

## Advance Praise for *Create More Flow*

"As an executive at a high-growth tech company and a mother, *Create More Flow* had a major impact on how I live my life, coach my team, and take care of my family. I'm now much more conscious of when I'm in a high performance state and how to trigger one. Camille's insights have also helped me clear my mind and enjoy my work and life more fully. I highly recommend this book."

—**Leah Belsky**, VP Global Enterprise Development, Coursera

"Have you ever experienced a time when you were engaged in something and you were so absorbed that you completely lost track of time? Do you remember how productive and efficient you were? Can you imagine how much more productive and effective we could all be if we could be in that state more of the time? That state is what's known as "flow," and Dr. Camille Preston's new book, *Create More Flow*, explains how you can create that space for yourself more often and more quickly. Her work is based on recent research in neuroscience and grounded by her own experience in creating more flow for herself and her executive clients."

—**William Courville, Ph.D.**, faculty, Georgetown University,  
Institute of Transformational Leadership

"*Create More Flow* offers timely advice for leaders looking for effective strategies to navigate our volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world."

—**General George Casey**, U.S. Army (Retired), Distinguished  
Visiting Lecturer of Leadership, Cornell University

"*Create More Flow* really nails the concept of flow – that incredibly effortless state of concentration and motivation where time slips away. This book is filled with great tips and research on how to unlock your peak performance more often. A must read for anyone who wants to be more satisfied and productive!"

—**Kathryn Minshew**, CEO & Founder, TheMuse.com

"Dr. Preston has developed simple – yet powerful – tips to becoming more efficient in tapping your creative juices. A must read for anyone interested in maximizing his/her potential. Buy it! Read it! Hack it!"

—**Robert W. Jerome**, Collegiate Professor Emeritus, Graduate School  
of Management, University of Maryland, University College

CREATE MORE FLOW

AIM Leadership, LLC  
97 Columbia St. Suite 3  
Cambridge, MA 02139

Copyright © 2017 by Camille Preston

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher at the address below.

AIM Leadership, LLC  
97 Columbia St. Suite 3  
Cambridge, MA 02139

Ordering Information:

Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the publisher at the address above or email [info@aimleadership.com](mailto:info@aimleadership.com).

Events:

The author is available for keynotes, workshops, and coaching sessions. For more information or to book an event, contact [info@aimleadership.com](mailto:info@aimleadership.com).

Cover and interior design: *theBookDesigners*

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Preston, Camille.

Title: Create More Flow: Igniting Peak Performance in an Overwired World/  
Camille Preston

Description: Cambridge: AIM Leadership, 2017.

Subjects: Business, General / Workplace Culture / Technology / Psychology.

ISBN: 978-0-9849041-1-2

# Igniting Peak Performance in an Overwired World

CREATE  
MORE  
FLOW

Camille Preston, Ph.D.

To Mark, Adie and Pres  
for igniting my desires to create more flow  
and more connected time with you

# CONTENTS

Preface xi

Chapter 1: Why Flow, Why Now? 1

Chapter 2: The Foundations of Flow 19

Chapter 3: Habits and Behaviors for Promoting Flow 33

Chapter 4: Creating More Bandwidth for Flow 47

Chapter 5: Creating More Time for Flow 63

Chapter 6: The Five Stages of Flow 75

Chapter 7: Flow Hacking 97

Chapter 8: Success Strategies 121

Afterword 131

## PREFACE

Six years ago, I set out on a mission in Sedona, Arizona. I had been struggling to start and complete writing my first book. I had hit wall after wall more times than I could count. I had started and restarted the book but failed to make any significant progress. I was beginning to believe that I would never achieve my goal. When I arrived in Sedona, however, something very different happened. Something magnificent flowed through me that was magical and captivating. After all my false starts, I found focus, clarity, and peace of mind and body. This is when I knew I wanted and needed more flow in my life.

Writing was never my forte. The longest, most miserable nights of my childhood were spent at my father's side working on essays that "I" was trying to write. It was always at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour for a class deadline. I always felt helpless and unsure where to start or where I wanted or needed to end.

