

Improvement through deliberate practice

By: Veronica Cool ⌚ June 3, 2016



I have been fascinated with the concept of Malcolm Gladwell's book, "The Outliers," and the 10,000 hours of practice required to achieve mastery. He attributes success to those who have access earlier to practice their craft, whether playing basketball to an Olympic level, or cello to a first position in an orchestra or achieving success in business.

But what of those times when you are investing the time but without the gusto? When you're simply going through the motions?

This is when we fall into the "busyness" model — being busy just for the sake of activity, without true productivity or deliberation towards a goal.

I scaled back on having meetings, let alone meetings of one hour to one and a half hours, unless there's a tight agenda correlated to outcomes. I've even shifted them to phone or Skype versus in-person meetings. Don't get me wrong: Meetings for the sake of relationship building and maintaining relationships should still occur. I actually make these meetings a priority.

The concept of deliberate practice has been top of mind as I strive to be more effective — being intentional about our efforts and prioritizing the things that matter, like family, health and even the time to breathe.

To learn any new skill or gain expertise you need to practice and practice. And then you need to practice some more. No one argues this point. We are beginning to learn through scientific research that the quality of your practice is just as important as the quantity. In essence, it is not just about the 10,000 hours.

And interestingly, the research also indicates that this mastery or expertise stems from practicing at expert levels, not just from innate talent. This is the concept of "deliberate practice."

Deliberate practice requires hard work, to truly improve your performance over time. Just like accomplishing any goal, there are certain essential components to success.

First, be motivated to practice. Be motivated to improve.

And then repeat.

Your practice must be intentional, with the goal of improving your performance. Whether it is litigating, debating, researching, conditioning. Be intentional.

If I ask you about your life plan, what would you say? Yes, you have the next vacation planned, your retirement account is growing (very roller coaster-like!) but what will your legacy be?

What is your mark on this life and this world?

For me, my goal is to create a strong community legacy. I aim to empower, to serve as a role model — not arrogantly but to show women, girls, Latinos and others that if I can arrive here, so could they.

I wish to show my kids that I'm a rock star, obviously not a fast or thin rock star, but a rock star, nevertheless. So they can learn to be fearless, to be kind, to be giving, to think bigger than themselves — to be rock stars themselves.

Include traveling into this mix, traveling to explore the world's people and places. I want to live a life full of adventure and laughter while having a permanent impact. So, I'm becoming very focused and deliberate in practicing what I preach so that I can enjoy these experiences.

Understanding where I want to wind up and the journey I wish to travel simplifies my day-to-day efforts. I'm deliberate about what I choose to do with my time.

I probably have more than 30,000 hours of practice, but these are in banking. Today, I'm an entrepreneur, storyteller, strategist. And I need more deliberate practice to become a master in these practices. That's doable and something I am eagerly anticipating.

As you build your legacy and create your mark, start by crafting your life plan. Where do you want to end up? Begin by building the road map to arrive there. Invest the energy, the effort to be strategic, to partner with the right people who motivate and empower you. And most importantly begin to implement deliberate practice. And then practice some more, remembering to be intentional about the improvement to accomplish success.

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