

Mastering Coaching

by Max Landsberg

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"an entirely new approach to coaching
... Landsberg has identified the most important coaching tools available! "
Marshall Goldsmith – #1 NYT bestselling author

"a must-read for any coach committed to their craft."
Andy Grant – Senior Coach Education Advisor at sports coach UK

"delves into the eclectic knowledge that underpins a coach's journey towards mastery."

**Professor David Clutterbuck – Co-founder,
European Mentoring & Coaching Council**

"Thought-provoking survey of the field - some new ideas
for me and, I suspect, for many"

Douglas Gurr – President of Amazon, China

"an invaluable guide to keep leaders current and effective in our roles."
Alistair Cox – Chief Executive, Hays plc

Excerpt

The best techniques, from neuroscience and beyond, to help you be a master coach and greater leader

Mastering Coaching will help you become a more effective leader, manager or coach - by broadening your knowledge of the vital skills of coaching, and deepening your mastery of them.

High performing leaders and coaches use a wide variety of tools, borrowed from many different disciplines. *Mastering Coaching* starts by asking what skills an effective coach must now possess to boost the performance of their team or coachees. In response, it summarises the most important research in areas such as neuroscience, sports psychology and mindfulness, positive psychology, mastery and goal- setting and offers a clear, simple and practical guide to how this new thinking can help coaches and managers to develop their own coaching practices.

Max Landsberg is an internationally recognised authority on executive coaching, development and leadership. His books on coaching, motivation and leadership have sold more than 250,000 copies in fifteen languages. Max combines the strategic perspectives of having been a partner at McKinsey & Company with the

developmental insights learned and refined as a senior partner at Korn Ferry and a prior search firm. He is a graduate of Cambridge University and Stanford Graduate School of Business.

The following excerpt includes **final draft** versions of the following:

- Contents page
- Introduction
- Selected endorsements
- Chapter 7 on Six Steps to Mastery, from the section on Strategies
- The Index

MASTERING COACHING

Practical insights for developing
high performance

MAX LANDSBERG

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PROFILE BOOKS

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The ego is not master in its own house

SIGMUND FREUD

*Life is a hard school for u know not
wat level of class u r in, wat exam
u will have, and u can't copy bcoz
nobody else has the same paper...*

HARSHIT AGRAWAL

(FACEBOOK PAGE; RETRIEVED 5 APRIL 2014)

INTRODUCTION

A BROADER REPERTOIRE

THIS BOOK CAN HELP YOU become a more effective leader, manager or coach – by broadening your repertoire of coaching skills and extending your mastery of them. It offers you an eagle’s-eye view of the best domains and techniques from which to borrow as you develop your coaching skills and toolkit.

Sources of inspiration

We coaches are usually T-shaped. As we coach, we probably face a very broad range of clients, remits and challenges. So we often draw inspiration and techniques from an equally broad range of quite different sources: this is the crossbar of our Ts.

But most of us have a preferred *modus operandi* – such as a set of favourite techniques that we apply, or a particular school of psychology that influences us more than other schools do. This depth of approach is the vertical bar of our Ts.

This guidebook aims to extend and strengthen the crossbar of your T. It aims to give you a wider repertoire of concepts to draw on, and more techniques for your toolkit. It aims to both broaden horizons and to answer a series of specific questions such as:



- What can coaching learn from neuroscience?
- Which elements of sports psychology are most relevant and transferable to performance coaching in general?
- Where does positive psychology fit into my coaching repertoire?
- If we are coaching to clarify an individual's strategy for their career or life, are there techniques we can usefully borrow from the world of business strategy?

The practice of coaching is a vast continent that is being shaped gradually but continually by the push and shove of its neighbouring tectonic plates: neuroscience impinges from the north, sociology from the south, expert performance from the east and changes in the world of work from the west. Pressures from these vast territories of theory and practice cause rifts and valleys in the continent of coaching, in which certain chunks of coaching are lost for ever. Other strata are raised up on the massifs of emergent theories and techniques – their mettle still to be tested there by the rigour of experiment and experience.

