

Throughout the course of my career I have experimented with ways of making myself more productive, both physically and mentally. Having energy has been essential to my work as a writer, with all of the research required for my books and the deadlines inherent in publishing. In this document I share with you some of the wisdom that has come from constant experimentation, reflection, and consistent results.

My journey in mastering my writing process did not happen overnight. In fact, it took many years of tinkering and experimenting that began well before I began <u>The 48 Laws of Power</u> and ended with the writing of <u>Mastery</u> itself. What I learned is that willpower, the intensity of desire, and practice can take us to levels of performance we never thought possible. It is my hope that you use these secrets to become a better writer, thinker, and Master of your fate.

## RIGOROUS EXERCISE

Going back many years, I have adhered to a rigorous workout schedule, alternating my exercise between swimming, bicycling, and a stretching routine. When I first started writing, I generally ramped this down, in order to reserve more energy. (Writing can be quite draining.) I still exercised every day, but not as hard; or I swam less often.

When I began the writing phase of Mastery, I decided that this time I would do the opposite. I would slightly increase the distances or time of each routine and I would adhere to this throughout the production of the book, including the writing. The goal was to overcome what I would call the plateau effect, a phenomenon that athletes such as Derek Jeter have described. If we increase our level of workout by a slight increment we eventually reach a point at which it is no longer so tiring. If we then increase the level again, we start to get diminishing returns as we experience deeper levels of tiredness that undermine further progress. If instead we remain at the earlier level longer (the plateau), we would make substantial gains in endurance.

Normally after exercise we experience cycles of lows and highs—tiredness and bursts of energy during the rest of the day. If we stay at the plateau, eventually these highs and lows even out. Our energy levels blend into one relatively stable cycle. We build up more endurance. I see writing books as a marathon race. If I have more endurance, I can avoid the tiredness cycle and the petering out effect that comes along with the long slog that is writing.

First, for the Mastery project I decided to up my exercise routine. I normally exercise every day, but I would increase the times and distances ever so slightly. At a certain point I knew I would reach a plateau in which I would no longer feel fatigued by these increases. I would stay at the plateau level for the entire length of the project. In sports such as long—distance cycling this kind of training helps build up endurance levels. I wanted to see if this would translate to more consistent energy levels in my work.

By the fall of 2010, I felt like I had reached the plateau level. I had more endurance in my various exercise routines. When I came down to the final stretch of writing the last two chapters of my book, under a very tight deadline, I began to experience a second wind that I attribute to the increased endurance I had developed through my new routine. I was able to call upon reserves of energy that I had built up over the course of two years. Since then I have adhered to this endurance-based exercise, swimming every morning, never missing a day, and have seen a noticeable increase in my energy levels and work output.

Find an exercise routine that works for you, something you don't mind repeating and doesn't bore you to tears. For this purpose I like to choose three or four forms of exercise that I alternate, each offering a different kind of mind/body experience. Next, work to arrive at an overall plateau level. This can take a year or more of steady practice. You'll notice you've exceeded the plateau when you experience unusual and sustained tiredness. Ramp down to the plateau and stay there. You should find an increased level of endurance—you can do more without feeling as tired. This can lead to great things.

### ZEN MEDITATION

On the mental front I have long practiced Zen meditation. I had always been fascinated by Zen Buddhism and had incorporated this interest in The 33 Strategies of War, particularly as it related to the Samurai tradition in Japan. I also profiled certain Zen Masters in Mastery, like Hakuin Zenji and Shoju Rojin. These Zen Masters believed that the problem with most people is that they inevitably stop somewhere, instead of continually challenging themselves. Zenji did not reach his deepest moment of enlightenment until the age of forty-one, bringing with it a mind-set that would not leave him for the rest of his life. This is the type of persistence I try to bring to my routines and writing.

My routine is over thirty minutes of Zen meditation (known as zazen) every morning. In this form of meditation (referred to as shikantaza) the main goal is to learn how to empty the mind, develop superior powers of focus (joriki), and gain access to more unconscious, intuitive forms of thinking.

When we focus deeply on whatever is before us, we slowly gain greater powers of mental perception and we are able to see deeper and deeper into things. We see the connections between phenomena. We awaken higher levels of intelligence. We are hardly aware of the powers we actually possess when we focus this lens.

