

Finding your flow

Feeling stuck? Lost your usual mojo? You might just need to update your settings

Words: Siobhan Mason

Have you ever had one of those days, or periods in your life, where you feel that things just aren't running optimally; when you're missing a bit of your mojo and can't get into your flow? If you're feeling that way right now, it might just be that it's time to reassess your settings, not unlike the way you update your mobile phone.

Battery running low? Perhaps it's time to move into power saving mode. Running out of storage space in your head? Maybe it's time to reconsider the information you allow into it. Perhaps some of your connections just aren't working for you anymore.

A few minor tweaks here and there can help you to run your life more smoothly and happily, so you may even begin to feel as if you've upgraded to a more efficient, shinier model.

Make your batteries last longer

Putting our phones into power-saving mode extends their life by lowering screen brightness, turning off haptic feedback (those little vibrations when we interact with an app), reducing background data usage and limiting performance. Only essential calls and messages come through, while all other notifications are put on hold.

We can use power-saving mode at all times, but tend to opt for it when batteries are running low. If our own batteries are struggling, we can conserve our energy by sticking to the essentials, such as sleeping, eating and working. Those extras – the socialising, life admin and cleaning – can wait until we're at 100 percent again.

Phone batteries run out quicker when we keep all our tabs open. Likewise, we run out of mental energy much faster if we churn over everything that needs doing instead of focusing on the task at hand. Learning how to get in the 'zone' or achieve 'flow' can be an effective way to close those tabs not in use. We know we're in flow when we're so absorbed in a task that there is no clock watching. We're working smart, not hard.

Notice when this naturally occurs. Is it because your desk is tidy? Is there an open window or a particular scented candle beside you? Is it because you've just had a workout, or have come back from a truly relaxing weekend?

Developing an awareness of when, why and how flow happens makes it easier to recreate, so you eventually learn to nail keeping just the one tab open at a time. ▶





Brighten your display

We can adjust the brightness on our phones to adapt to specific situations. For example, outdoor mode boosts a phone's brightness temporarily so it can be read easily in bright sunlight.

We also show the brightest side of ourselves to the world when out and about or trying to make a good first impression. And this is no bad thing. "Trying to look, act and perhaps even dress like the person you want to be is an affirmation in action," says psychotherapist Gael Lindenfield, who explains that she got into the habit of displaying the person that she wanted to be while growing up in children's homes.

We invite a positive response from others when we are positive ourselves, so we might even end up feeling as bright as our initial outward display.

However, outdoor mode switches off after 15 minutes so it doesn't drain your battery (or damage your eyes). We can likely last a tad longer in our bright mode, but it is important to be our authentic selves too. Spending time with people where it's okay for your light to be as dim as it needs to be is vital. Which is why it's a good idea to...

Check your connections

Some friends are like Wi-Fi: they are reliable, usually there for you and feel like home. Others may be more like mobile data – the kind you tap into when you're out and about having fun. Both are valuable, and knowing which is which can keep our expectations of friends realistic.

"Many people become frustrated and lonely when they expect nurturing from people who cannot or will not give it to them," says Gael. "This can stop us appreciating all the other positive qualities they can offer."

However, if it becomes hard to see the positive qualities (perhaps some friends only come to you when they are in need of something, or always

talk about themselves), then it's okay to move on.

"Our personalities change as we age and so do the things and people that feed them," explains Gael. "Some people moan about some friends, but don't discard them or spend less time with them. But sometimes, that's what is needed. By re-evaluating our friendship network every so often, we can focus on the people who nourish us.

"First, identify the connections that matter most, then spend more time than you think you can afford on them." ▶





Gael Lindenfield

A retired psychotherapist and author of 21 personal development books, which have sold several million copies around the world, Gael is skilled in building confidence. See her catalogue and blog at gaellindenfield.com

Limit your data

The data usage setting on our phones tells us how much data each app consumes and warns us when we're getting near our overall limit.

There's no such setting to measure the data in our heads, though a whirring mind and inability to switch off is generally a sign that we're downloading too much. "It's a good idea to take a step back and assess how much stimuli we allow into our environment," says Gael, "then ditch the data that's not really feeding us."

If we spend evenings scrolling through Instagram, listening to talk radio while in the shower, or watch a 24-hour news channel whenever we have a free moment, it could be time to be more deliberate about

what we consume. Do we need to watch the speculation on a news story as it unfolds, or could we do something more relaxing and come back to it once the facts are in?

"We need to build some regular times into our lives where we're not trying to catch up with anything," says Gael. "Find time to do nothing – absolutely nothing – but simply look at how the day and how our lives are going." For Gael, it's a bath without distractions, but it could also be a solitary walk in the park, a few quiet minutes meditating or simply sitting on your own with a comforting drink.



Switch to easy mode

Switching to easy mode on a phone enlarges the font size of each app, making it easier to find the ones we need at a glance. It also means the most useful and valued apps are simple to access on the home page.

We can switch our own lives to easy mode by working out our core values and keeping them front and centre. "Our values – the basic framework within which we operate – change as we go through life," says Gael.

"We can update them by listing around 10 or 20 (such as being kind, caring for the planet, putting family first). Then, if we ask ourselves

which we would give up a job for, lose a friendship over or be prepared to die for, we'll soon be able to whittle them down to three."

Once we find our three most important values, these can guide our day-to-day and major decisions.

Recharge regularly

Finally, charge yourself every day with nourishing, wholegrain foods, plenty of fresh air, exercise and a good night's sleep. And remember to switch off. As the writer Anne Lamott says, "Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes. Even you." 📵