The classic texts that have helped us adventure through this continent of coaching were written many years ago: Tim Gallwey's *The Inner Game of Tennis* in 1972, Sir John Whitmore's *Performance Coaching* in 1992 and *The Tao of Coaching* in 1996. All these books have remained best-sellers for decades, but now coaches, managers and educators are increasingly asking, 'What is new in the world of coaching?'. Or 'Has nothing changed since the GROW model?'

No syllabus for advanced coaching can be definitive. Both reader and writer will always be influenced by the id of their own personal passions, the ego of their short-term needs and the super-ego of their broader conceptual or philosophical beliefs. So in selecting the fourteen topics that are the subjects



of the fourteen chapters in his book, I consulted many sources.

First, I reflected on my own nag-list of unanswered questions about which disciplines could add most to my own repertoire of coaching techniques. Then I sifted and sorted that list, trying to spot any obvious gaps. Some of the topics on the revised list were more theoretical, and some more practical. Some were topics that have assumed greater importance on the back of corporate or societal changes, such as using 360° feedback and managing Generation-Yers.

To this list I then added topics about which my coaching friends and colleagues had asked over the years. And finally, and most importantly, I reviewed suggestions from clients, coaches, academics, HR professionals and others with whom I had worked.

The resulting contents were ultimately selected for their practical relevance for coaches, and for tuned-in managers and leaders who understand the central role that coaching plays in their day-to-day effectiveness. But you have to draw the line somewhere. So if you find your favourite subject is missing – such as theories of adult learning, or the application of narrative techniques to coaching – let me know, and popular choices will be included in any subsequent edition.

Using this book

You can use most of the techniques explained here in at least three different ways: deploy them within your coaching session or coaching engagement, offer them as tools for your client to use with his or her team or use them in your own life – in self-coaching to increase your performance beyond the realm of coaching.

For example, you can use the model explained in Chapter 7, 'Six Steps to Mastery', to frame for your coachee the context of

your current coaching session and to explain the value of focusing on actions such as 'finding patrons'. Or you can explain the model in more detail to your client so that he can share it with someone he is managing or mentoring. Or you can use it to guide your own development in mastering coaching or some other endeavour.

As each technique has multiple uses, it makes the investment in mastering it more worthwhile. I highlight this point in several chapters where this is most relevant, but have tried to avoid labouring the point.

Note that this book is not a map of the entire continent of coaching or of all the adjacent disciplines; rather, it is a selective guidebook that aims to show where the largest Everests are rising, where the most fertile Niles are flooding and how the nuggets of new theories and practices can be dug up and fashioned into more advanced tools for coaching.

In the field of neuroscience, for example, I have tried to focus single-mindedly on how a highly effective coach can use the latest findings of that body of knowledge and apply it in the daily work of coaching. But I have not tried to cover in detail the anatomy and chemistry of the brain, instead providing a summary and pointers in Appendix 1 and the extensive Bibliography. Similarly, in the field of experiential learning, I have focused on the theories and techniques that have been most useful in coaching – typically prioritising the tried and tested over the new or academic.

In other words, this book is intended as a very practical guide, offering packaged continuing professional development for the active coach.

Each chapter ends with a concise summary.

Readership

This book is a guide primarily for enlightened managers, and for coaches and educators who work in the worlds of business and executive coaching, leadership coaching, team coaching, performance improvement and personal development more generally. But, as with all books on coaching, those who work as sports coaches or life coaches may also find that the book has useful ideas and techniques to apply.

To gain most from this book, you will ideally have understood and applied the core skills of coaching over the course of several years. For example, in *Business Coaching* Anne Scoular offers her list of 'Big Five' essential coaching skills: contracting with the client; using the GROW model; listening; questioning; and being able to coach non-directively. In *The Tao of Coaching* I offer 'Twenty Golden Rules', and show in detail how to use the GROW model.

