Self mastery is often defined as self-control, the ability to exert a strong will against our impulses to steer our future to one of our choosing. But this is only one aspect of the term. Personal mastery requires having a vision for your future self. And harnessing the will to realize that vision.

We learn to master ourselves by getting out of our own way. We strip away what we are not to realize who and what we really are, actualizing our potential in the process. This guide is designed to assist you on your path. It will point out the pitfalls and offer suggestions to support your efforts in personal development.

What is Self Mastery?

Self mastery is a path, an orientation one chooses to hold toward oneself and the world. It’s a commitment to never-ending improvement; it’s a process of becoming. It’s based on the realization that there are parts of us that will always try to hold us back.

Our biggest naysayers aren’t “out there.” They are within us. Someone committed to this path of self-mastery is willing to find ways to transcend their fear and break through their resistance.

Personal mastery implies that one possesses the self-awareness necessary to identify the source of one’s resistance and the creativity to find ways beyond it. A common belief about self mastery is that it’s about controlling your basic impulses. This, I believe, leads many people astray.

Self mastery isn't about controlling yourself or dominating those fearful, aggressive, and nasty parts within us. It’s about getting to know these parts, but then transcending them. Resolving these inner tensions, you can find wholeness and allow the natural process of development to take hold.
Self Mastery is Our Destiny

As Maslow told his group of doctoral students:

“You must want to be a first-class psychologist, meaning the best, the very best you are capable of becoming. If you deliberately plan to be less than you are capable of being, then I warn you that you’ll be deeply unhappy for the rest of your life. You will be evading your own capacities, your own possibilities.”

Although many of us refuse the call to adventure, developing our innate capacities is our destiny. Fighting this destiny brings depression and anxiety. Embracing this destiny leads to freedom and fulfillment.

Personal Mastery 101

Abraham Maslow highlights thirteen characteristics of self-actualization he observed in individuals with positive mental health. They are the markers of those walking the path to self-mastery. Familiarize yourself with these characteristics so you can self-assess if you’re on the right track today.

See: 13 Characteristics of Self-Actualizing Individuals

No matter what you’re going to learn, you will go through four stages in your development. When you don’t know what these stages are, at least two of them hijack your development. If you know what to expect, however, you will reach the final stage of personal mastery.

See: The Four Stages of Learning Anything

Resistance to Self Mastery

The path toward self mastery would be straight and narrow if it wasn't for resistance. Resistance takes various forms. When you understand the source of your resistance, you can navigate around and through it.
Our Drive for Safety

Within an individual's psychology are two important, yet opposing forces. One propels us toward growth; the other drives us toward safety.

See: Two Driving Forces That Determine Our Destiny

The Power of Homeostasis

Homeostasis sabotages most people's attempting to develop themselves. When you know how homeostasis works, you can navigate through the resistance it creates on your path to growth.

See: How Homeostasis Influences Our Growth and Development

Seeking Passion and Excitement

Those who achieve personal mastery learn how to avoid extremes. They don't seek passion and excitement regarding their development, living in moderation and making steady progress each day.

See: The Middle Way: Why You Should Let Your Passion Die

The Rigidity of a Fixed Mindset

Only with a love of learning and a resilience through innumerable plateaus can we actualize our potential. We truly must believe—with a deep conviction—that we can achieve greatness. We must know in our heart that we have potential to actualize and the will and grace to make it so. To have this resolve, we must first change your fixed mindset.

See: How to Change Your Fixed Mindset

"I Know How To Do That"

Another thing that blocks the process of learning and development is the mind’s belief, "I know." This single belief stops learning, destroys creativity, and inhibits personal mastery.

See: Guide: How to Adopt a Beginner’s Mind to Improve Learning and Creativity
Craft Your Plan for Personal Mastery

What then can we do to promote our continual growth and development? One reason many of us fail to actualize more of our potential is that we lack a personal development plan.

This plan can be simple. It can fit on a single page. But it must be created with an understanding of human potential so you aware of what’s available to you.

See: How to Create a Personal Development Plan

A Final Word for Self Actualizers

Discovering a great talent, capacity, or strength within yourself that demands nurturance can be exhilarating, but it can also bring feelings of danger and responsibility. It may demand that you stand alone, cultivating inner strength instead of seeking support from your environment. (Although you can find those that will support your efforts, too, especially if they are on their own path to self mastery.)

The path to growth and personal mastery is invariably difficult at times. It's uncomfortable moving out of the known into the unknown. Even if the known is not ideal or even desirable, it’s familiar to us. And since all humans have a need for safety, there will always be an attraction to staying within the familiar.

Make peace with homeostasis, but continually challenge yourself to establish higher homeostatic set points. Honoring your need for safety, courageously guide yourself into the great unknown. Enjoy practice for practice’s sake. Transform yourself slowly, steadily, and daily.

Book Recommendations for Self Mastery

Here are recommended books to support your path toward self mastery:

- Mastery by George Leonard
- The Talent Code by Daniel Coyle
- The Little Book of Talent by Daniel Coyle
- The Willpower Instinct by Kelly McGonigal

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