Robert Greene

Mastery

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You don’t need inborn talent to become a master; just follow the steps of masters before you.

Most people think that the extraordinary accomplishments of great masters like Da Vinci and Mozart stemmed from natural talent and inherent genius.

But it’s not true. There is, in fact, no natural link between inborn talent and the mastery of a skill or field.

As one study showed, while many young children display blazing talent, relatively few of

them ever go on to remarkable achievement. On the other hand, those who show little sign of brilliance in school often later accomplish far more than their gifted peers.

For example, consider Charles Darwin's younger cousin, Sir Francis Galton. Whereas Darwin was an ordinary boy who showed no sign of exceptional intellect, Galton had a higher IQ and was considered a prodigious genius. Yet today, it's Darwin who's regarded as the superior scientist and one of the century's brightest minds.

Clearly, mastery does not depend on whether you're gifted or "ordinary." So what steps do both a maverick genius and a regular person take to become masters?

The answer is: exactly those steps taken by every great master throughout history. Each discovered their field, engaged in some kind of apprenticeship, developed a creative and open mind, then went on to achieve mastery. Edison, Mozart, Einstein, Goethe – the most celebrated masters throughout history all followed a similar path to success.

Modern masters, too, take the same steps. For example, professional boxer Freddie Roach dreamed of becoming a boxer, apprenticed with the great trainer Eddie Futch, and created a unique fighting style. Roach is now considered one of the best boxing trainers of his generation.

You don’t need inherited gifts, early talent or a high IQ to become a master. Just find your field or subject and follow the steps of the great masters before you.

Each of us has an inner calling which guides us towards our vocation in life – a discipline or field that we wish to master.

Have you ever had the feeling that a discipline or field was tailor-made just for you, and that working in that field is your destiny?

You need to trust that feeling!

Each of us is unique – an original, through and through. Due to the endless possible combinations of DNA in our bodies, we are a one-off

phenomenon; like snowflakes, no two humans are exactly alike.

So why is it, then, that we don't all *act* unique?

Due to incredible social pressure to blend in, we suppress our uniqueness in the vain hope that just doing what everyone else does will keep us out of trouble.

While adopting this "disguise" might have its advantages, it's actually our uniqueness as individuals which spurs us to find our inner calling.

In fact, many of history's geniuses experienced a moment of clarity when everything "clicked into place" and they suddenly knew what they wanted to do in their life. Many of them felt that, during their entire lives, a force had guided them towards a certain field.

For Leonardo Da Vinci, this "clicking moment" was when he stole sheets of paper from his father's office so that he could indulge his deep fascination and sketch animals in the forest.

And for others, such moments are even experienced in the form of an "inner voice" – as is

the case with profoundly religious Christians who reported hearing the voice of God telling them to use their lives to pursue a specific task.

Rather than using your energy to blend in with the crowd, recognise instead that you're unique, and that you have a specific calling in life which can be found quite simply by listening to – and following – your inner voice.

In the next blinks you'll find out exactly how you can follow that inner voice.

Your main goal in a new field should not be immediate success or money, but to learn as much as possible.

When people look for a "way in" to a particular field – an internship or first job – they often search for positions which promise the greatest prestige or financial reward.

But there are other, more important rewards to consider.

For one, a job that gives you an opportunity to learn can be worth doing, even if it doesn't pay well. Other more

prestigious, well-paid positions will be available to you later, and the practical knowledge you gain from those early, badly-paid jobs will ultimately pay off for decades to come.

Consider boxer Freddie Roach: he chose to take an unpaid position at a boxing center, using his time there to develop the skills necessary to his professional career. Ultimately, his decision paid off; Roach eventually earned far more money than if he'd taken a different, paid job early on.

Many other masters made a similar choice in their early

years. For example, in his youth, Charles Darwin rejected both a place at medical school and a well-paid job in the church. Instead, he convinced his father to allow him to work as an unpaid naturalist on the HMS Beagle, where he could study exotic plants and animals. The observations he made during that voyage helped him to develop his famous theory of evolution.