Structure of the book

This book comprises three parts, each of which offers you something slightly different. In Part 1 we review advances in selected areas of science that are directly or indirectly linked with the mind and applicable to coaching. The emphasis is on straightforward explanations of sometimes complex subjects, but with the implications for coaching always as a priority.

We cover neuroscience, sports psychology, positive psychology, mindfulness and experiential learning. Some of these fields are newly emerging, others have ancient roots, but all have lessons that can foster better coaching.

Several common themes emerge from these disciplines. These themes permeate later parts of the book too, and suggest specific coaching-related tools. For example, from across

apparently disparate fields you will see the repeated importance of motivation and goal-setting, the power of visualisation and deliberate practice, and how we can find wisdom and ‘flow’ by overcoming anxiety and finding hope and passion.

In Part 2 we review strategies for coaching that are organised around a single tool or related cluster of them. Topics include: the field of expert performance (home to familiar notions such as the importance of 10,000 hours of deliberate practice); ‘Six Steps to Mastery’ – a simple framework that draws lessons from the Old Master painters; two models from the field of business strategy, which can also be used when coaching an individual too (Jim Collins’s BHAG and McKinsey’s Three Horizons); and an overview of psychometrics and how to apply them in coaching.

In Part 3 we explore several frequently encountered coaching situations, and the techniques that have proved valuable in addressing them. We explore how to coach clients who are facing a role transition, or who have just received 360° feedback. We then see how to review the effectiveness of a board as a basis for subsequent coaching and how to advise someone who is leading a team of predominantly Generation-Yers.

The Appendices then offer notes relevant for coaching on, respectively, neuroscience, corporate culture and psychometrics. In addition to providing details of works cited, the Bibliography also suggests further reading – and highlights my favourite readings on the topics covered in each chapter.

* * *

Regarding terminology: first, references to the masculine and feminine are intended to be interchangeable. Second, the term ‘coachee’ has won general acceptance as the name for the person you are coaching, but rather than over-use that somewhat

clumsy word I frequently refer to 'your client' instead; that term refers to the person you are coaching, not any company for which they might work. Third, 'the organisation' is a lengthy term, and I frequently substitute the words 'company' and 'firm' – without necessarily implying a profit-oriented enterprise.

PRAISE FOR *MASTERING COACHING*

A coach for the coaches! Max Landsberg has created an entirely new approach to coaching – you'll be more effective than ever, and your clients will thank you for it. *Mastering Coaching* demonstrates how coaches can up their own game by customizing their style to the needs of their clients. Landsberg has identified the most important coaching tools available!

– Marshall Goldsmith, author of the NYT#1 bestselling *Triggers* and global bestsellers *MOJO* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

Thought provoking survey of the field – some new ideas for me and, I suspect, for many.

– Douglas Gurr, President, Amazon China

I would highly recommend this book. *Mastering Coaching* takes complex subject matter and turns it into useable content for coaches working at all levels, incorporating theory and practice and full of great nuggets of actionable content. A must-read for any coach committed to their craft and serious about their personal development. If you are prepared to read this book and study it hard you will be rewarded by becoming a better coach; after reading it, I feel inspired. It has reminded me that the motivated and skilled coach can make a positive impact on not just their client, but on the whole of society. Great coaches can make great people.

– Andy Grant, Senior Coach Education Advisor at sports coach UK

A magnificent summary of the present state of coaching. The reader will find excellent summaries of most of the main trends in contemporary coaching, with helpful guidance and suggestions as to how to use each approach in practice. It provides an ideal 'what next' for people who have completed a coach training and want to continue their development.

– Jon Stokes, Leadership Consultant and Coach, Stokes & Jolly Ltd; Associate Fellow, Saïd Business School, Oxford University

Effective coaching is at the heart of strong leadership practice and in *Mastering Coaching* Max Landsberg brings together the best of insights from neuroscience, sociology, expert performance, business and his own extensive experience as a coach, enabling his readers to broaden their coaching 'toolkit' and to develop themselves and their teams as effective coaches. The strong balance of academic insight, succinct explanation and practical application means that the book provides something for every coach, regardless of where they are on their personal journey.

