



# *Mastery*

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Penguin Group

Hi,

Welcome to my highlights from the book Mastery! I hope you find them useful. This book changed how I look at work, life & fulfillment in general.

This wasn't a short book and these aren't a short set of highlights but I've tried to distill the book down to its most important ideas.

If you got here because someone shared this with you and would like more, [you can sign up for my newsletter here](#) and I'll let you know when I release a new one of these.

If you thought these notes were valuable, I strongly recommend reading the full book, available here:

 [CA LINK](#)

 [USA LINK](#)

Enjoy!

*Created by Mitch Schwartz*

## *I. Discover Your Calling: THE Life's Task*



August 22, 2019

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## *II. Submit to Reality: The Ideal Apprenticeship*



*First, it is essential that you begin with one skill that you can master, and that serves as a foundation for acquiring others. You must avoid at all cost the idea that you can manage learning several skills at a time.*

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*You need to develop your powers of concentration, and understand that trying to multitask will be the death of the process.*

August 26, 2019



*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. **In any event, you must meet any boredom head-on** and not try to avoid or repress it. Throughout your life you will encounter tedious situations, **and you must cultivate the ability to handle them with discipline.***

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August 26, 2019

### III. Absorb the Master's Power: The Mentor Dynamic



*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.*

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*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.** Masters are those who by nature have suffered to get to where they are. They have experienced endless criticisms of their work, doubts about their progress, setbacks along the way.*

September 5, 2019

## IV. See People As They Are: Social Intelligence



*philosophy: they are simply a part of life, like rocks or furniture. All of us have foolish sides, moments in which we lose our heads and think more of our ego or short-term goals. It is human nature.*

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***Seeing this foolishness within you, you can then accept it in others.*** This will allow you to smile at their antics, to tolerate their presence as you would a silly child, and to ***avoid the madness of trying to change them. It is all part of the human comedy,*** and it is nothing to get upset about or lose sleep over

September 12, 2019

## V. Awaken the Dimensional Mind: The Creative-Active



***The feeling that we have endless time to complete our work has an insidious and debilitating effect*** on our minds. Our attention and thoughts become diffused. Our lack of intensity makes it hard for the brain to jolt into a higher gear

[300](#)

October 16, 2019



*You don't have the luxury of feeling frustrate*

[300](#)

October 16, 2019



*Constantly remind yourself of how little you truly know, and of how mysterious the world remains*

[302](#)

October 16, 2019



*Creativity is by its nature an act of boldness and rebellion. **You are not accepting the status quo***

[302](#)

October 16, 2019



*work hard to **develop internal standards and a high degree of independence**. You have the capacity to see your own work with some distance; when the public reacts, you can **distinguish between what is worth paying attention to and what you should ignore**.*

[303](#)

October 16, 2019



*The best way to neutralize our natural impatience is to cultivate a kind of pleasure in pain—like an athlete, you come to enjoy rigorous practice, pushing past your limits, and resisting the easy way out.*

[304](#)

October 16, 2019



*Ever so slowly, the emphasis shifts from the joy of the creative process to the love of attention and to our ever-inflating ego. Without realizing it, we alter and shape our work to attract the praise that we crave*

[304](#)

October 16, 2019



*There are always greater geniuses out there than yourself. Luck certainly played a role, as did the help of your mentor and all those in the past who paved the way. What must ultimately motivate you is the work itself and the process.*

[304](#)

October 16, 2019



*You must bend to the moment and adopt the attitude appropriate to the moment.*

[305](#)

October 16, 2019



*We indulge in drugs or alcohol, or engage in dangerous sports or risky behavior, just to wake ourselves up from the sleep of our daily existence and feel a heightened sense of connection to reality.*

[305](#)

*In the end, however, **the most satisfying and powerful way to feel this connection is through creative activity. Engaged in the creative process we feel more alive than ever, because we are making** something and not merely consuming, Masters of the small reality we create.*

*In doing this work, **we are in fact creating ourselves.***

October 17, 2019



*Understand: **the greatest impediment to creativity is your impatience**, the almost inevitable desire to hurry up the process, express something, and make a splash. What happens in such a case is that you do not master the basics; you have no real vocabulary at your disposal. What you mistake for being creative and distinctive is more likely an imitation of other people's style, or personal rantings that do not really express anything.*

[312](#)

October 17, 2019



*Pain, it seemed, was a kind of opinion the body rendered on what it was experiencing, on its own health. This opinion could be tricked or manipulated, as the mirror experiment had shown*

[316](#)

October 17, 2019



*If an apparent anomaly calls into question your own beliefs or assumptions, so much the better. You must speculate on what it could mean, this speculation guiding your subsequent research but not determining your conclusions. If what you have discovered seems to have profound ramifications, you must pursue it with the utmost intensity.*

[319](#)

*Better to look into ten such facts, with only one yielding a great discovery, than to look into twenty ideas that bring success but have trivial implications.*

October 17, 2019



*The principles behind mechanical intelligence can be summarized as follows: **whatever you are creating or designing, you must test and use it yourself. Separating out the work will make you lose touch with its functionality.***

[327](#)

