

HELPING NEW SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS ACHIEVE “FLOW”

In his new book, "Leading at Light Speed," Eric Douglas describes in detail the 10 quantum leaps needed to build high-performing companies in a time of accelerating change. The sixth quantum leap is "Stimulate Creative Flow."

Why is the concept of "flow" important? The reason is simple. People who are in a state of flow do their jobs better. They show a high level of focused attention and intrinsic satisfaction. As a result, they are both happier and more effective.

According to the author Mihály Csíkszentmihályi¹, there are three conditions that are necessary to achieve flow:

1. People must be involved in tasks with a clear set of goals. This adds direction and structure to the task.
2. People must have a good balance between the perceived challenges of the task at hand and their own perceived skills. People must feel confident that they are capable to do the task.
3. The task must have clear and immediate feedback. This helps people negotiate changing demands and gives them time to adjust their performance to maintain the flow state.

Here are some specific things you can do to help new supervisors and managers achieve a state of flow:

First, give new managers and supervisors a structured way to think about the task of managing. Two of the most important tasks are managing effective meetings and clarifying roles and responsibilities. Then give them opportunities to "job shadow" highly experienced, capable managers. Let them see first-hand how to run an effective meeting, how to organize their day, how to give direction, and how to provide feedback. Let them sit in on an employee appraisal.

Second, provide them a mentor or a coach, someone who can shadow them and give them prompt, positive feedback to build their confidence. Do this as soon as they are promoted into supervisory or managerial role.

Third, ask the same coach to work with each new supervisor and manager to create an Individual Development Plan (IDP) with 2-3 clear, actionable steps they can take to improve.

Finally, don't put too much faith in management training. This has the least payback for professional development. The most beneficial ways to develop new managers and supervisors are through 1) on-the-job experience and 2) feedback and coaching. Provide that, and you'll help them find their "flow."

¹ "Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience," by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, Harper Perennial, 1991