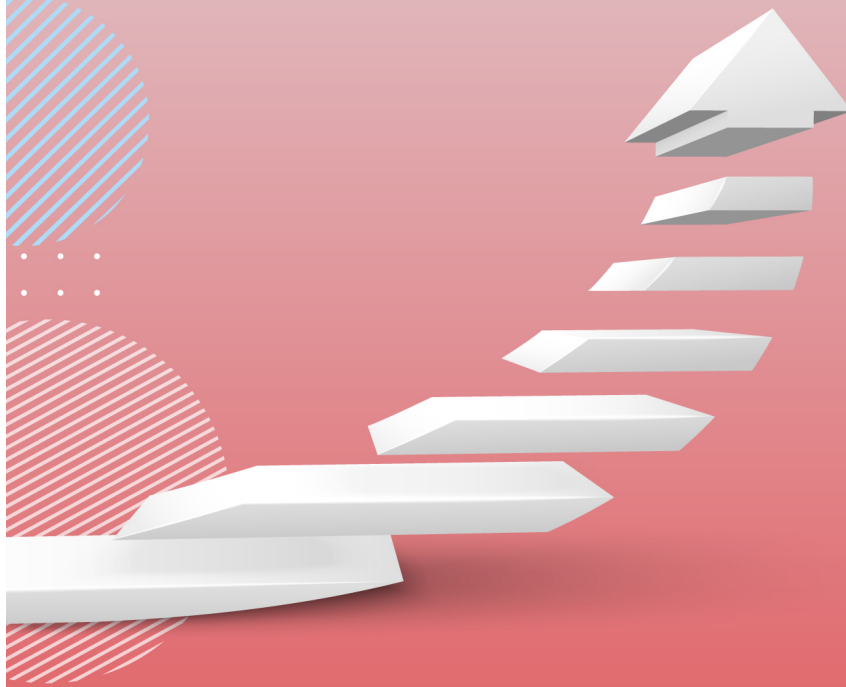


SUMMARY

MASTERY

ROBERT GREENE



Summary of “Mastery” by Robert Greene

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Learn How to Unlock the Power From Within You to
Become a Master

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Introduction

Imagine you are learning to play a musical instrument or entering a new job where you must learn a new skill. In the beginning, you feel uncomfortable, like an outsider. You feel intimidated and perhaps a bit of fear. If you're first studying the piano, you don't yet understand the relationships between the keys, the chords, the pedals, and everything else that goes into creating music. If you're starting a new job, you don't yet know the power relationships between people, the psychology of your new boss, or the rules and procedures you'll need for success. So you begin to observe others and follow their lead. As you do so, you gain clarity as you learn the rules and see how things work and fit together. If you keep practicing the piano, you gain fluency and the basic skills become mastered. Now, you can take on new and more exciting challenges, and you begin to see the connections that were once invisible to you. Your confidence grows. Soon, you move from student to practitioner and expand your knowledge. Instead of just learning how others do things, you begin to bring your style and individuality. As the years go by and you continue the process, you finally accomplish something greater: mastery. The piano is no longer something outside of you; it's internalized. It's become a part of your nervous system, your fingertips. In your career, you now understand the group dynamic, the social situations, and you can make rapid and creative decisions. You've learned the rules so well that you can now break them down and rewrite them.

This process illustrates three phases: *Apprenticeship*, *Creative-Active*, and *Mastery*. In this final phase, your degree of knowledge, experience, and focus is so deep that you can now see the whole picture with complete clarity. You now have access to the heart of life. It is in this phase that we see brilliant scientists uncover new laws of physics and inventors create something no one else has ever imagined. The best part? Mastery can be achieved by anyone, even you. For centuries, people have believed Mastery to be a privilege, given to a select few who simply have an innate talent. But "This is the real secret: the brain that we possess is the work of six million

years of development, and more than anything else, this evolution of the brain was designed to lead us to mastery, the latent power within us all.”

To Discover Your Life's Task You Must Look Inward

If all of us are born with similar brains, then why is that only a limited number of people seem to truly excel and utilize this potential power? I mean, how else can you explain the brilliance and natural talent of artists like Mozart or Leonardo da Vinci? But studies show that thousands upon thousands of children display exceptional skill and talent in some field, yet relatively few of them ever go on to do great things. In other words, natural talent or a high IQ cannot predict or explain future achievement.