This routine helps me concentrate better on my work and relieves me of the obsessive thought patterns that often wear me out during the long haul of producing a book. It helps keep my mind more fluid and open, capable of greater flow. When I first started this routine I didn't know if it would yield any results, but I had faith that something would come of it. The key to my success was that I have adhered to these two routines with the utmost discipline, no matter if I am physically ill, or on the road.

Meditation has significantly improved my ability to concentrate when reading or taking notes. The nuisances that years ago used to get under my skin are now largely ignored or forgotten. My sleep has also never been better. I have developed patience in dealing with the drudgery of practice and am better able to handle petty criticisms. From early on I could see how this routine was helping me in several ways and I have since meditated every day in the morning.

If you are feeling restless or find that little things often aggravate and distract your from your life's work, I recommend you take up Zen meditation.

# RESEARCH

My research process has been essential to my work as a writer. Its one of the secret weapons I have that separates me from other writers. For each book I write I read about 250 books and for the first year or so after I begin a book project there is no writing, only research. If you are looking to take your writing to another level, I suggest using my system and then making it your own.

When I read a book, I am looking for the essential elements in the work that can be used to create the strategies and stories that appear in my books. As I am reading a book I underline important passages and sections and put notes (called marginalia) on the side.

After I'm done reading I'll often put it aside for up to a week and think deeply about the lessons and key stories that could be used for my book project. I then go back and put these important sections on notecards. A good book will generate 20 to 30 notecards, while a bad book will generate two or three notecards.

With this method I can take a book that's maybe not organized very well and reorganize it for my purposes. So if on page 30 the author is talking about concealing one's intentions and then talks about it again in another unrelated section on page 180, I can put those two sections together on one notecard and that becomes a theme for the book that I can easily access. This is the process that allows me to find the themes for my books and break down the books I read to get to the heart of them. As I get deeper into the process I begin to see these themes and patterns that can form the structure of the new work. Slowly the chapters come to life and I'm now able to organize the cards into various chapters.

Each notecard I make has the title of the book on it and is color coded, having different colors of cards, depending on the kind of subject that I'm dealing with. This provides an extra layer of organization that can get pretty elaborate. So, for instance, with the 33 Strategies of War, blue cards would be about politics, yellow strictly war, green the arts and entertainment, pink cards on strategy, etc. I could use this in several ways. I could glance at the cards for one chapter and see no blue or green cards and realize a problem. I could also take out all the cards of one color to see which story I liked best, etc.

This essential work builds the foundation for my writing, so when I sit down to begin, I basically have the entire book organized and at my fingertips. If for a project I wanted to write about Leonardo de Vinci, I might have fifty notecards that break him down from every possible angle. I can now write in a much fuller, deeper, dimensional way because I've taken all this information and I've organized it. To me this is an incredible way to shape a book.

These three secrets have helped me maintain momentum and produce at amazing levels during periods of intense stress throughout my career. I look back now and can see the stark difference in my health and focus before I began these routines and developed my research system. They have given me a sense of control, which has many benefits to it.

We too often think that those who achieve great things possess a larger brain or some innate talent, giving them the raw materials that we weren't blessed with to transform themselves into geniuses and Masters. But through my research I've come to know that many of the greatest figures in history were mediocre students; they often came from poverty or broken homes; their parents or siblings did not display any kind of exceptional ability. Their powers did not appear in their early years, but were instead the fruits of intense labor and consistent routine.

We all have goals we want to accomplish and we can get down on ourselves when we feel we are not realizing our potential. By establishing routines that build up endurance and confidence, you'll find you can overcome what you thought were your limits. You'll begin to find pleasure in exploring the outer reaches of your capabilities, realizing hidden powers that are latent and undiscovered within you. It is this confidence that will keep keep you on the path to mastery and power.

#### YOU CAN FIND ROBERT'S BOOKS ON AMAZON AND RETAILERS EVERYWHERE:

THE 48 LAWS OF POWER

THE ART OF SEDUCTION

THE 33 STRATEGIES OF WAR

THE 50TH LAW

MASTERY

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