

Mastery (Greene, Robert)

This intense connection and desire allows them to withstand the pain of the process—the self-doubts, the tedious hours of practice and study, the inevitable setbacks, the endless barbs from the envious. They develop a resiliency and confidence that others lack.

Our levels of desire, patience, persistence, and confidence end up playing a much larger role in success than sheer reasoning powers. because they took more pleasure in making the little, secondary things well than in the effect of a dazzling whole.

If we experience this time as something to get through on the way to real pleasure, then our hours at work represent a tragic waste of the short time we have to live.

Instead you want to see your work as something more inspiring, as part of your vocation.

Greek poet Pindar wrote, “Become who you are by learning who you are.”

Some people never become who they are; they stop trusting in themselves; they conform to the tastes of others, and they end up wearing a mask that hides their true nature.

Think of it this way: What we lack most in the modern world is a sense of a larger purpose to our lives. In the past, it was organized religion that often supplied this. But most of us now live in a secularized world. We human animals are unique—we must build our own world. We do not simply react to events out of biological scripting. But without a sense of direction provided to us, we tend to flounder. We don't how to fill up and structure our time. There seems to be no defining purpose to our lives. We are perhaps not conscious of this emptiness, but it infects us in all kinds of ways.

Feeling that we are called to accomplish something is the most positive way for us to supply this sense of purpose and direction. It is a religious-like quest for each of us.

We thrive by the collective activity of people supplying their individual talents. Without such diversity, a culture dies.

Your vocation is more than the work that you do. It is intimately connected to the deepest part of your being and is a manifestation of the intense diversity in nature and within human culture. In this sense, you must see your vocation as eminently poetic and inspiring.

You are on your own. Change is inevitable, particularly in such a revolutionary moment as ours. Since you are on your own, it is up to you to foresee the changes going on right now in your profession. You must adapt your Life's Task to these circumstances.

Like Roach, you don't want to abandon the skills and experience you have gained, but to find a new way to apply them.

They are not good at what others seem to find easy or manageable. The idea of a calling in life is alien to them. In some cases they internalize the judgments and criticisms of others, and come to see themselves as essentially deficient. If they are not careful, this can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When you are faced with deficiencies instead of strengths and inclinations, this is the strategy you must assume: ignore your weaknesses and resist the temptation to be more like others.

Instead, like Temple Grandin, direct yourself toward the small things you are good at. Do not dream or make grand plans for the future, but instead concentrate on becoming proficient at these simple and immediate skills. This will bring you confidence and become a base from which you can expand to other pursuits. Proceeding in this way, step by step, you will hit upon your Life's Task.

Like a lotus flower, your skills will expand outward from a center of strength and confidence. Do not envy those who seem to be naturally gifted; it is often a curse, as such types rarely learn the value of diligence and focus, and they pay for this later in life. This strategy applies as well to any setbacks and difficulties we may experience. In such moments, it is generally wise to stick to the few things we know and do well, and to reestablish our confidence.

Too many people believe that everything must be pleasurable in life, which makes them constantly search for distractions and short-circuits the learning process. The pain is a kind of challenge your mind presents—will you learn how to focus and move past the boredom, or like a child will you succumb to the need for immediate pleasure and distraction? Much as with physical exercise, you can even get a kind of perverse pleasure out of this pain, knowing the benefits it will bring you.

We humans live in two worlds. First, there is the outer world of appearances—all of the forms of things that captivate our eye. But hidden from our view is another world—how these things actually function, their anatomy or composition, the parts working together and forming the whole. This second world is not so immediately captivating. It is harder to understand. It is not something visible to the eye, but only to the mind that glimpses the reality.

Life is short, and your time for learning and creativity is limited.

To learn requires a sense of humility. We must admit that there are people out there who know our field much more deeply than we do. Their superiority is not a function of natural talent or privilege, but rather of time and experience.

In fact, we come to believe that being critical of Masters or teachers is somehow a sign of our intelligence, and that being a submissive pupil is a sign of weakness.

In any event, you should not feel timid in approaching Masters, no matter how elevated their position.

In such a case you will want to convert such books and writers into living mentors as much as possible. You personalize their voice, interact with the material, taking notes or writing in the margins. You analyze what they write and try to make it come alive—the spirit and not just the letter of their work.

One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil. —FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

That is why everyone must constantly be pushed to the abyss, starting over and feeling their utter worthlessness as a student. Without suffering and doubts, the mind will come to rest on clichés and stay there, until the spirit dies as well. Not even enlightenment is enough. You must continually start over and challenge yourself.