– Caroline Curtis, Head of Executive Talent, Succession and Development at Santander

Want to top up your coaching skills? This book is what you need, full of insights, authoritative comment and practical understanding. Max Landsberg is a master of coaching.

– Andrew Campbell, Director, Ashridge Strategic Management Centre

Truly masterful coaches combine a systemic perspective with depth of reflection on a wide body of relevant knowledge. In *Mastering Coaching*, Max Landsberg delves into the eclectic knowledge that underpins a coach's journey towards mastery.

– Professor David Clutterbuck, Co-founder,
European Mentoring & Coaching Council

Winning an Olympic medal at 40 required me to 'unlearn' a few things before I could relearn to be part of a new and hugely successful TeamGB. As coaches we also need to be prepared to challenge our habits and look differently at our practice. This book helped me to rethink the way I approach coaching relationships. It provides new ways to tackle old problems and encourages us to think, act and perform more effectively.

– Greg Searle, Olympian

He's done it again – Max Landsberg has written an eclectic, practical guide to help newcomer and experienced practitioner alike master coaching.

– Declan Woods, Global Head of Standards and Accreditation,
Association for Coaching; CEO, ZPD Consulting

Max cuts mercilessly through the guff, to distil the best of the insights, tools and science we need to be world class coaches, leaders and friends, right now.

– Anne Scoular, Founder, Meyler Campbell

This is a genuinely good book, elegantly exemplifying its own messages: Max Landsberg doesn't tell us what to do, but illuminates the reasons for doing what we already know we should. The topics for each chapter are foundational in their importance, and written in a way that invites the reader to connect and contribute thoughts of their own. This is the mark of an author who has really mastered the practice as well as the theory.

– Jonathan Gosling, Professor of Leadership, University of Exeter

Coaching may be the most critical leadership skill to multiply capacity in your organization. *Mastering Coaching* gives you the practical and transformational tools needed to accelerate individual, team and organizational potential. Get this book and master coaching!

– Kevin Cashman, Senior Partner, CEO & Executive Development, Korn Ferry;
bestselling author of *Leadership from the Inside Out* and *The Pause Principle*



Mastering Coaching offers a set of unique insights into the role of the coach and the knowledge required to coach effectively. By drawing on a wide range of references and sources, Max Landsberg successfully describes many of the key ingredients required for a thorough understanding of how coaching works, and the part that it plays in improving human performance.

– Martin Burgess, EVP of Human Resources & Communications, Cobham plc

Being an effective leader of a business requires us to spend many hours each day coaching. We may not realise that this is what we are doing when we are interacting with our teams, and it certainly is not described in our diaries as 'Coaching Session'. But coaching it is, whether it's working with our teams to deliver a world-class solution to an issue, or self-coaching as we seek to make our own individual performance ever stronger. This book helps the leader manage the twin challenges of keeping abreast of the advances in coaching, and of tailoring the coaching appropriately. It is an invaluable guide to keep us current and effective in our roles.

– Alistair Cox, Chief Executive, Hays plc

Max Landsberg's latest book is an insightful read. By using real-world examples and intelligent, multidisciplinary research to teach coaching skills, he gives clarity to complex topics. This book is a key tool for mastering coaching of any kind.

– Petros Kalkanis, Area Managing Director & Vice President, Johnson & Johnson Consumer Health Care

An essential read for coaches

– Judith Barton, Director of Coaching & Mentoring, British School of Coaching

This book is a must read, not only for coaches but for any serious learner, HR professional and for all great leaders. It explores the fundamental themes which should be front and centre of all our minds today, from neuroscience to mindfulness to experiential learning, and does so in a way that is both stimulating and pragmatic.

