

To Master a Skill is to Master the World

By Simon Pelletier

To be a master programmer is to have acquired great proficiency and skill in the activity of commanding a computer to do your bidding. What do we gain from this achievement? We can make the computer do many things for us. We can get it to count up our bills. We can get it to send messages. It can create beautiful songs and pictures for us. We can also sell our services to others who want us to make computers do things for them. By repeating a difficult task we implant it so completely into ourselves that it becomes an act of nature. The paths through our neural circuits are so smoothed and worn from use that we easily fall into step with them. Producing beautiful code without so much as a second glance. The computer codes itself, so to speak.

The *world* as the Oxford Dictionary describes, can include all the countries, peoples, cultures and natural geography that is the planet earth. Oxford also states that the another definition of *world* is "human and social interactions."

A master programmer will have spent so much time in the computer that they will attract those around them looking for help. Those looking for help will ask the programmer to use his abilities to enact a vision they have. If the programmer wishes to help them a mutually beneficial arrangement will be reached and the work will begin. At completion of the task, if things go well, he will be satisfied in helping someone else get something done he could do well that they could not. And he will have made a measurable change upon the world. Not just the physical state of the world, the code he wrote on a computer, but also the social connection that he crafted with the person who requested his help.

If he likes to program, and feels content on this path, he will carry along and create and fulfill many other visions. Laying down a foundation in the social and human connection space that is the "daily" world. Satisfaction is derived through the empowerment created by providing for ones greater community.

The world of programmers and people who need things built on a computer is a small subset of the the greater world. This greater world consists of every skill and ability that humans have. Cooking food and providing meals. Caring for the sick. Loving the looked-past. Singing to the crowd.

The next obvious step is to layer this approach. We can acquire another skill and

eventually arrive at a place where people are asking us for help again. Our identity changes, we become known as someone who can do this new thing and we create more social connection and investment in our community. Wrapped up in all of this is a self-feedback cycle where skills acquired leads to social connections which lead to new perspective in ones world which leads to new interests and, if ones mindset is to always be learning, then new skills are built again.

As one explores more of the masteries of life one begins to grasp concepts that felt outside of oneself. The writer, who reads books and does little else takes up a wrench and gets their hands oily. The car seems like a boring and limiting thing. Mechanical devices seem inferior to philosophizing and intellectualizing. But as the writer fixes something that was broken they notice the warm afterglow of working with their hands. The satisfaction of making something out in the world work again. They notice that this trite, blue-collar work is mentally challenging. Fixing broken things is not child's play. Other projects are pursued. They begin to build and create material possessions that bring them joy and contentment. They experiment with doing these things for others, and gifting people their creations. To see a creation made out in the world, living its own life, is a new satisfaction. And now they don't find writing and intellectualizing to be quite so fundamental as they once thought. And they gained a new found proficiency over their world they previously had no control over. A new, fuller human being created one simple skill at a time.

These masteries end up providing us agency over our own small slice of the world we inhabit. If we pursue them for their own sake we can continue to build, explore, and inhabit this world in newfound and interesting ways. A treadmill that provides joyous experience, new perspectives and with new perspective comes new opportunity.