10,000 Words to Mastery

Have you ever wondered why Tiger Woods was so good at golf for so long? How Deepak Chopra can write or co-author over eighty books? How a tennis academy in Moscow, Russia, which has less than twenty tennis courts, consistently produces some of the top tennis players in the world? How Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian of all time, can come back from semi-retirement and make an unprecedented fifth Olympic team? How Stephen Curry, a young man who was overlooked by all major basketball college programs, becomes the NBA league MVP in back to back years? How Hopi High School’s men cross country running team has won the state title for twenty six straight years? How Kieko Fukuda became the Karate world’s only 10th degree woman Dan in Judo at the age of 100?

I have wondered about these people and thousands of others for most of my adult life. The question in my mind iterated over and over again was” how do ordinary people become masters in their chosen profession?”

I have read hundreds of books and thousands of articles over the years and I think I have my hands around this phenomena. Deep practice! Yes, I know that both genetics and one’s environment also play a role in the quest to mastery. However, when you bundle it all up, the same conclusion surfaces again and again; deep practice. As the old saying goes, there is no substitute for hard work and execution. This observation comes from extensive research done in the field of mastery.

What I have experienced through my own personal laboratory, challenging my performance assumptions and beliefs , readings of academia and watching countless hours of footage showing greatness in front of my eyes, that mastery is really the pinnacle of perfecting a “domain specific skill.”

I truly believe in the proven theory that states **the sum of the parts makes the whole greater.** One can look back over the last 100 years in almost any accomplishment of great significance and find this to be true. Using this prevailing theory or model, one can understand how Team USA Basketball continues to win gold medals time and time again in the Olympics, how Chinese divers have won 85% of the gold diving medals in the last four Olympics, how the original Apple Macintosh team revolutionized how computers are used and how the University of Connecticut women’s basketball program has won the last four National championships. The collective sum is where the juice lives.

Then my question to myself was “What are the fundamental soft skills or prerequisites that make up the some of the parts, in order to master the “domain specific skill?” Not an easy algorithm to solve. But neither was the Rubik’s Cube. It took the Hungarian inventor in 1974 a month to solve it after he originally wrote the code for the cube. And, there are just forty three quintillion moves one can make to solve the cube.

There is good news. You only have to be proficient at understanding and using 10,000 words in your daily life(soft skills) to support mastering your chosen domain. And the other news, you don’t want to hear, is that it takes much longer than a month to achieve mastery. In fact, there is no conclusive evidence of exactly how long it takes. There are several theories that many psychologists and neuroscientists alike have debated over the years. The 10,000 hour rule and the decade of practice, appear to be the two that are most widely debated in academic fields. I will leave that up to you to ponder and explore for yourself as you step into your own personal journey of mastery.

The 10,000 words and their accompanying definitions are here for you to incorporate into the vernacular of your domain specific skill. As you climb your own mountain, I hope this small contribution of words assists you in reaching your summit

Remember, mastery is as much a team sport as it is an individual sport. Here, the words serve as your unselfish teammates or as interleaving components. In interleaving, one focuses acute attention to soft skills. The by-product of this approach is that the domain specific skill dramatically increases. Feel free to add more words as you climb. This particular mountain has no top. I’m sure ten thousand words is just the beginning.

As we move swiftly into the second machine age and an open world platform, where information travels faster than the speed of light, I hope we can continue to “knowledge share” for the betterment of a world full of peace, love and MASTERY.

Climb On,

Ralph Campbell –July 2016