– Katie Evans, Head of Learning and Talent Development, Europe, Middle East and Africa at KPMG





PART TWO

STRATEGIES

**Specific techniques, or clusters of techniques,
that can increase your mastery of coaching**

- 6.** Expert performance
 - 7.** Six Steps to Mastery
 - 8.** Collins's Hedgehog and the BHAG
 - 9.** McKinsey's Three Horizons
 - 10.** Psychometrics
-

IN PART 2 we review strategies for coaching that are organised around a single tool or related cluster of them.

Topics include: the field of expert performance (home to familiar notions such as the importance of 10,000 hours of deliberate practice); 'Six Steps to Mastery' – a simple framework that draws lessons from the Old Master painters; two models from the field of business strategy, which can also be used when coaching an individual (Jim Collins's BHAG and McKinsey's Three Horizons); and an overview of psychometrics and how to apply them in coaching.

CHAPTER 7

SIX STEPS TO MASTERY

Old Masters and new • Places
Prior art • Patrons • Productivity
Practice • Passion • Summary

AS COACHES, we are often asked for advice on how to build a presence or career in a particular field or discipline. A friend may ask you to give career advice to a graduating daughter who wants to become a top barrister; a long-term coaching client may ask for your thoughts on how, as he moves out of the corporate world, he can become a world-class photographer; you might yourself be wondering how to master a particular aspect of coaching.

Old Masters and new

If you are looking for a source of inspiration about how to master a career, look no further than the Old Master painters. To illustrate the lessons they offer I developed the following framework – originally for a speech to the Royal Society of Arts during its 250th anniversary conference, and with subsequent amendment as I used it in coaching afterwards.

A dozen years ago London's National Gallery offered an exciting, albeit unusual, stimulus to understanding Mastery – in the form of an exhibition of the works of Doménikos Theotokópoulos – aka El Greco.

There at the beginning of the exhibition hung one of El Greco's earliest works, painted in the mid-1500s, a traditional icon executed in the typical formulaic style of the period: almost 'painting by numbers'. Yet at the end of the exhibition, on loan from the Metropolitan Museum in New York, was one of his later pieces – an expressionist work, now valued at many millions of dollars, and an example of why Picasso himself would call El Greco the father of modern art three hundred years ahead of his time.

Repeating this before-and-after comparison across the typical 'workspan' of any great artist always shows improvements that are equally dramatic.

The questions of course are: how did El Greco and the others manage to achieve greatness? How did they build their careers? Are there lessons for mastering our own careers?

Uniquely, these artists have left a detailed trail along their journey of development. If you wanted to, you could trace every brushstroke as they painted their way to greatness. They have left a uniquely visible, visual and indelible trail as they mastered their art. Their record is an entirely truthful one: they could not rewrite their own history in the way a politician could, for they had already painted it.

The lives of the Old Masters suggest that you dramatically increase your chance of finding career success if you follow six steps that relate to places, prior art, patrons, productivity, practice and passion (Figure 7.1).

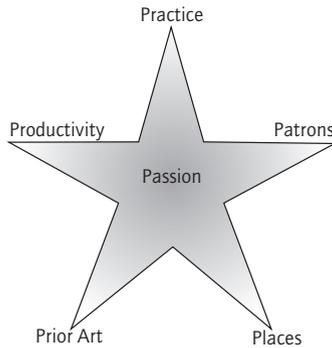


FIGURE 7.1 Six steps to mastery

Places

The Old Masters benefited from being incredibly well travelled, and if you want to be the best, you too have to travel, to where the best is done (and learn from it), and to any other random place that will immerse you in as rich a mix of influences as possible.

Take El Greco. Born in Crete in 1541, by the age of twenty-six he is in Venice with its array of artistic influences, and is soon a student of Titian; by twenty-nine he is in Rome, avidly studying the works of Michelangelo; and seven years later he is in Toledo, with a whole gamut of new influences. All this adventure was at a time when few people ventured beyond the edge of the village green. Little wonder he was to develop the whole art of painting so far that, four centuries later, Picasso credited him with having invented modern art.

Gauguin was a globetrotter, Turner was a tourist, Van Gogh was a voyager – at least, a virtual voyager as he drew deep inspiration from Japan's woodblock prints.