For example, let's take a look at Sir Francis Galton and his older cousin, Charles Darwin. When the two were young, Galton was a super-genius with an exceptionally high IQ, even higher than Darwin's. He even went on to have a notable scientific career. Yet, Galton never fully mastered any of the fields he went into. On the other hand, Darwin is celebrated as one of the greatest scientists in history. He is one of the few who has forever changed our view of life. Darwin himself admits that he was "a very ordinary boy, rather below the common standard of intellect... My power to follow a long and purely abstract train of thought is very limited." So what did Darwin have that Galton didn't?

Many masters throughout history confess to experiencing some kind of force, voice, or sense of destiny that guides them forward. For Napoleon Bonaparte, it was his "star." And for Socrates and Goethe, it was a "daemon," and even Einstein talked of an inner voice that shaped the direction of his thoughts. You may think of this voice or feeling as something purely mystical or beyond explanation. But there is a very real, and practical explanation for such "stars" and "daemons." You see, each of us is born unique. This uniqueness is in our DNA, and we are a one-time phenomenon; our exact genetic makeup will never be repeated. These forces within us draw us toward certain experiences and even influence the development of our minds.

Over time, this force weakens as you move through life and conform to social pressures. This *counterforce* is incredibly powerful and is the voice that tells you to act in such a way to fit into a particular group. When the counterforces become strong enough, you lose complete contact with your uniqueness and your desires change to conform to the desires of others. You end up choosing a career that doesn't suit you, you seek pleasure in places outside your career, and you become less engaged in your work. In the end, you've broken contact with your destiny formed at birth.

You must avoid this fate and realize your Life's Task. To do this, you must go through three phases. First, you must look inward and connect or reconnect with your inclinations, that sense of uniqueness. Clear away the voices that might confuse you, perhaps those voices come from your parents or your peers. Next, you'll need to look at the career path you are on or about to begin. To do this, you will want to view your work as something more inspiring than just a "job," you'll want to view it as part of your *vocation*. Your work then is something deeply connected to who you are, not a separate compartment in your life. Finally, you must see your career or vocational path more as a journey with twists and turns rather than a straight line. As you go throughout your journey, you will build your understanding and your confidence and eventually become a Master in your field.

Masters Find Inspiration Through Genuine Love and Curiosity

It may sound easier said than done to find your vocation and your Life's Task. That's because looking inward requires some serious introspection, and you may never know where your inspiration will come from. For example, when Albert Einstein was just five-years-old, his father gave him a compass as a present. Immediately, he became fascinated by the needle, which changed direction as he moved the compass. The notion that there was a magnetic force that operated this needle, a force invisible to the eyes, captivated him. For the rest of his life, all his interests and ideas revolved around the question of hidden forces and fields, and he often thought back on that compass that sparked his initial fascination.

Sometimes, however, it isn't an object that sparks a deep connection. For anthropologist-linguist Daniel Everett, it was growing up on the California-Mexico border that drew him into the Mexican culture around him. He was fascinated by the language, the food, the manners. His fascination then turned into a lifelong interest in diverse cultures. For John Coltrane, his inspiration came from an encounter with a Master. Coltrane was interested in music and took up the saxophone and played in the high school band. Just a few years later, he saw the great jazz saxophonist Charlie "Bird" Parker perform live. It was that performance that sparked something inside Coltrane, and he began to practice with such intensity that within a decade, he transformed himself into one of the greatest jazz artists of his era.

All of these masters found success in a field that was sparked by a genuine interest and love for their subject. Things like prestige and money came later. Therefore, it's important that when you search for a career or vocation that you become guided by love and curiosity, not fame and fortune. Just take a look at Freddie Roach, the boxer who chose an unpaid position at a boxing center to help him develop the necessary skills. Ultimately, Roach's decision to take an unpaid job led to more fame and success later in life than if he had taken another paid job earlier on. Charles

Darwin made a similar choice when he rejected a place at medical school and a well-paid job in a church. Instead, he took an unpaid position as a naturalist on the HMS Beagle, where he could study exotic plants and animals. It was during that voyage that Darwin made observations that helped him develop his famous theory of evolution.

Ultimately, you should value learning above all else. This will lead you to all of the right choices. One that will allow you to work with people and mentors who can inspire and teach you. Even if it's a job with mediocre pay, it can provide you with valuable life skills. Additionally, "You must never disdain an apprenticeship with no pay. In fact, it is often the height of wisdom to find the perfect mentor and offer your services as an assistant for free." Oftentimes, such mentors will divulge more than the usual trade secrets. In the end, when you value learning above all else, you set the stage for your creative expansion and money will soon follow.

