

WISDOM SESSION

Happier at Work

“The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.”

Csikszentmihalyi and Larson’s breakthrough was to leverage new technology (for the time) to bring the question to the subject right when it mattered. In more detail, they outfitted experimental subjects with pagers. These pagers would beep at randomly selected intervals (in modern incarnations of this method, smartphone apps play the same role). When the beeper went off, the subjects would record what they are doing at the exact moment and how they felt. In some cases, they would be provided with a journal in which to record this information while in others they would be given a phone number to call to answer questions posed by a field-worker.

Because the beeps were only occasional but hard to ignore, the subjects were likely to follow through with the experimental procedure. And because the subjects were recording responses about an activity at the very moment they were engaged in it, the responses were more accurate. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson called the approach the experience sampling method (ESM), and it provided unprecedented insight into how we actually feel about the beats of our daily lives.

Among many breakthroughs, Csikszentmihalyi’s work with ESM helped validate a theory he had been developing over the preceding decade: “The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.” Csikszentmihalyi calls this mental state flow (a term he popularized with a 1990 book of the same title). At this time, this finding pushed back against conventional wisdom. Most people assumed (and still do) that relaxation makes them happy. We want to work less and spend more time in the hammock. But the results from Csikszentmihalyi’s ESM studies reveal that most people have this wrong:

Ironically, jobs are actually easier to enjoy than free time, because like flow activities they have built-in goals, feedback rules, and challenges, all of which encourage one to become involved in one’s work, to concentrate and lose oneself in it. Free time, on the other hand, is unstructured, and requires much greater effort to be shaped into something that can be enjoyed.

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When measured empirically, people were happier at work and less happy relaxing than they suspected. And as the ESM studies confirmed, the more such flow experiences that occur in a given week, the higher the subject's life satisfaction. Human beings, it seems, are at their best when immersed deeply in something challenging.

- Deep Work by Cal Newport

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,” – Colossians 3:23

CCM - I Must Continue To Challenge Myself

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David Trent believes that wisdom comes from continually seeking to learn and grow through relationships and reading, which leads to personal development. In an effort to inspire learning in others, David Trent sends out weekly Wisdom Sessions. He recommends purchasing and reading any book source used in these Wisdom Sessions.