In whatever domain your own career lies, following the example of these artists of sniffing out novel lands and exposing

yourself to unexpected experiences will foster your professional development in many ways. You can accomplish this by:

Seeing excellence in action. If you are in IT, then having spent time within Microsoft, Google or Oracle (or ideally all three) will give you glimpses of the leading edge in your field. In banking you might go for Goldman Sachs or Citigroup. In consumer marketing there is Diageo or Johnson & Johnson. You don't merely add to your CV; you see and feel what 'great' looks like. Without meeting Titian, Michelangelo and the searing passion of Spain, El Greco could never have become El Greco.

Gaining unexpected inspirations. Sahar Hashemi was a lawyer when she visited her brother in New York, became hooked on lattes and returned to the UK to found Coffee Republic. Adding more locations to your career journey helps you innovate.

Building your personal network. The most successful executives have excellent networks and are active alumni of many institutions. The more places you have visited, the greater the range and depth of your network. This fuels your fund of mentors, advisers and patrons.

So travel broadens the mind, but it also broadens your skills; how can you programme this into your career?

1. List the companies that are at the leading edge of your field, and find ways to work with them or see them close up.
2. Attend lectures or workshops delivered by experts in your field.
3. Find ways to 'travel' within your current company – assignments to new countries, product areas, functions.
4. If you can't get that full-time assignment, find (or propose) a cross-company project on which to work.

Locate and visit your Venice, your Rome and your Toledo. As Saint Augustine said, 'the world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page'.

Prior art

Experts who are en route to true mastery are happy to draw on the past. The Old Masters were like sponges, propelling themselves to greatness in part by an obsessive study of the best painters who had gone before them. Picasso drew on Cézanne, who drew on El Greco. Such obsessive study of relevant prior art can boost your own career too.

Picasso provides a great role model. His famous painting of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* draws heavily on Cézanne's *Bathers*, ... and in turn *Bathers* includes many elements from El Greco's paintings – painted three hundred years earlier.

All the Old Masters stood on the shoulders of giants: Géricault and Delacroix spent months in the Louvre, slavishly copying Rubens and Michelangelo; and Rubens himself made many detailed copies of Leonardo da Vinci's works.

If we accept the Old Master analogy of career excellence, we have then to ask how much we study prior art to further our own careers. Beyond the college course or the occasional training session, are you obsessive enough in mining the experience of experts in your industry or field of interest? By doing so, you can expect to reap many rewards.

Learning new techniques. If you do a lot of public speaking, why not ditch the PowerPoint and study the speeches of Martin Luther King and Winston Churchill. Go further and read Cicero's *De Oratore* (available in English), on how to be a great orator. Find techniques that have worked and practise them regularly.

Gaining encouragement and inspiration. If you are a

manager or leader, regularly faced with seemingly impossible challenges, why not ditch The One Minute Manager and watch a documentary about how Shackleton rescued his entire crew from near-certain death.

Providing a glimpse of the Promised Land. If you have to persuade teams to undertake radical change, why not ditch the economic logic and instead take the team to visit organisations that have already made similar changes, so they can see the art of the possible and how to achieve it.

In summary:

1. Establish who your role models are – individuals or organisations that have achieved success in your field of endeavour.
2. Learn about them in detail, finding out the techniques they employed, then using them and upgrading them.
3. If relevant to your company, initiate an outward-looking project to scan your competitors, suppliers, clients or other firms that could provide insights into how you or your colleagues might excel.

Even Isaac Newton noted that ‘If I have seen farther than other men, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants.’ To excel in any career requires finding the giants, the gurus, the Old Masters – and then climbing onto their shoulders and understanding what they have seen.

Patrons

Patrons were instrumental in helping the lowly painter to become an Old Master, and patrons are crucial to our modern careers too: but what is a patron these days?

