

# OPTIMISING SELF-LEADERSHIP

# WELCOME!

If you are feeling stressed when making decisions, finding it difficult to concentrate or simply wanting to level-up your untapped potential, this guide is for you.

Strong leadership starts by becoming a strong leader of ourselves. Like children, adults innately do what leaders do rather than what they say. None more so than when we want to be at our best and pressure knocks.

So managing how we think, feel, and act when under pressure is critical to how others perceive our decisions and the subsequent actions they will take.

In this eBook, **we are going to give you the foundations of reaching an optimal level of performance** so you can level up your leadership skills.







# INTIMATE TRUST

We are going to start your journey towards self-leadership by learning how to deal with pressure.

Let's take a climbing analogy. Alex Honnold—star of the documentary, *Free Solo*—is a rock climber who climbed the iconic north face of Yosemite Valley with no ropes or support.

On the wall, Alex's hands move with the grace of a master craftsman, the deft manoeuvre his only focus. His breathing, deep and rhythmical, serving as his inner anchor; the intimate trust placed on each micro-movement, allowing him to pivot the impossible and endure the wrath of an **unforgiving route never to be scaled like this before**, is inspiring. His mind focused like a falcon, aware of every pin drop and breath of wind, is undistracted by adrenaline. In much of his climbing, Alex embodies a state of deep presence and allows himself to flow up the rock. On he goes...

Alex thwarts the stress of potential death, stays mentally focused for hours, and scales the 'impossible' like others might approach another day at the office.

How does he deal with these pressures?

The key here is that Alex doesn't perceive these pressures as *stressors* in the moment. Instead, he **perceives** situational *demands/complexities* that he has the necessary coping skills to deal with.

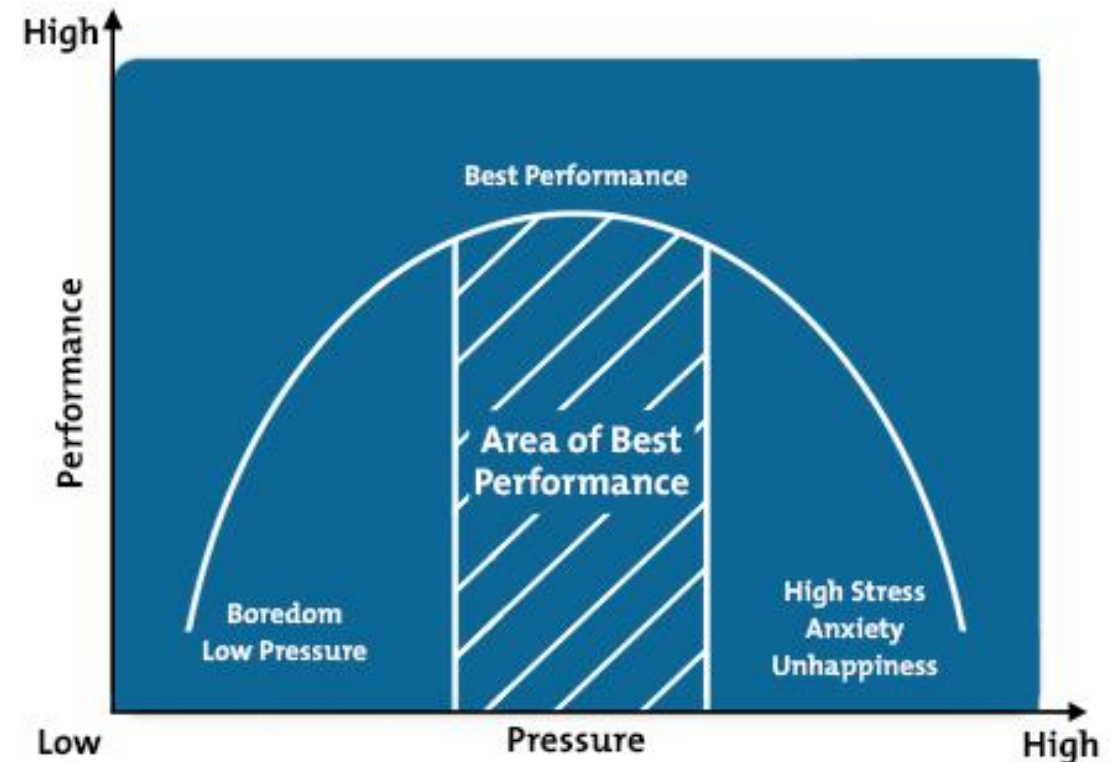
He is under stress, to that, there is no doubt. But not the stress that is constantly amplified in our daily lives – the sticky, debilitating distress that causes us to huff and puff, skew our perspectives, and feel frustrated. Instead, Honnold perceives these difficulties as what the “Father of Stress”, Hans Selye, calls “Eustress” or good stress.