*Through intense labor on your part, you gain a feel for what you are creating. In doing this work, you see and feel the flaws in the design.*

October 17, 2019



*First, it is essential to build into the creative process an initial period that is open-ended. You **give yourself time to dream and wander, to start out in a loose and unfocused manner.***

[334](#)

*In this period, you allow the project to associate itself with certain powerful emotions, ones that naturally come out of you as you focus on your ideas. It is always easy to tighten up your ideas later on, and to make your project increasingly realistic and rational.*

October 17, 2019





Second, it is best to have wide knowledge of your field and other fields, **giving your brain more possible associations and connections.** [335](#)

Third, to keep this process alive, you must **never settle into complacency, as if your initial vision represents the endpoint.**

You must cultivate profound dissatisfaction with your work and the need to constantly improve your ideas, along with a sense of uncertainty—you are not exactly sure where to go next, and this **uncertainty drives the creative urge and keeps it fresh.**

October 17, 2019



Any kind of resistance or obstacle that crosses your path should be seen as yet another chance to improve your work. [335](#)

October 17, 2019



Finally, you must come to **embrace slowness as a virtue** in itself. When it comes to creative endeavors, time is always relative. Whether your project takes months or years to complete, you will always experience a sense of impatience and a desire to get to the end. [335](#)

October 17, 2019



*Perhaps the greatest impediment to human creativity is the natural decay that sets in over time in any kind of medium or profession.*

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*In the sciences or in business, a certain way of thinking or acting that once had success quickly becomes a paradigm, an established procedure.*

*As the years go by, people forget the initial reason for this paradigm and simply follow a lifeless set of techniques*

October 17, 2019



*Begin by looking inward.*

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***You have something you want to express that is unique to yourself and related to your inclinations.***

*You must be sure it is not something that is sparked by some trend or fashion, but that it comes from you and is real.*

*Perhaps it is a sound you are not hearing in music, a type of story not being told, a type of book that does not fit into the usual tidy categories. Perhaps it is even a new way of doing business.*

***Let the idea, the sound, the image take root in you.*** *Sensing the possibility of a new language or way of doing things, you must make the conscious decision to play against the very conventions that you find dead and want to get rid of*

October 17, 2019



*Your project or the problem you are solving should always be connected to something larger—a bigger question, an overarching idea, an inspiring goal.*

[346](#)

***Whenever your work begins to feel stale, you must return to the larger purpose and goal that impelled you in the first place.***

*This bigger idea governs your smaller paths of investigation, and opens up many more such paths for you to look into.*

***By constantly reminding yourself of your purpose, you will prevent yourself from fetishizing certain techniques or from becoming overly obsessed with trivial details.***

*In this way you will play into the natural strengths of the human brain, which wants to look for connections on higher and higher levels.*

October 17, 2019



*The lesson is simple—what constitutes **true creativity is the openness and adaptability of our spirit***

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October 18, 2019

## VI. Fuse the Intuitive With the Rational: Mastery



*The process that people go through when they arrive at an answer through rational analysis can generally be examined and verified, which is why we esteem it so highly.*

[381](#)

*We prefer things that can be reduced to a formula*

October 18, 2019



*Maintain a sense of destiny, and feel continuously connected to it. You are unique, and there is a purpose to your uniqueness.*

[388](#)

*You must see every setback, failure, or hardship as a trial along the way, as seeds that are being planted for further cultivation, if you know how to grow them.*

*No moment is wasted if you pay attention and learn the lessons contained in every experience.*

October 19, 2019



*More and more people in this overheated environment will be tempted to opt out. They will develop a greater taste for ease and comfort; **they will increasingly settle on simplified ideas of reality and conventional ways of thinking**; they will fall prey to seductive formulas that offer quick and easy knowledge.*

[393](#)

*They will lose a taste for developing skills that require time and a resilient ego—it **can hurt our self-esteem in the initial phases of learning a skill**, as we are made so aware of our awkwardness.*

*Such people will rail against the world and blame others for their problems; they will find political justifications for opting out, when in truth they simply cannot handle the challenges of engaging with complexity.*

October 19, 2019



*This desire for what is simple and easy infects all of us, often in ways we are mostly unaware of.*

[393](#)

***The only solution is the following: We must learn how to quiet the anxiety we feel whenever we are confronted with anything that seems complex or chaotic.***

*In our journey from apprenticeship to mastery we must patiently learn the various parts and skills that are required, never looking too far ahead.*

*In moments of perceived crisis, we must develop the habit of maintaining our cool and never overreacting.*

*If the situation is complex and others are reaching for simple black-and-white answers, or for the usual conventional responses, we must make a point of resisting such a temptation*

October 19, 2019



*In our apprenticeships, we naturally begin by learning the parts and making various distinctions—the right and wrong way to proceed, the individual skills to master and their particular techniques, the various rules and conventions that govern the group.*

[399](#)

*In the Creative-Active we begin to melt these distinctions as we experiment with, shape, and alter these conventions to suit our purposes.*

*And in mastery we come full circle, returning to a sense of the whole. We intuit and see the connections. We embrace the natural complexity of life, making the brain expand to the dimensions of reality instead of shrinking it to the narrowest of specializations.*