When Rembrandt dropped out of university, his career was rescued by several patrons: Lastman, a painter in whose studio

Rembrandt mastered the portrayal of gesture and vivid lighting; Rutts, a wealthy merchant, who was the first to commission a Rembrandt portrait; and Huygens, who introduced Rembrandt to the Prince of Orange, to further commissions.

Patrons were sometimes gifted teachers, sometimes clients with a rich network of referrals, sometimes PR agents and even marriage brokers.

Today, however, we risk losing sight of the contribution that a patron can make to our careers, as we no longer use that simple concept and instead fragment it over the differing roles of boss, client and mentor. Here are a few pointers to finding the power of patronage:

1. Make every project a commission. When patrons provided commissions, the aspiring Old Master was not always overjoyed with the subject matter to be portrayed, but the commission provided an opportunity for the painter to master a technique or try out a new flourish. If we view jobs in this way, we can hijack the most routine assignment and use it to enhance our skills.
2. Turn your boss into a patron. Your boss can also be your patron if you take the initiative to build a slightly different type of relationship with him or her and are clear about the kind of patronage you would like.
3. Make clients a source of referrals. Satisfied clients can be your most powerful sales force. Having checked that they are delighted with the quality of your work, be bold and ask whether they know of others who may want similar work. Make it easy for them to introduce you by providing samples, case studies or other materials.
4. Find your personal ambassadors. Develop a network of people, esteemed by others, who can speak highly of

your work. Do your homework on who could make a difference to your career and make sure that they see your masterpieces.

If you feel you don't have a patron or mentor, look a little harder or wider and you will undoubtedly find people who can fit the role.

Productivity

Occasionally the successful painter presents a spectacle of the lone tortured soul. But the Old Masters certainly found ways to increase their productivity and output by delegating. Before the multinational company had refined such concepts, Renaissance painters such as Raphael had large workshops (employing up to fifty people, according to Vasari in his *Lives of the Artists*), many of whom after a formal training were dispatched to parts foreign on valuable commissions.

Rafael's assistants initially painted merely backgrounds and skies. Later he had them deliver everything but the difficult face and hands; and finally the Master had them design and even execute entire rooms at the Vatican for the most powerful man in the world. These workshops were clearly of huge importance to the Old Masters, and in them talent was nurtured. And as we look at modern artists, we see more modern versions of productivity (think 'outsourcing') in masters such as Damien Hirst.

The main point is that, on the road to mastery, the ambitious person will be striving to find new challenges, new influences, new clients. There are some aspects of his production that he will have to delegate if he is to progress. Remarkably, Vasari – who was a near contemporary of Rafael – records that this master ran a particularly harmonious and efficient workshop and so clearly combined skills in artistry with those of leadership.

Practice

Practice can make masters of us all. But ordinary practice does not make perfect, it merely makes 'pretty good'. Only deliberate and intentional practice makes perfect. It's not just about the 10,000 hours of practice that Malcolm Gladwell made famous, but about the obsessive preoccupation with using those hours, deliberately, to hone your skill (as K. Anders Ericsson, the originator of the concept makes clear – see Chapter 6, on 'Expert Performance').

Van Gogh's famous *Sunflowers* hangs in London's National Gallery. But it also hangs in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam ... as well as in galleries in Tokyo, Philadelphia, Munich and several private collections. That is because Van Gogh painted at least eleven versions of it! They are all of similar size and composition, with only small variations in detail as the master strived for ultimate perfection.

Monet painted eighteen almost identical versions of *Rouen Cathedral* as he intentionally strove to master the effects of lighting on his otherwise unchanging subject. Munch painted four *Screams*. Leonardo da Vinci had two attempts at his massive and venerated *Virgin of the Rocks*. The Masters were pushing, pushing, pushing their limits to find elusive perfection.

What lessons can we draw for our careers today? *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance* provides many answers. Within its 901 pages we find proof that excellence is only achieved when repetition is combined with stretch, ambition and reflection.

