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# The Rise Of Superman: Decoding The Science Of Ultimate Human Performance



## Synopsis

In this groundbreaking audiobook, New York Times best-selling author Steven Kotler decodes the mystery of ultimate human performance. Drawing on over a decade of research and first-hand reporting with dozens of top action and adventure sports athletes like big wave legend Laird Hamilton, big mountain snowboarder Jeremy Jones, and skateboarding pioneer Danny Way, Kotler explores the frontier science of "flow", an optimal state of consciousness in which we perform and feel our best. Building a bridge between the extreme and the mainstream, *The Rise of Superman* explains how these athletes are using flow to do the impossible and how we can use this information to radically accelerate performance in our own lives. At its core, this is an audiobook about profound possibility; about what is actually possible for our species; about where - if anywhere - our limits lie.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

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## Customer Reviews

This was a tough book to review. One reason is that I have read Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's 1990 perennial bestselling book *Flow - The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, his 1993 book *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*, and his 1996 book *Creativity, Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. Flow, the psychological research behind it, the relevance to sports, business, and life, have been around for decades. Jimmy Johnson, the once coach of the Dallas Cowboys gave some credit for his superbowl wins in the 1990's to reading Csikszentmihalyi's book *Flow*. With this background, I opened this book on the relevance of flow to action adventure

sports with trepidation. The strengths in this book are also some of the weaknesses. You will gain a new appreciation of action sports heroes that deserve greater recognition. Discover the accomplishments of legendary surfer Laird Hamilton, skateboarding sensation Danny Way (although you will gain more from watching the documentary "waiting for lightning" which is available on Netflix), rock climbing fanatics Alex Honnold and Dean Potter, among others. I knew many of the stories but Steven Kotler is a journalist and knows how to trigger intrigue. The concept, science, and applications of entering into the deep psychological state of flow plays second to Steven's attempts to draw you into the death defying feats in sports. Let me be absolutely clear - if you are uninterested in adventure sports, you will not enjoy this book. I'll give you a few examples of what I mean.

If you are interested in flow, as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, this book is absolutely worth the five bucks (Kindle edition). However, Csikszentmihalyi's groundbreaking book, *Flow*, is a better introduction to this topic, and a better one-stop shop on this topic. Dr. Cs was the scientist behind this concept, while Mr. Kotler is a journalist providing mostly human-interest stories about extreme athletes. The overall thesis of this book is that flow puts the brain in a state where pattern recognition and learning happen at much faster rate, giving rise to superhuman achievements over relatively short periods of time. So consistent flow is a shortcut to mastery, esp. compared to the popular 10,000 hours of conscious practice. Unfortunately, the author focuses entirely on extreme sports enthusiasts: big-wall rock climbers (free soloists), white-water kayakers, giant-wave surfers, BASE and bungee jumpers, freedivers, X-games-winning skaters, acrobatic skiers, etc. I say unfortunately because (a) I could not identify with people who dedicate their life to these pursuits and many of whom die as a result and (b) it is fairly obvious that these pursuits produce flow, while trying to achieve flow in a more productive daily-life activity is difficult and not addressed here. The author mentions a McKinsey study that executives who experienced flow were five times more productive. I would have loved to read more about that, rather than about how a ski bum tore his rectal muscles while trying to stop himself from terminal velocity by grabbing a rope with superhuman strength.

*The Rise of Superman* is ostensibly Steven Kotler's book about *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, as experienced through extreme athletes. In reality, it seems to be Kotler's attempt to break into the corporate consultancy/sponsorship world, using pseudo-scientific words (such as his organization's name: The Flow Genome Project) to try to get corporations to buy into his brand of "mindfulness extreme" as the next big competitive advantage. The way you can tell Kotler's a poseur

is that he uses terms like "source code" inappropriately through the book, as though trying to show that he has some deep insight that he is uniquely qualified to tell. No engineer or computer scientist worth his salt would use the words "source code" the way he does, and on closer inspection, it appears that Kotler did a "search-and-replace" for "source" with "source code" throughout the text. I'm not dismissing Flow or Mindfulness in any way. Nearly every unimpoverished human has experienced flow at one point or another in his life. I've threaded harrowing descents down Italian mountains with inches to spare between my handlebars and a pick up truck coming up on a narrow winding road, and piloted boats out of ports with sidewinds where mistakes would mean disaster, but I don't claim to have any deep insight to flow that are inaccessible to others. More prosaically, nearly every video gamer that has played a perfect level of Tetris or say, Naughty Dog's sublime

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