Finding the Right Mentor is Just as Important as Leaving That Mentor

As mentioned earlier, focusing on learning and curiosity should be your driving force for success. Of course, learning is not always an easy process, especially when you are starting something new. Therefore, one of the best ways to learn something new is by finding a mentor in your field. When you find the right mentor, you will be able to use your time and resources more effectively and learn the ropes quicker. In fact, the choice of the right mentor is more important than you might imagine and finding the right mentor is key. People often make the mistake of choosing someone that is the most knowledgeable, the most charming, or has the most stature - these are all superficial reasons. So don't choose a mentor just because they crossed in your path first; instead, put as much thought into your decision as possible.

When selecting a mentor, keep your Life's Task and your vision of your future self in mind. The mentor you choose should be strategically aligned with this vision. So if your path is in a more revolutionary direction, you will want a mentor who is open and progressive, and not domineering. If your ideal is more idiosyncratic, you'll want a mentor who makes you feel comfortable and will help you transform your peculiarities into mastery, instead of squashing them. And if you aren't sure about the direction you want to go, it might be useful to find someone who can help you gain clarity in what you want. In this case, you might even benefit from choosing a domineering mentor. It's important, however, to stay emotionally distant. That way, you can eventually choose what you wish to absorb and what you should reject.

For example, in 1906, Carl Jung was a promising psychiatrist, renowned for his work in experimental psychology, and he held an important position at the famous Burghölzli Psychiatric Hospital in Zurich. Despite his success, he still felt insecure and became frustrated that many of his treatments for patients weren't often effective. So he began to correspond with the founder

of the psychoanalytic field, Sigmund Freud, who was 51-years-old at the time. While Jung was ambivalent about Freud, he admired his passion as a pioneer in the field. When they finally met a year later, the two talked nonstop for 13 hours. Freud was charmed by Jung and found him to be more creative than others, and Freud believed Jung could serve as his successor in the psychoanalytic movement.

Jung, on the other hand, believed Freud could be the father figure and mentor he desperately needed. So they worked together for about five years until Jung's initial ambivalence returned. He realized Freud could be rather dictatorial and he refused to follow the Freudian dogma. By 1913, they ended the mentor relationship and Jung was banished from Freud's inner circle. But the relationship wasn't all bad. Over the years, Jung had worked out all his doubts and sharpened certain core ideas about human psychology. Overall, he was able to strengthen his sense of identity throughout the years, and without the mentorship, he would have never come to a clear resolution.

When going through your own apprenticeship, it's important to remember that you won't be an apprentice forever. This simply means that you'll need to go back to your childhood. For instance, if you've ever visited a new country in which you cannot rely upon everything being familiar, you come childlike again. You become struck by the oddness and newness of everything you are seeing. Well, Masters retain a portion of this childhood spirit in their work and their ways of thinking. They also retain a childlike excitement about their field in a playful approach. This is called the *Dimensional Mind*, which often lies dormant in the Apprenticeship Phase as you patiently absorb all the new details there is to know about your field.

The spirit then comes back as you gain freedom and the opportunity to use the knowledge you've gained. It is this freedom to bend the rules that you should embrace once you finish your apprenticeship. For example, Mozart spent close to eight years suppressing his creativity under the pressure from his father. Later, he rebelled and reconnected with his childlike spirit and exploded with creativity once he had freed himself from his family. In other

words, don't be scared to rebel and go out on your own; after all, that's what every Master does at some point anyway!

To Obtain Mastery, You Should Train Your Brain to Stay Open-Minded

Imagine the mind as a muscle that naturally tightens up over time unless it's consciously avoided. The reason our minds tighten is for two reasons. First, we typically prefer to entertain the same thoughts and ways of thinking because it makes us feel familiar and safe. We are creatures of habit, and sticking with the same methods saves us a whole lot of effort. Second, whenever we work hard at a problem or idea, our minds naturally narrow their focus because of the strain and effort involved. Put simply, we eventually tend to consider fewer alternative possibilities or viewpoints and become narrow-minded.

To overcome this affliction, we must loosen up the mind and let in alternative ways of thinking. You can do this by cultivating Negative Capability. In 1817, 22-year-old poet John Keats wrote a letter to his brothers explaining his most recent thoughts on the creative process. He wrote that the only way to understand the full complexity of the world is to let our mind absorb its experiences without having to determine the meaning of it all. The mind must then be able to feel doubt and uncertainty for as long as possible. It is in this state that ideas become more dimensional than if we had jumped to conclusions and formed judgments early on.