This ‘eustress’ is one of our greatest friends; people like Alex rely on this positive stress to amplify abilities and perform to precision. This high arousal is necessary for optimal performance. Without it, we overcontrol or become too relaxed. Though if misperceived, we can feel over-aroused, anxious and stressed.

**The point here is that it is rarely the actual pressure of the situation, rather our perception of the stressors that affect our performance.**

“When we start to see **pressure as a privilege**, we quickly gain an appetite for challenges, allowing radical growth both personally and professionally.”

– **Cameron Norsworthy, CEO, the Flow Centre**



# POP QUIZ!

We often monitor our results frequently, but rarely do many of us monitor the quality of our subjective experience.

In these questions, below, please be brutally honest with yourself, you can't change what you are not aware of.

**On a scale of 1 to 10, how stressed are you on your most stressed day throughout the week? Place an X on the line below.**

?

1 - Bored

10 - Over Stressed

**On a scale of 1 to 10, how fulfilled do you feel on your best day of the week?**

?

1 - Unhappy

10 – Highly fulfilled

Write down below your current coping strategies for dealing with stress.

*I.e. running, wine, meditation, I don't have any...*



# UNDER PRESSURE

Sustained stress leads to performance decrement, distress and disease. However, **pressure is unavoidable** if you're living an engaged life.

In fact, pressure is an essential part of our development and growth. It is only by playing with our edges that we can stretch our capacity and unearth potential.

Importantly, how you deal with the stressors and challenges in your life will determine the quality and richness of your subjective experiences. Furthermore, the sum of these individual experiences, will ultimately determine the quality of your life.

With every passing minute, we become older, closer to death's door. So, if you are ready to fundamentally change the way you deal with difficulty, then let's get started.



To cut to the chase, we can dance in many ways to the same tune. The **optimal version of engagement**, however (to which we suggest our focus aligns towards) **is a mental and physical state called 'flow'**.

In flow, our brain wave activity becomes fluid, switching to different frequencies when required. Our cognitive systems synch up to add greater efficiency, and we allow the best aspects of our cognition to carry out the task at hand and captain the ship. Our heart rate becomes coherent, providing optimal physiological arousal and a calm mind. And finally, communication within our nervous system operates undistracted, and our neural highways are allowed to run like they have been designed to. In short, flow is nothing miraculous. Instead, it uses our natural functions to their greatest capacity.

Experientially, flow feels liberating. We become detached from our thoughts and operate with an innate trust and wisdom that effortlessly takes the reins of our experience; we act intuitively and let the situation unfold before us.

So how do we find this 'flow' in our day-to-day challenges?



# THE STRESS CYCLE

Fundamental to optimal performance is understanding the different ways our brain and body can react during pressure.

When the brain perceives a threat to our comfort, competence, or safety, **our mind and body naturally go into a biological stress response.** These reactions are actually helpful; they prime us to act, become alert, focused, and present.