Mastery-through-practice occurs only through consciously applying a four-step cycle (set out in more detail in Chapter 5, on 'Experiential Learning') of experience, reflection, modelling and trial. It is as relevant for the marketing executive aiming to become the marketing director as for the project manager aiming to become the divisional chief executive.

Deliberate practice worked for the Old Masters and can work for you too. In the words of Leonardo da Vinci: ‘There is no higher or lower knowledge, but one only, flowing out of experimentation.’

Passion

With passion you may turn your dreams into mastery; without it you cannot achieve excellence.

Many of us struggle to say what our passion really is; we feel we ought to have one, but may have difficulty pinning it down. That’s OK. One of the fascinating lessons of the great artists is that the guiding passion, though powerful, is often malleable and evolving.

El Greco started life as a painter of conventionalised and formulaic icons, but rapidly discovered that his passion was to portray nature with incisive realism, flouting the conventions of his day. Yet as he advanced he found an even deeper passion – to paint what he felt, not just what he saw. Centuries ahead of his time, he had invented expressionism.

J. M. W. Turner’s early passion was for depicting the topography of the countryside, yet this later evolved into a passion for portraying the elemental forces of nature, wrestling the most dramatic storms into oil on canvas.

Knowing what one’s passion is provides energy to pursue the initiatives needed to advance a career, provides a North Star to guide when career alternatives present themselves unexpectedly, and a safeguard against ‘plateauing out’ at a level that will ultimately prove demotivating and destructive.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Joseph Campbell, the great mythologist, dramatically illustrates the effects that this plateauing out can have if the call of passion is denied:

Refusal of the summons turns The Call into its negative.

Walled in by boredom, hard work or 'culture' the subject loses the power of affirmative action ... His flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless – even though, like King Minos, he may through titanic effort succeed in building an empire of renown. Whatever house he builds it will be a house of death: a labyrinth of cyclopean walls to hide from his Minotaur. All he can do is ... await the gradual approach of his disintegration.

In contrast, when in touch with our passions, we enter the well-known state of flow set out by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: 'being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one ... Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost.' (See Chapter 3, on 'Positive Psychology'.)

Some people discover their career passion, purpose and meaning early in life; others later. Some recognise their passion in an instant; for others the enlightenment is more gradual. Everyone has their own Quest for this Grail: through mind-mapping, creative visualisation, self-help books, religion, psycho-synthesis. There is no single route; but some possible steps include:

1. Create space for reflection. In the world's great religions, the Sabbath is a vast cathedral in the timeline of the busy week in which to reflect on deeper issues. Earmark a slot of time periodically to look deeply into what motivates you.
2. Reflect on early interests. For example, many CEOs work with products or markets in which they became interested while very young.
3. Convert feelings of anger into a constructive mission. Sometimes we can recognise what we are most passionate



about only when it is taken from us. Identify something that has turned you off and use it to discover what turns you on.

Only by finding and nurturing the passion factor in our daily work can our careers be successful. The journey is towards mastery. The key is to seek. The prize is the career of which you dream.



SUMMARY

1. The Old Master artists offer us clear pointers for how to achieve mastery in any career; their lessons apply equally to your coaching career, and to the career of your client.
2. Places: find and visit the places most valuable to your career – where you can see excellence in action, gain unexpected inspiration and make useful contacts.
3. Prior art: study your precursors – people who can teach you new techniques, inspire you to go further than you thought possible and show you what 'great' looks like.
4. Patrons: engage with people who can be your commissioners, sources of referrals and, more broadly, your ambassadors.
5. Productivity: figure out how to deliver your expertise most effectively and what model will allow you to have greatest impact.
6. Practice: keep re-defining the development agenda so that the focus remains valid and the goals challenging.
7. Passion: make an honest reckoning of what you are passionate about, if necessary using as inspiration the lives of successful painters, film-makers, sports stars, entrepreneurs or friends whom you respect.



*The fox knows many things, but the
hedgehog knows one big thing.*

ARCHILOCUS (FRAGMENT OF POEM)

*The man who chases two
rabbits catches neither.*

CONFUCIUS

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