Or consider Benjamin Franklin, who – rather than taking over his father's lucrative candle-making business – chose to work at a printing business. This meant a far longer

apprenticeship, and financial uncertainty, but Franklin recognised he could use this position to learn how texts were composed – a skill that would later benefit him greatly.

So when you're looking for an internship or that first job, don't fixate on prestige or money. Instead, sniff out those that offer you an opportunity to gain knowledge and develop your skills. Such jobs will lead you to reap greater financial rewards in the future.

The best way to learn a discipline or skill is to have a mentor who shows you the way.

Learning new things is never easy. You can, however, at least make the process much easier for yourself.

When we try to learn something new on our own, we tend to make preventable mistakes, and spend much time seeking the correct way to do things. The result? Time and resources are squandered.

What you need is a mentor: someone to guide you, helping

you to use your time and resources more effectively.

For instance, consider how complicated it can be to begin a new job and navigate its working environment. Without proper guidance, it'll take much longer for the newcomer to learn the ropes and find her way around.

It's somewhat like being in a foreign city for the first time and trying to find the train station. You can, of course, do so by wandering through the unfamiliar streets until you happen to stumble upon it. Yet, you'll save time and effort by simply asking one of the locals.

But you're not the only one who benefits from having a mentor. Usually, a mentor and apprentice develop a special relationship from which both can profit.

This is because, firstly, the mentor sees the apprentice as a younger version of herself, and is therefore interested and invested in their future. Secondly, because the apprentice admires the mentor, she pays much closer attention, absorbing their knowledge like a sponge.

Yet, as an apprentice, your progress isn't necessarily limited

by your mentor's own limitations. Many famous masters had mentors whom they eventually surpassed. Alexander the Great, for example, learned much about governing a state from the great philosopher Aristotle, and would later go on to modify and augment these lessons based on his own firsthand experiences.

Like many other famous students and apprentices, you should seek out a mentor who will teach you their own ways. But don't forget: your ultimate goal should be to outmatch your mentor.

In the next blinks, you'll find out how, following your apprenticeship, you can advance to find your own unique way forward.

Once you complete your apprenticeship, you must be bold enough to think innovatively and challenge the very rules you learned before.

During your apprenticeship, you've learned the most important aspects and facets of your field. But you can't stay an apprentice forever.

So, what now?

It's time to revive your innately fearless and open mind.

As children, all of us were natural freethinkers and rule-breakers. A child's mind is totally

open. They believe that anything and everything is possible, take nothing for granted, and thus ask all kinds of questions: Why is the sky blue? Who's that in the mirror, staring right back at me?

Children also believe in all manner of supernatural creatures and fantastical tales, and are able to imagine, with zero effort, that they're true.

Such open-mindedness, such absence of fear towards questioning anything we don't understand – this is a human being's natural state. For example, when, as adults, we visit a foreign country where we

can’t depend on old habits and experiences, we’re prompted to be open-minded again. Seeing the world with child’s eyes is, for adults, one of the most enjoyable things about traveling.

It’s precisely this freedom and audacity to break rules and subvert expectations which you should embrace once you finish your apprenticeship and go it alone. This is what will enable you to grow in your field – and achieve mastery – in your own unique way.

Indeed, many masters throughout history eventually began to think innovatively and

create something uniquely their own. For example, Mozart became tired of performing the old tried-and-true piano repertoire, so began to compose his own music. He fused the styles he already knew, adding some of his own, unusual elements.

The result? His audiences were impressed by his music's novelty and originality.

So be brave and think in new ways, challenging the established rules of your time. If you don't, you might one day find yourself stuck in the same unsatisfying routines.

You can learn to problem-solve in new and creative ways by broadening and training your mind.

Who among us has not wished for the ability to solve problems in original and creative ways? Well, luckily, this ability can be trained.

First, we must unshackle and broaden our minds, because we have a natural tendency to think too narrowly.

Humans quickly become creatures of habit, loyally repeating the same actions

without reflection. Once a process has been proven to work in a particular situation, we tend to use it for every similar situation without pausing to ask: “Is this really the best way to solve this particular problem?”