Though the problem is that for many of us, we stay too long in this threat response. We maintain a high erratic heartbeat, which overproduces cortisol, norepinephrine, and adrenaline – our stress neurochemicals. Instead of using eustress to move to the next phase of intuitive action and optimal experience, we remain in a tightly controlled stress-driven cycle; to which further tension, stress, reduced motivation, poor decision-making, dissatisfaction, and micro burnouts are inevitable.





# THRIVING THROUGH STRESS

Now, focusing on and trying to talk ourselves out of a stress response and the ensuing reactions can be a total head f\*\*\*. Instead, what we want is simple process to respond with when we feel the pressure rising and the early stages of stress happening.

**Before we get started, pick a challenging task.** It can be anything: throwing tea bags into a mug, juggling, having that conversation you've been avoiding, or holding your breath for as long as you can. What you want is an activity that will cause the a stress responses in your body

*E.g., physical tension, high heart rate, internal alarm bells, thoughts to control the moment tightly, frustration, avoidant thoughts and messages such as "this is stupid", "I have more important things to do"?*

Now, practice the activity a few times and understand how this pressure and stress feels in your body.

Note: If you are not experiencing the above stressors, you need to amp up the level of challenge in the activity so that you can feel some of above stressors. You can do this by adding a time limit, creating unfavourable consequences, and so on.



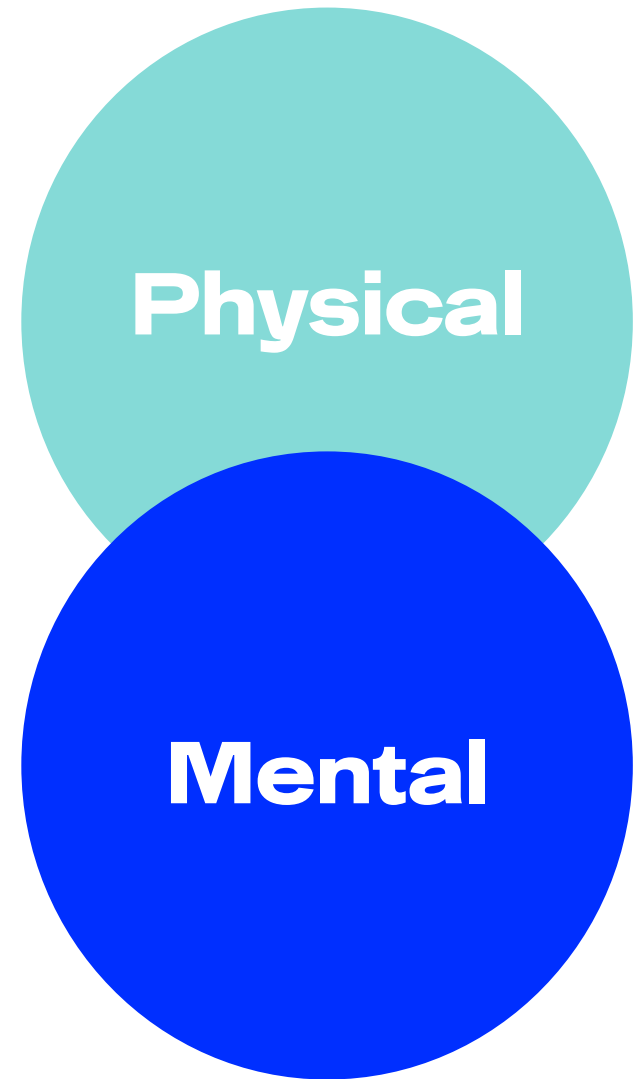
Next, we will integrate 3 simple skills I have used with C-suite execs and many elite professionals which have created profound effects in their lives.

## They are very simple steps and they work.

Initially, we have to conceptually separate stress into mental stress and physiological stress.

Mental stress being the fixed mindset, avoidant thoughts, gritted volition, and the ‘pull your socks up” messages you might hear yourself say.

Physical stress being the active heart rate, slight tension in your body, tense forehead, butterflies in the stomach etc.



