

dear residents

Optimal Training and the ACGME Survey

February 9, 2025

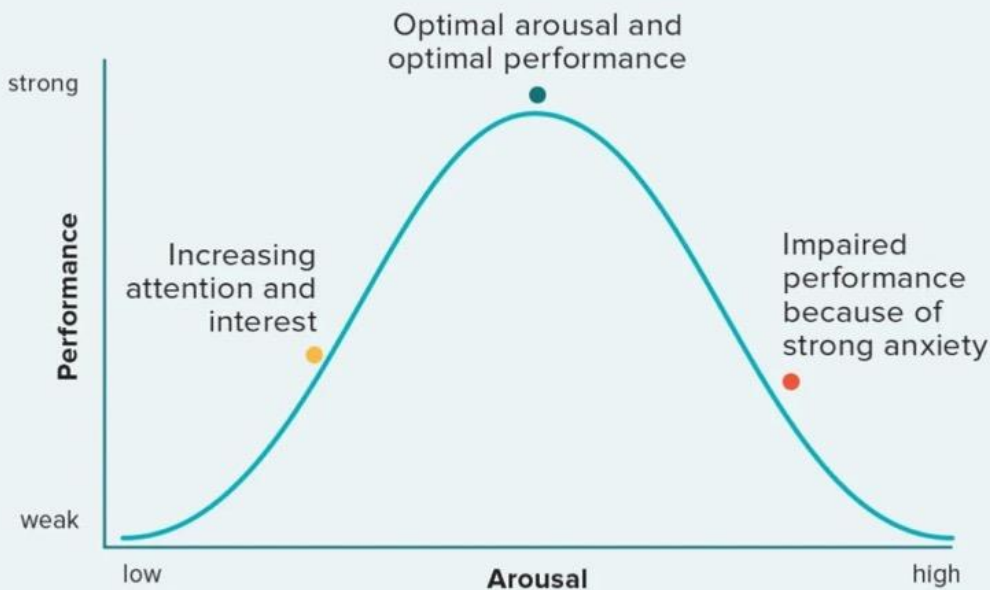
Dear Residents,

Optimizing something always sounds like a good idea—after all, we strive for perfection, efficiency, and functionality in various aspects of our lives. We can fully optimize some systems like computers, automobiles, and HVAC systems. However, more complex systems like residency training, which involve significant human factors and multiple stakeholders (patients, hospitals, payers), often create competing optimization priorities. Cooperation and compromise are essential strategies to achieve the best possible outcomes for everyone involved.

Imagine a fully optimized healthcare system: everyone has access, patients arrive at regular intervals, they fully recall their past medical history, medication reconciliation is a breeze, the emergency department is not overwhelmed, there is minimal waiting for imaging or testing, veins are easily found, admissions flow smoothly, medications are administered promptly, discharge rates closely resemble admission rates, handoffs are seamless, night calls are rare, patients go home on time, and unexpected events are minimized due to the system's well-behaved nature and anticipated scenarios. There are no beeping alarms, patient misidentification is eliminated, fall prevention is flawless, there are no central line-associated bloodstream infections, no catheter-associated bloodstream infections, no ventilator-associated pneumonia, no deep vein thrombosis, and no codes. Complications are averted, patients are cured, discharges are smooth, bills are paid, and everyone is content. It's all so ideal but so overly optimistic and unreal enough to merit its own Truman Show.