Despite those high-stress, late-night, last-ditch efforts and my less than stellar writing skills, I managed to graduate from high school and get into a reputable college. Arriving at Williams College, I remember the embarrassment and relief I felt when I was assigned to Professor Clara Park's remedial writing class. Throughout college,

writing was a challenge. Perhaps that is part of the reason I decided to be an art major.

After graduating, I spent a year working in Africa. Maybe I'm a glutton for punishment, or maybe I'm a slow learner, or maybe I'm just stubborn, but I decided to apply to graduate school to pursue a degree in psychology. I must have known that to graduate I would have to write and defend two very large papers (a master's thesis and doctoral dissertation), but that didn't stop me. During my first semester of grad school, the chair of my department called me into his office. He had read my first paper and asked me point blank: "How did you get into this program?"

A lot transpired over the next five years, but I graduated faster than most students and stunned every faculty member in the department, as well as my father and myself, when I was awarded the American Psychology Association's International Best Dissertation Award. In the process, I learned a lot about the mindset and skill set necessary to hack outcomes. I learned how to achieve an outcome you want in the fastest, easiest, most effective way possible.

I backpacked through Southeast Asia for several months before starting a public policy fellowship with the American Psychological Association. However, I soon realized that "sausage making" (what happens on Capitol Hill in the legislative process) was not for me. I transitioned to working for a non-profit organization that supports police executives from large jurisdictions. My first day on the job was 9/11: the day law enforcement fundamentally changed from hometown security to homeland security. This catapulted me into a leadership role. When I later transitioned to working with executives, I continued to draw on this profound experience, which brought me into close contact with professionals who were struggling, tackling adversity head on and continuing to move forward.

At some point on this journey, I decided it was time to return to writing. I began to work on three different books, but couldn't seem to finish any of them. Call me gritty or just plain persistent. At some point, I decided I had to poop or get off the pot. I enrolled in an eight-day writing retreat. Either I'd come back with a book or I'd move on to other endeavors. That writing retreat was in Sedona, Arizona, and it was the most powerful experience I have ever had of being in flow.

Some might say that I was in the spirit and others might say it was the magical mystical vortex forces in Sedona. What I know for certain is that I was finally able to focus. It not only felt fabulous to be so deeply consumed in writing, it also created something great. While I had been trying to write a book for nearly three years, this retreat was my final attempt to actually do it. The book that I wrote was not the book I had set out to write. The book that came out of me in Sedona was completely new thinking to me.

I had to travel to Sedona to create the time and space needed to engage deeply, to tap into my intuition and to let my wisdom and thoughts combine in new and more innovative ways. On that retreat, I tapped into a deeper part of me and was able to consolidate my thinking into a very logical, inspired, and timely commentary about how technology is rewiring our brains and lives in a digital age.

Looking back, my writing in Sedona was an intense experience of being in flow. It was the unique yet replicable structure of the retreat that masterfully moved me out of my head and beyond myself into a place of full-bodied presence, deep engagement, beauty, and creativity.

For the past six years, I have been exploring how to recreate this peak experience more often, more sustainably, and in more areas

of my life. Flow is not just about feeling better, which means living better. Flow is not just about increasing productivity and creativity. Flow is essential for the well-being of individuals and communities. By cultivating a flow mindset and skill set, we can all spend more time in flow and spend more time feeling great and creating great things. How you create flow will likely be somewhat different from how I create more flow. What I know is that we can all learn from one another and that we all have something to gain from creating more flow in our lives and our work.

In early 2017, as I complete this book, there is no question that the world needs more flow now than ever before. Flow allows us to organize our lives around practices of intrinsic value: habits and ways of being that we have decided are important, fulfilling, and have the capacity to change the world for good. This is the belief, premise, and promise of this book.



## WHY FLOW? WHY NOW?

While flow isn't a new concept (it was first identified in the early 1970s), there has been a recent surge of talk and activity focused on flow. At its most basic, flow is about creativity and total immersion in life. It is about finding and sustaining that optimal place where we are engaged, moving forward and loving every minute of the process. In flow, we know where we are going and crave every step of the journey. If more and more people are finally turning their attention to flow, it reflects a confluence of factors ranging from a deeper understanding of how the brain works (thanks to modern neuroscience) to technological and economic shifts to the ongoing restructuring of the workplace and changes in the nature of work itself. This chapter explores the origins of flow in detail while also introducing the five steps of flows.