*This is the inevitable outcome of deep immersion in a field. We can define intelligence as moving toward thinking that is more contextual, more sensitive to the relationships between things*

October 19, 2019



*If he had any qualities that were extraordinary, they were his **patience mixed with his extreme tenacity**.*

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*After what can only be considered as well beyond 10,000 hours of contemplation of one problem, he reached a transformation point.*

*The various aspects of a supremely complicated phenomenon had become internalized, leading to an intuitive grasp of the whole—in this case, the sudden image that came to him revealing the relativity of time.*

*His two theories of relativity have to be considered as perhaps the greatest intellectual feats in history, **the fruits of intense labor and not of some extraordinary, inexplicable genius.***

October 19, 2019



*The problem is that we humans are deep conformists. **Those qualities that separate us are often ridiculed by others, or criticized by teachers.***

[424](#)

*People with a high visual sense are often labeled as dyslexic, for example. Because of these judgments, we might see our strengths as disabilities and try to work around them in order to fit in.*

*But **anything that is peculiar to our makeup is precisely what we must pay the deepest attention to and lean on in our rise to mastery.***

*Mastery is like swimming—it is too difficult to move forward when we are creating our own resistance or swimming against the current.*

October 19, 2019



*In any competitive environment in which there are winners or losers, **the person who has the wider, more global perspective will inevitably prevail.***

[443](#)

*The reason is simple: **such a person will be able to think beyond the moment and control the overall dynamic through careful strategizing.***

*Most people are perpetually locked in the present. Their decisions are overly influenced by the most immediate event; they easily become emotional and ascribe greater significance to a problem than it should have in reality.*

*Moving toward mastery will naturally bring you a more global outlook, but it is always wise to expedite the process by training yourself early on to continually enlarge your perspective. **You can do so by always reminding yourself of the overall purpose of the work you are presently engaged in and how this meshes with your long-term goals.***

*In dealing with any problem, you must train yourself to look at how it inevitably connects to a larger picture.*

***If your work is not having the desired effect, you must look at it from all angles until you find the source of the problem.** You must not merely observe the rivals in your field, but dissect and uncover their weaknesses. "Look wider and think further ahead"*

October 19, 2019



*He could no longer accept the superiority of one particular belief or value system. To hold such an opinion, he determined, is merely an illusion that comes from remaining on the outside.*

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October 20, 2019





*The primal source of human intelligence comes from the development of mirror neurons (see [here](#)), which gives us the ability to place ourselves in the skin of another and imagine their experience.*

[453](#)

*Through continual exposure to people and by attempting to think inside them we can gain an increasing sense of their perspective, but this requires effort on our part.*

***Our natural tendency is to project onto other people our own beliefs and value systems, in ways in which we are not even aware.***

October 20, 2019



*To do so we must overcome our great fear of the Other and the unfamiliarity of their ways.*

[453](#)

*We must enter their belief and value systems, their guiding myths, their way of seeing the world.*

*Slowly, the distorted lens through which we first viewed them starts to clear up. Going deeper into their otherness, feeling what they feel, we can discover what makes them different and learn about human nature.*

*This applies to cultures, individuals, and even writers of books.*

October 20, 2019



Goethe had now come to the conclusion that all forms of human knowledge are manifestations of the same life force he had intuited in his near-death experience as a young man.

[460](#)

The problem with most people, he felt, is that they build artificial walls around subjects and ideas. **The real thinker sees the connections, grasps the essence of the life force operating in every individual instance.** Why should any individual stop at poetry, or find art unrelated to science, or narrow his or her intellectual interests?

October 20, 2019



**The mind was designed to connect things, like a loom that knits together all of the threads of a fabric.**

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If life exists as an organic whole and cannot be separated into parts without losing a sense of the whole, then thinking should make itself equal to the whole

October 20, 2019



the design of the human brain—its inherent need to make connections and associations—gives it a will of its own.

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**[...] the desire to connect will win out in the end because it is so powerfully a part of our nature and inclination.**



***Your false self is the accumulation of all the voices you have internalized from other people—parents and friends who want you to conform to their ideas of what you should be like and what you should do, as well as societal pressures to adhere to certain values that can easily seduce you.***

[463](#)

*It also includes the voice of your own ego, which constantly tries to protect you from unflattering truths.*

October 20, 2019



*In following your inclinations and moving toward mastery, you make a great contribution to society, enriching it with discoveries and insights, and making the most of the diversity in nature and among human society.*

[464](#)

***It is in fact the height of selfishness to merely consume what others create and to retreat into a shell of limited goals and immediate pleasures.***

*Alienating yourself from your inclinations can only lead to pain and disappointment in the long run, and a sense that you have wasted something unique. This pain will be expressed in bitterness and envy, and you will not recognize the true source of your depression.*

October 20, 2019

😄 Well, that ended on a dark note. All the same I hope you found it valuable. If you did, I strongly recommend that you Read the full book:

🍁 [CA LINK](#)

🦅 [USA LINK](#)

👉 **these links will take you to the hard copy and kindle versions.**