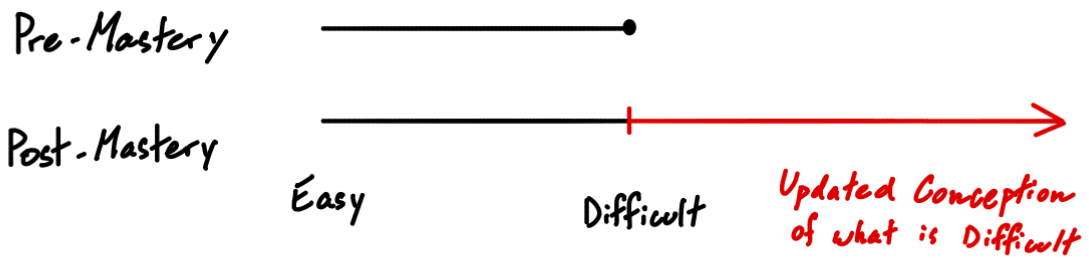




The Ripple Effects of Pursuing Mastery

By Blas Moros

The Difficulty Spectrum



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I've had the privilege of being able to pursue several different skills to a high-level. Now that I'm a father (and soon to a second!), the ripple effects of mastery are becoming increasingly apparent and important.

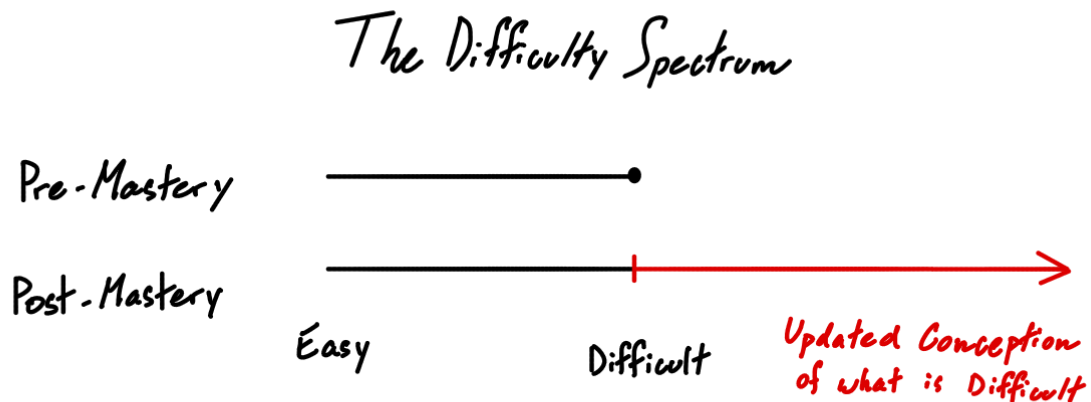
The pursuit of mastery (not necessarily the attainment of it) provides a framework and process from which to effectively learn, instills resiliency and good habits, teaches self-dependence and agency, and helps set your internal compass. This pursuit also forces you to realize the difference between process and outcome, teaches you how to give something your all and still be ok with failing, helps you uncover how to be a good student, a good teammate, a good leader, reveals how to sacrifice today for something greater tomorrow, and so much more.

Importantly, there is a confidence and freedom that comes from acquiring these skills and mindset that is hard to describe and impossible to fully impart to others – somebody must experience and embody this process themselves to fully benefit from it. Therefore, this pursuit is so challenging and so meaningful – you can't cheat the system! There is no way for somebody else to struggle and learn for you, you must go through the heat and pressure yourself to collect the gems that lie on the other side of mastery.¹

Reflecting on this process and what I gained from it has taught me that building my capacity and extending my “difficulty spectrum” is one of the key ripple effects that pursuing mastery helped facilitate. For example, after college, many things I had heard were stressful and difficult felt totally manageable because my conception of what was difficult had been extended. With tennis and a full class load, I effectively had 2 full-time jobs through college and when I graduated and “only” had 1 full-time job, I had already developed the skills, habits, and mindset to effectively cope with it.²

¹ Many (most?) of life's most important elements have to be earned, not bought. This experience is why Naval's pithy [Tweet](#) rings so true to me: “A fit body, a clam mind, a house full of love. These things cannot be bought – they must be earned.”

² I recently finished reading [Endure](#) by Alex Hutchinson. One of his key points is that you have to struggle in practice as this pushes your limits and allows you to do more with less. Through this process, *perceived effort* decreases over time and this has a notable effect on performance and endurance. I *love* this notion – you push yourself in practice to new heights so that perceived effort in your craft (or life) is lower than it is for others. This is how you can not only survive but thrive.



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The point of this essay isn't that I learned these things, the point is that these skills are universally valuable and accessible to those who pursue something, anything, to the highest degree they can bear. The price for admission is high (time, failure, effort, embarrassment) and it is *terrifying* to consistently put yourself on the line, but you come to learn and trust that the payoff is worthwhile even if the goal isn't always clear or attainable. This is where compounding kicks in, especially if you can take the skills and mindset and apply it to your "learning OS", rather than simply your current craft. If you can do this, every additional skill you attempt to master becomes marginally easier and it impacts every other area of your life too.

In addition, by pushing myself to my limits, I get to realize and understand the contours of my competencies, the edges of my abilities more clearly. Again, this is scary as hell, but the alternative is an unexamined life where *your* maximum potential isn't realized. I've learned and experienced that the more I take on and the further I push myself, the more meaning I seem to be able to weave throughout my life and so far, this has proven a great recipe to minimize regret.

Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents, which in prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant. – Horace

Now, perhaps the greatest ripple effect of mastery is only starting to make itself apparent to me as I'm discovering how it applies to parenthood. In this vein, I consider one of my most important roles as a parent is to facilitate this process of mastery. In other words, I want to help encourage depth – diving into any rabbit holes my kids want to. With the obvious, commonsensical limitations, I don't think the outlet matters. If your child is passionate about something, wants to get better, and cares enough to learn every facet and can't stop thinking about it, I think these benefits we're discussing will become apparent over time. In a complex world, trying to predict what will be most useful is difficult. Take gaming and game design, for example. This was seen as a waste of time and maybe even dangerous to a large percentage of parents 20 years ago, but today is a valuable skill. Find that depth of passion, mine it, and its value will accrue over time.

Part of the beauty of pursuing mastery is that if you frame it correctly and understand the long-term benefits you're working towards, there is no downside. You may not reach your goal – I didn't get to compete in grand slams like I dreamed of as a little boy – but it has provided me a set of tools to help me navigate the world. In a sense, what we're talking about here is the meta skill of learning how to learn. If you can find a passion, pursue it to a high level, abstract the lessons, and apply them to various aspects of your life, you'll be able to learn, iterate, adapt, and improve faster than you otherwise would.

I strive to be on this journey for the rest of my life, but what is most thrilling at this point is to think about sharing this path with my little ones. I can think of few things more worthwhile.