Similarly, the standards and conventions our culture depends on might be essential for quick, functional communication, but they can also seriously hinder our potential for creative, innovative thinking.

For example, in order to identify things quickly, we use clear, binary distinctions –

man/woman, body/mind, fiction/fact. As we become habituated to using them, we also become desensitized to the nuances that lie between.

The second thing we must do to improve our creative thinking is to train our brains to quickly make new and uncommon connections.

One famous study showed that after 10,000 hours of practice in a given field, the brain is qualitatively changed, and makes brand new connections between formerly unconnected areas. This enables you to quickly see any given problem in

that field in a new and broader way.

This is best demonstrated in the human ability to solve a specific problem while apparently thinking about something completely different. Ever had a eureka moment while in the shower, or taking a walk? You're in good company: Einstein, for example, played the violin while he pondered theoretical problems, claiming that this helped lead him to the solution.

So don't resign yourself to the notion that people are either born creative thinkers or not. You *can* control and train your

brain. By following the above steps, a more open and creative mind can be achieved much faster than you might believe.

Finally, in the next blink, you will learn what exactly “mastery” is.

Mastery: practice a skill until it's automatic, so your mind and body act as one, freeing you to focus on the bigger picture.

So, what exactly *is* mastery?

You might've experienced it already in high-pressure situations when your body responded immediately – and automatically – to your mind's commands.

This enables masters to see the big picture, rather than just the details, and indeed many masters have described their talent in these terms.

Chess master Bobby Fischer, for example, saw beyond the individual moves of a game, instead perceiving moving "fields of forces" that revealed the many ways a game could play out.

Similarly, pianist Glenn Gould "saw" the entire architecture of a given piece of music as he played, not only the part he was playing at that moment. This freed him to masterfully coordinate the different parts of a composition as he performed.

Masters can do this because they've developed an automatic connection between mind and

body – a connection that is actually deeply rooted in our nature.

In fact, for every animal, mental decisions and physical actions are experienced as one. For example, in the exact moment a bee “decides” to sting you, it acts on it. The bee simply reacts to sensory input, its nerves issuing a command to the body. No second-guessing the reflex; no abstract thinking.

And, according to one theory, our primal ancestors didn’t separate mind and body either. Separation occurred once we’d developed the capacity for

abstract thought. This is what enabled us to suppress certain reflexes. For example, when threatened, humans don't automatically attack or run away; they try to talk things out. But this separation also meant that any sense of a unified mind and body was lost.

As a master, your mind and body will become one, enabling you to reach a new level of understanding and skill. And even when you're in the thick of practicing your discipline, you'll also be able to see the bigger picture, and to use this knowledge to accomplish great things in your field.

Final summary

The main message of this book:

To achieve mastery, you need to find your own, unique inner calling; study and learn a great deal under a mentor during an apprenticeship; and, finally, develop an independent and creative way of thinking. Studying the lives of other great masters can give valuable insight on this task.

This book in blinks answered the following questions:

Who can achieve mastery?

- You don’t need inborn talent to become a master; just follow the steps of masters before you.
- Each of us has an inner calling which guides us towards our vocation in life – a discipline or field that we wish to master.

What constitutes a good apprenticeship?

- Your main goal in a new field should not be immediate success or money, but to learn as much as possible.
- The best way to learn a discipline or skill is to have a

mentor who shows you the way.

How can masterful, creative thinking be achieved?

- Once you complete your apprenticeship, you must be bold enough to think innovatively and challenge the very rules you learned before.
- You can learn to problem-solve in new and creative ways by broadening and training your mind.

What exactly is Mastery?

- Mastery: practice a skill until it's automatic, so your mind

and body act as one, freeing you to focus on the bigger picture.

Suggested further reading: *Awaken the Giant Within* by Anthony Robbins

Awaken The Giant Within argues that, ultimately, we're all in control of our own lives, and that by changing our habits, controlling our emotions and believing in those things we want to believe, we can make our ideal life a reality.

Nice work! You're all done with this one.

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