the day to follow.*

**What will you do tomorrow?** *Write that list here: (remember, you get a hit of dopamine each time you check a box!)*

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

**EXERCISE: *Relax!***

List relaxing, rejuvenating, fun... things you can do during your scheduled breaks.

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**Grit: TASK 1: Mindset** - Identify a challenge you are facing. What effort/s can you employ to overcome this? Do you see a pattern where you make the same mistake over and over: What can you do differently next time? What curiosities do you have that, by seeking their answers, might point you in the path of a solution to your challenge?

Challenge: \_\_\_\_\_

Efforts: \_\_\_\_\_

Patterns I repeat/Curiosities/New actions: \_\_\_\_\_

**Grit: TASK 2: Persistence** - What is one, low-energy workout (Kotler does 200 pushups) you can do for challenging days?

**Grit: TASK 3: Mental Hygiene** - What negative phrase do you hear in your mind? (List that here). Then, write 3 positive attributes you possess that override the negative belief.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_





## **EXERCISE: “Five Books of Stupid”**

Kotler lays out five steps that can help you learn nearly anything. **In this first step**, write down five books about a topic that interests you, listing them in an ever-increasing level of difficulty.

Begin with something approachable and popular, then gradually read more technical books, and finally read a fifth book regarding the future of the field.

*Learning*: **TASK 1: Write your list of five books.** As you read, take note of 3 things: the Historical Narrative, Terminology, and always take notes on the Stuff that Excites You! Include any questions that intrigue you.

[1] \_\_\_\_\_

[2] \_\_\_\_\_

[3] \_\_\_\_\_

[4] \_\_\_\_\_

[5] \_\_\_\_\_

Questions: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **EXERCISE: “Be the Idiot”**

Take any unanswered questions from your list on page 19, and seek out experts for their answers.



## **EXERCISE: “Always ask the next question.”**

Find a new set of experts that offer contradictory information from your previous set.

You will know you have arrived at a stopping point, when everything you thought you knew is incorrect!







## *Flow Triggers:* **QUICK GUIDE:**

### **Internal Triggers**

1. Clear Goals
2. Unambiguous/Immediate feedback
3. Challenge/Skills Balance
4. Concentration on a Task
5. Curiosity/Passion/Purpose
6. Autonomy

### **External Triggers**

7. High Consequence
8. Novelty
9. Complexity
10. Unpredictability
11. Deep Embodiment

### **Creative Trigger**

12. Pattern Recognition + Risk Taking

### **Group Triggers**

13. Shared Goals
14. Equal Participation
15. Hive Mind
16. Deep Listening
17. "Yes, and" (*keep it moving*)
18. Complete Concentration
19. Sense of Control
20. Familiarity
21. Open Communication
22. Shared Risk

### **Extended Triggers:**

High Consequences

Rich Environments (include: novelty, unpredictability, and complexity.)

Deep Embodiment

### **FLOW BLOCKERS:**

- 1, Distraction
- 2, Negative Thinking
- 3, Non-Optimal Arousal
- 4, Lack of Preparation

## *The Flow Cycle*: **QUICK GUIDE**:

Flow is a cycle with four phases that you have to pass through one at a time.

### STAGE ONE: ***Struggle***

During struggle we acquire knowledge and skills. But at this stage it still feels uncomfortable and effortful.

“Unpleasantness is a built-in part of the experience. It’s an unavoidable biological necessity.”

“Optimal performance begins in maximum frustration.”

Flow redeems the struggle, and lies beyond struggle. For peak performers, frustration and struggle are actually a compass, because they know what lies beyond it.

### STAGE TWO: ***Release***

This is the incubation period where information moves from our conscious to our subconscious mind.

Low-grade physical activity (a hike, long car drive, playing an instrument, etc) works best.

### STAGE THREE: ***Flow***

When you reach this stage, it is important to avoid the four flow blockers: distraction, negative thinking, non-optimal arousal, and lack of preparation.

### STAGE FOUR: ***Active Recovery***

Flow is a high-energy state, so we need to recover from it.

“The word ‘active’ is operative here. Those dedicated to the flow path don’t leave recovery to chance, nor do they outsource it to their whims.”

“The neurochemicals used in flow are expensive for the brain to produce. It can take a little while to fill those tanks again. Nutrition matters, sunlight matters, sleep matters.”



## *SCHEDULING*: TASK 2: 7 daily practices, 6 weekly practices

### ***Daily:***

**90 to 120 minutes** of uninterrupted concentration

**5 minutes** for daily gratitude practice

**20 minutes** for release/mindfulness

**25 minutes** to learn and load the pattern recognition system through reading outside your core area

**5 minutes** for distraction management (preparing for the next day)

**5 minutes** for making a clear goal list (preparing for the next day)

**7 to 8 hours** of sleep

### ***Weekly:***

**2 to 6 hours** of high-flow fun activity (surfing, dancing, skiing, ...)

**60 minutes, 3 times a week:** challenging exercise session

**20 to 40 minutes, 3 times a week:** active recovery (sauna, massage, light yoga, ...)

**30 to 60 minutes, once a week:** train a weakness or being your best when you're feeling the worst

**30 to 60 minutes, once a week:** get feedback on the work you do during your daily high focus blocks

**120 minutes once per work:** social support, making time for other people

## **FAQS OF FLOW by STEVEN KOTLER**

<https://www.stevenkotler.com/rabbit-hole/frequently-asked-questions-on-flow>

### **GLOSSARY OF TERMS:**

**DRIVE:** Powerful emotional motivators that drive our behavior automatically.

**STACK:** Cultivate, align, amplify, and deploy

**MTP:** Massively Transformative Purpose

**HHG:** High, Hard Goal

## **KEY TO THE 6 PLEASURE DRUGS:**

### **DOPAMINE**

*Affect:* produces all the stages of desire. excitement, meaning, enthusiasm

*Experiences:* play, dancing or cooking, sex, shopping

Dopamine helps with these functions: 1. Focus, 2. Tuning signal to noise ratios, 3. helps us to detect more patterns and then creative ideas tend to spiral, 4. it is a reward chemical/feel good drug which drives behavior, and 5. amplifies memory.

### **OXYTOCIN**

*Affect:* produces: trust, love, and friendship. underpins fidelity and empathy; and heightens cooperation and communication

*Experiences:* play, connecting with others

### **NOREPINEPHRINE**

*Affect:* produces increase in energy and alertness. This is present when you are obsessed with an idea, can't stop working on a project, or thinking about a person you just met.

*Experiences:* exercise, sleep, small accomplishments, music, meditation

### **SEROTONIN**

*Affect:* calming, peaceful chemical, providing a gentle lift in mood, satisfaction, contentment, and the "feeling of a job well done"

*Experiences:* exercise, gratitude, self-care, spending time with people you love

### **ENDORPHINES & ANANDAMIDE**

*Affect:* painkilling bliss producers. heavy-duty weight lifters, euphoria, relaxed happiness, "all is right in the world"

*Experiences:* runner's high, exercise, sex, laughter, dancing, and listening to music

### **PAIRINGS:**

Dopamine + Oxytocin = blend beneath the delight of play

Norepinephrine + Dopamine = passion, like an artist for their craft, to the passion of romantic love

All 6 = FLOW is the biggest neuro-chemical cocktail of all. It may be the only time you get all 6 at one time. Flow is the source-code for intrinsic motivation.