# STEP 1

---

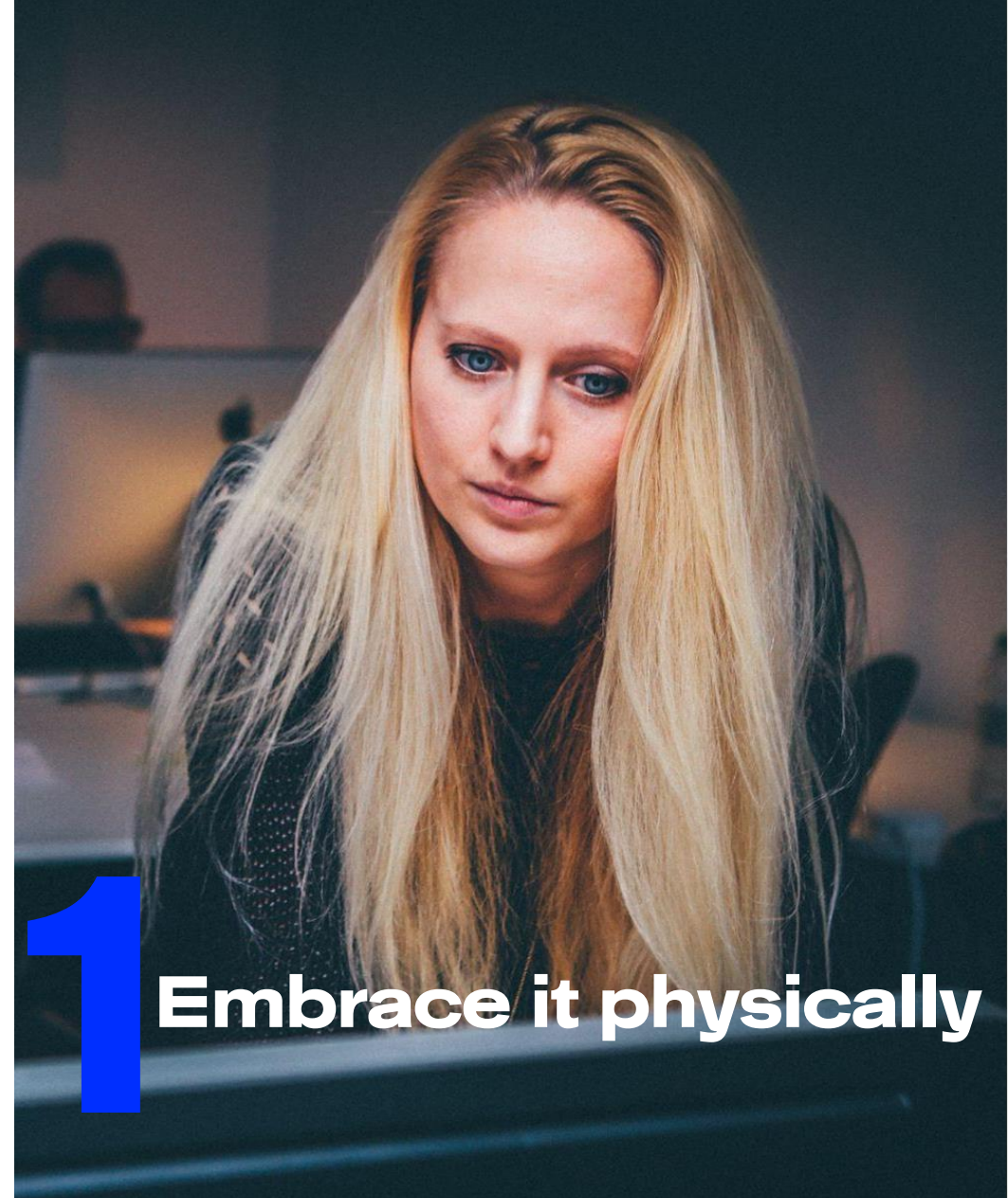
## Embrace Eustress

The first step is to embrace the physical stress you feel during your challenge.

