

The Lost Art of Mastery

There is value to honing and mastering to a craft. But it takes time and experience.



I recently went down a rabbit hole watching various craftsman videos. Individuals carrying on traditions of long-lost trades. Things like Japanese long bows, wooden soup ladles, hand cut wooden shingles and hand-woven rope. All these steps take years to perfect. A person must dedicate large portions of their life mastering the techniques in every step of the process. From selecting the right raw material to final assembly, each area has multiple steps to learn. A person dedicates time and mental energy to learning how to recognize what is a conforming or non-conforming part. An intimate relationship between a person's being and their craft develops. It becomes difficult to discern one from another. I think now about our current society. We live our life with a "drive through" mentality. It seems like we want it now. When I look at sports I see a different story. Parents will tell their children to put in the time. Learn the basics and build up skills over time. Children are learning mastery of a craft. It is this attitude that we should bring to our work when we become adults.

We will spend between one-quarter and one-third of our life at work. We should pick a craft we love. Why do we feel we do not have to put years of work learning our way up through a company? Why do we feel entitled to start at the top at work? Why are we so offended when someone asks us to sweep the floor and wash parts? I remember when I started out that was all I got to do. Later I was moved to secondaries slowly moving my way up to setups. It was better this way. I learned every step of the process. I knew who the internal customers were. When I was washing parts, I did not want to receive a pan full of bar ends and chips. So as an operator I kept that stuff out.

I think society has forgotten mastery of the craft. We no longer plan on three to five year apprenticeships to build our knowledge for our career. There are pockets of this still for instance, in the medical field. A surgeon must commit to a 1 - 3 year fellowship after medical school. A time spent with a

senior surgeon to hone your craft. It is a time of mastery putting all that a doctor learned in school into practical use.

As shop owners and managers — and as parents to the next generation — we must sell the importance of mastery better. We need to explain to the younger generation it is not demeaning to learn a craft. On the contrary it is the ultimate job security. We have masters in our shops and they are valued. Most of the time we keep them working part time after they retire. I was always told no matter what you do, do it at your best. If you are going to sweep the floor, then strive to be the best floor sweeper ever. We have a notion that certain types of work are demeaning. They are not! All tasks work together to make our shops run like well-oiled machines. Would you run your car without the oil? Pride in our work is essential to mastery. A level of never being satisfied. The master is always striving to do it better the next time. Masters become masters not because of what they know, as much as it is that they know there is always more to learn.

To the next generation I say do not be afraid to take the path of mastery. Just like coming to a new team in freshman year you must start at the bottom. Work your way to the top and prove yourself. Do whatever someone asks of you and do it well. Do not just do it well, do it best. If you want to find your way up a ladder, find the tasks no one wants to do and jump on those. Volunteer to do the tough work. Those who do what no one else does get noticed. You will also find that tough work teaches you lessons that will enhance your capabilities through your whole career. Put in time and effort and you will go far. We need you in this industry. The work pays very well and is rewarding but the price for admission is your commitment. If you love it commit to it, and you will be rewarded with a distinguished career for which you will want to spend a third of your life. **P**

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