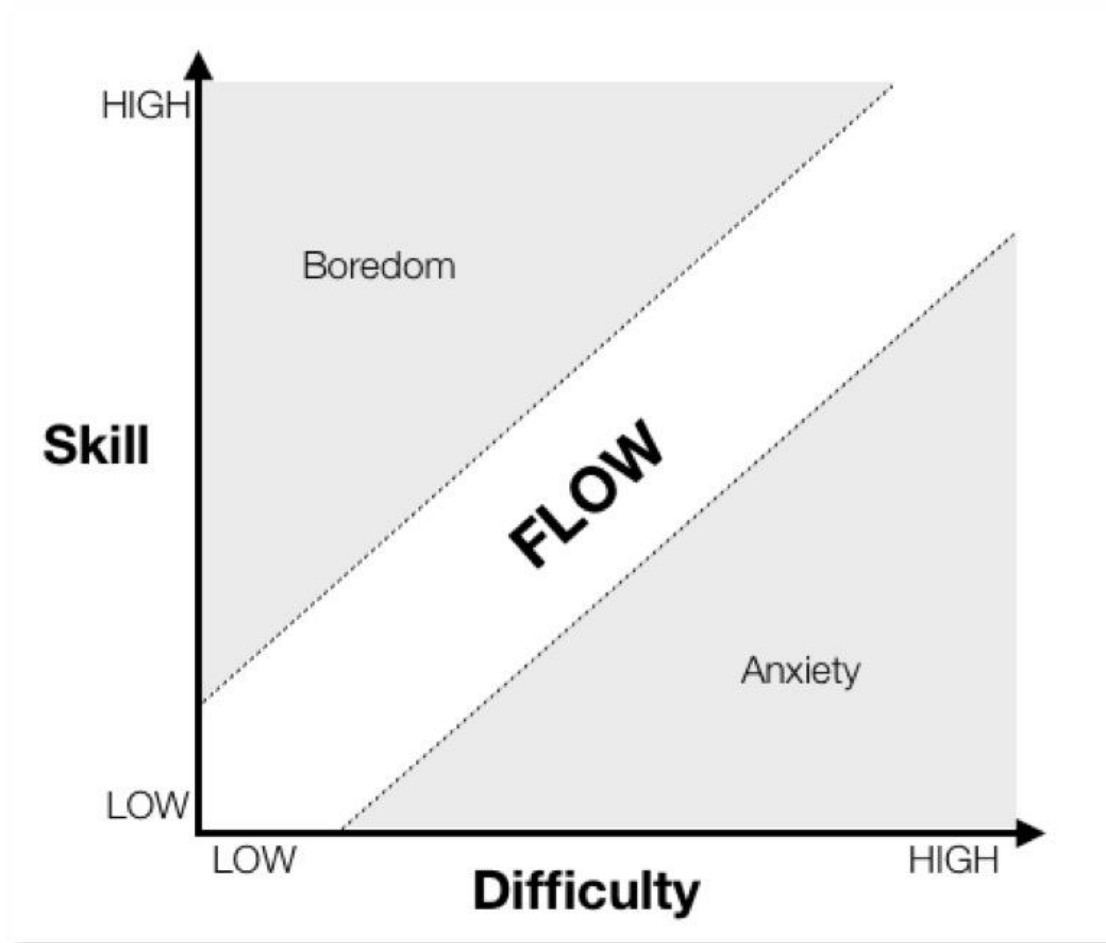
As you well know and have personally experienced, while health systems continuously strive for continuous improvement in processes and outcomes, there are too many variables and far too much unpredictability to ever achieve full optimization in any realm. From the perspective of the residency what we can control is to optimize your functioning in the best way possible. We primarily achieve this by aligning the tasks assigned to you with your level of skill development and by providing adequate support and redundancy to ensure a safe learning environment. **The principles of the [Yerkes-Dodson Law](#)** suggest an inverted U-shaped relationship between arousal and performance. According to this principle, too little arousal can lead to underperformance due to lack of motivation or engagement, while excessive arousal can result in stress, anxiety, and impaired functioning. The ideal level of arousal depends on the complexity of the task at hand—simpler tasks often benefit from higher arousal levels, whereas more complex or cognitively demanding tasks require moderate arousal to maintain focus without becoming overwhelmed. This law has been widely applied in psychology, education, sports, and workplace productivity to optimize performance by managing stress and motivation levels effectively.

YERKES-DODSON LAW BELL CURVE



healthline

A related concept is [flow](#) or getting in the zone – where an activity is rewarding, you are intrinsically motivated and the complexity of the task approximates the level of skill required to perform it – you find yourself fully immersed and work seems effortless. Expounded by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, the flow state occurs when the challenge of a task is perfectly balanced with one's skill level, creating a state of energized engagement. In this state, time seems to pass quickly, self-consciousness fades, and performance reaches its peak. Flow is often associated with creativity, productivity, and overall well-being



<https://www.calmsage.com/what-is-a-flow-state/>

Residency training occurs within a health system environment with competing priorities and processes optimized for various stakeholders, such as hospitals, clinics, faculty, and nursing. Therefore, it's essential to prioritize residency training optimization on an equal footing rather than allowing it to be overshadowed by the interests of others. This is precisely what we strive to achieve, guided by a set of principles outlined in the ACGME program requirements. Consequently, we design a curriculum that strikes the right balance between patient care and education and ensures an optimal level of arousal (stress) for you. Some of the principles that underpin our approach include managing work hours, ensuring days off, optimizing patient loads, and protecting time for learning and scholarship. Moreover, maximizing your joy in work while promoting your wellbeing remains paramount.

Starting next week, you'll receive the annual ACGME survey (which will be new for interns). Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions. As you know, I genuinely value your thoughts and opinions, and I'm committed to creating the best possible training experience for you. Our team is dedicated to advocating for you and continuously improving your training experience.

Best wishes for a week full of optimal flow,

Dino Kazi