This may feel counterintuitive, but this is the good stuff that helped Alex climb up the North Face, without ropes. This physical eustress is going to be your greatest friend. This eustress will help you rise above your average performances and experiences.

Welcome it, invite it, yearn for it. Feel it prime your body for action. In doing so, you may start to notice that your experience feels different. Instead of igniting muscle tension, frail nerves, and shaky knees, you may start feeling lighter, more present and alert.

Now, let's put it to the test. Practice your activity and focus on separating the physicality of your stress. Keep repeating the activity until you start truly desiring the physical effects of eustress.





# STEP 2

---

## Breathe-out mental stress as you prepare

Optimal execution comes with a level head, calm application, and a level of precision. So when mental stress arises in your consciousness (this may be different, now you are in charge of your physical stress), we are going to breathe-out any unwanted stress.

What we want to end up with is an optimal level of mental activation that allows you to be both highly cognisant but detached enough to be playful. If you feel mentally light and playful, then you are in the right place. If you're frowning or too serious, loosen up.

## Ready? Apply it to your task.

Increase the challenge in your task, whilst mentally staying mentally 'light and loose'. Important note! When actually at the crux of the task, just focus on the task. This exercise is supposed to be a preparatory exercise, that you do prior to the act, or in the early stages of the act.



# STEP 3

---

## Let go and surrender

Now, we are going to go beyond our normal conscious experiences of your activity (often operating through stress).

To do this, you will need to let go of your need to control the outcome. You will need to surrender any parts of yourself that 'struggle' or 'strain' during the act. Instead of struggling we want to 'surrender'.

Surrender the part of you that wants to fight, grit your teeth, and push on. The part that tells you to "make it happen". Instead, trust in your innate ability to perform what is necessary moment-to-moment. Find a sense of effortless in the effortful; with it will come increased capacity and amplified performance.

## Ready? Apply it to your task.

Keep your preparations the same, then let go of your normal conscious control. Focus on finding a sense of effortlessness.



# FIND YOUR FLOW

We hope the above points have been helpful and will serve you in the weeks to come. If you like what you have witnessed here, then this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Integrating the principles of flow has been successful in a diverse range of contexts and cultures. We have worked with entrepreneurs, CEOs and World Champions, and many people in between from a range of careers and cultures. **Put simply, flow training not only works, but it also has the added benefit of transferring into all areas of life.**

The application of flow has been academically proven to facilitate high function/performance, enjoyment, well-being, engagement, increased motivation, satisfaction, positive affect, creativity, reduced anxiety, improved mental health, optimal learning, cognitive capability (i.e., increased concentration), and the occurrence of further flow experiences.

We hope you choose to begin your training on self-leadership and fulfil your potential as a leader.

*References: Flett, 2015; Pelet et al., 2017; Zumeta, Basabe, Wlodarczyk, Bobowik, & Páez, 2016; Swann et al., 2017; Cheng, 2014; Wang & Hsu, 2017; Freire, 2016; Miles, 2013; Fullagar, Knight & Sovern, 2013; Magyarodi & Olah, 2016; Wang & Hsu, 2013; Landhaeusser & Keller, 2012; Llorens & Salanova, 2017.*





# START YOUR JOURNEY TODAY

Are you ready to take the next steps towards finding your flow?

Then our signature course, the [Flow Certificate](#), is perfect for you. In this course, you will learn a host of essential practical skills to master your mind and thrive under stress. It is a real game changer.

Click [here](#) to know more about our Flow Certificate.

If you have any questions, feel free to [contact us](#) or send us an email at [cameron@flowcentre.org](mailto:cameron@flowcentre.org)

*"The Flow State is what takes life to the next level, for enjoyment and performance. It has been critical to reaching a string of excellent performances." **Rebecca Soni, 8 Olympic Medals & World Record Holder***