People are increasingly reluctant to tell each other the truth about themselves—their weaknesses, their inadequacies, flaws in their work.

It seems abusive or damaging to people's self-esteem to offer them stern, realistic criticism, to set them tasks that will make them aware of how far they have to go. In fact, this indulgence and fear of hurting people's feelings is far more abusive in the long run. It makes it hard for people to gauge where they are or to develop self-discipline. It makes them unsuited for the rigors of the journey to mastery. It weakens people's will.

People are no longer struggling for good grades or social approval, but for survival. Under such pressure, they reveal qualities of their characters that they normally try to conceal. They manipulate, compete, and think of themselves first. We are blindsided by this behavior and our emotions are churned up even more than before, locking us into the Naïve Perspective.

Social intelligence is nothing more than the process of discarding the Naïve Perspective and approaching something more realistic. It involves focusing our attention outward instead of inward, honing the observational and empathic skills that we naturally possess. It means moving past our tendency to idealize and demonize people, and seeing and accepting them as they are. It is a way of thinking that must be cultivated as early as possible, during the Apprenticeship Phase. But before we can begin to acquire this intelligence we must first come to grips with the Naïve Perspective itself.

Instead of obsessing over himself and what other people were not giving him, he thought deeply of how they were experiencing the world, what they were feeling and missing. Emotions seen inside other people create empathy and bring a deep understanding of what makes them tick.

This intelligence consists of two components, both equally important to master. First, there is what we shall call specific knowledge of human nature—namely the ability to read people, to get a feel for how they see the world, and to understand their individuality.

Second, there is the general knowledge of human nature, which means accumulating an understanding of the overall patterns of human behavior that transcend us as individuals, including some of the darker qualities we often disregard.

To begin this process, you need to train yourself to pay less attention to the words that people say and greater attention to their tone of voice, the look in their eye, their body language—all signals that might reveal a nervousness or excitement that is not expressed verbally. If you can get people to become emotional, they will reveal a lot more. Cutting off your interior monologue and paying deep attention, you will pick up cues from them that will register with you as feelings or sensations.

As an exercise, after you have known people for a while, try to imagine that you are experiencing the world from their point of view, placing yourself in their circumstances and feeling what they feel. Look for any common emotional experiences—a trauma or difficulty you've had, for instance, that resembles in some way what they are going through. Reliving a part of that emotion can help you begin the identifying process. The goal is not to literally inhabit their mind, which is impossible, but to practice your empathic powers and gain a more realistic appraisal of their worldview.

For instance, you should take particular note of people's actions and decisions. Your goal is to figure out the hidden motives behind them, which will often revolve around power.

Their actions, however, say much more about their character, about what is going on underneath the surface.

If they present a harmless front but have acted aggressively on several occasions, give the knowledge of that aggression much greater weight than the surface they present.

In a similar vein, you should take special note of how people respond to stressful situations—often the mask they wear in public falls off in the heat of the moment.

Furthermore, people have trained themselves to appear a certain way; they have a persona they use in public that acts like a second skin to protect them. Unless you are incredibly perceptive, you will tend to mistake the mask for the reality.

Seething with envy, the only way to discharge it is to find a way to obstruct or sabotage the person who elicited the emotion. If they take such action they will never say it is because of envy, but will find some other, more socially acceptable excuse. They often won't even admit their envy to themselves.

Envy: It is our nature to constantly compare ourselves to others—in terms of money, looks, coolness, intelligence, popularity, or any number of categories. If we are upset that someone we know is more successful than we are, we will naturally experience some envy, but often we will find a way to minimize it because it is an unpleasant emotion.

If you are dealing with insecure types, you can display great interest in their work and even turn to them for advice. You must be careful not to boast of any success, and if necessary, to ascribe it to just good luck on your part.

There are simply too many to avoid. We can classify people as fools by the following rubric: when it comes to practical life, what should matter is getting long-term results, and getting the work done in as efficient and creative a manner as possible. That should be the supreme value that guides people's actions. But fools carry with them a different scale of values. They place more importance on short-term matters—grabbing immediate money, getting attention from the public or media, and looking good. They are ruled by their ego and insecurities. They tend to enjoy drama and political intrigue for their own sake. When they criticize, they always emphasize matters that are irrelevant to the overall picture or argument.

They are more interested in their career and position than in the truth. You can distinguish them by how little they get done, or by how hard they make it for others to get results. They lack a certain common sense, getting worked up about things that are not really important while ignoring problems that will spell doom in the long term.