To accomplish this kind of mindset, we must negate our ego. In other words, we must suspend our ego and simply experience what we are seeing without the need to make judgments for as long as possible. This is called *negative capability*. All Masters possess this Negative Capability, and it is the source of their creative power. It allows them to entertain a broader range of ideas and experiment with them. In turn, their work becomes richer and more inventive. To illustrate this further, let's look at Mozart. Mozart never asserted any particular opinions about music. Instead, he absorbed all types of styles and incorporated them into his own voice. Later in life, he encountered the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, who played

music quite different from his own. Many artists might grow defensive and dismissive of something that challenges their own; however, Mozart became open to new possibilities and studied Bach's use of counterpoint for about a year and absorbed it into his own vocabulary. As a result, his music took on a new, surprising quality!

To put Negative Capability into practice, you must begin to suppress the need to judge everything that crosses your path. Observe while holding yourself back from forming an opinion. Additionally, you should seek out what is unfamiliar. Begin by seeking books written by unfamiliar writers in unrelated fields or from different schools of thought. However, Negative Capability shouldn't be a permanent state of mind. After all, to produce work, you must create boundaries and limits and come up with conclusions. Instead, Negative Capability should be used as a tool in the process to open up the mind temporarily to more possibilities.

Mastery Occurs When Skills Become Automatic and Mind and Body Become One

You may be asking yourself at this point, so what is mastery? Well, Masters often talk about the sensation of *seeing more*. Suddenly, they can grasp an entire situation through a simple idea. They experienced an *intuition* or a *fingertip feel*. For example, the great chess Master Bobby Fischer spoke of being able to think beyond the moves of his pieces on the chessboard. He noted his ability to see “fields of forces” that allowed him to anticipate the entire direction of the match. For the pianist Glenn Gould, he no longer focused on notes or parts of the music he was playing but focused on the entire architecture of the piece. Thomas Edison even spoke of a vision he had for illuminating an entire city with electric light, this complex system communicated to him through a single image.

When we hear stories like these, we naturally believe that this type of power doesn't exist. That's because we are rational thinkers. Rational thinking follows a sequence: we see phenomenon A, and we deduce a cause B, and maybe anticipate a reaction C. But intuition doesn't follow this type of thinking, and Masters don't reduce their thinking down into a formula. Instead, Masters think differently and access deeper parts of reality; they've developed an automatic connection between mind and body.

In fact, this ability to think about our bodies and actions as one is only natural. Animals, for example, don't experience this type of division between the mind and the body. Humans, on the other hand, become aware of their bodies as they move when doing something new. We have to think about the various steps to follow, but when we take our practice far enough, the skill eventually becomes automatic and we have the sensation that the mind and body are operating as one. You see, when we learn a complex skill, like flying a jet in combat, we must master a series of simple skills one at a time. Each time a skill becomes automatic, the mind is freed up to focus on the higher one. At the end of this process, when there are no more simple skills to learn, the brain assimilates and the skill becomes

internalized and becomes part of our nervous system. This skill is now inside us and is at our fingertips.

Of course, achieving this type of Mastery takes practice. This may sound uninspiring, but mastery can take as much as 10,000 to 20,000 hours of practice. It's time, however, to change your perspective on practicing a skill and begin to see the powers you can gain through practice and discipline. The rewards can be incredible, even miraculous. In fact, it is natural for your brain to want to move in the direction of mastery, to elevate its powers through repetition. It is when you lose that natural inclination that you begin to denigrate practice, and if everyone lost that inclination, then no one would have the patience to master complex skills. Humanity then would never make important discoveries or come up with revolutionary ideas. Therefore, "As individuals, we must resist such a trend, and venerate the transformative powers we gain through practice."

Final Summary

Achieving mastery requires finding your unique calling that drives your natural curiosity. To find this, you will have to look inward and perhaps think back on what you enjoyed as a child. Next, you'll have to study and learn under a mentor during an apprenticeship. Your apprenticeship or career should not be driven by wealth or fame; instead, you should choose a mentor or job that will give you the greatest insight into your field whether you get paid or not. Then, you'll need to develop independence and creativity and put your individuality into your work. Finally, practice leads to mastery. So be patient, enjoy your work, learn as much as you can, and you'll eventually find success.



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