

Stepping on the Path of Mastery

by Sally Durgan,
ITP SF group leader and Mastery member

“Are you looking for your keys?” asked a friend as I rummaged through the bottom of my purse. Grasping my key ring, I felt a sense of relief, regaining access to my home, mailbox and membership to the gym, public library and frequent tea drinkers’ club.

In a more figurative sense, George Leonard offers “The Five Master Keys” in his book *Mastery: The Keys to Success and Long-Term Fulfillment*, quoted below. These principles, which informed both the development of ITP and subsequently, ITP’s 9-month Mastery program, feel both familiar and challenging, worthy of revisiting on a regular basis:



Key 1: Instruction: We are constantly learning—new information, skills, and ways of being. With the vast number of subjects and methods, George emphasizes “how to involve each student actively in the process of learning.” As students, how can we know ourselves well enough to create the conditions and choose the approaches that support us? As teachers, how can we engage to meet the varying needs of our students? We are fortunate to have a number of options for continued development, which brings us to the second key:

Key 2: Practice: Instruction, even using an active approach, is not sufficient. George describes practice as “anything you practice on a regular basis as an integral part of your own life—not in order to gain something else, but for its own sake.” Many activities in our daily lives match this definition. ITP incorporates practices including the kata, meditation and staying current. These involve consistency and focus, individual effort and community support.

Key 3: Surrender: Until this point, Mastery may feel like a linear process; then we arrive at Surrender: “There are times in almost every master’s journey when it becomes necessary to give up some hard-won competence in order to advance to the next stage.” The way forward may be sideways or even backwards: “For the master, surrender means there are no experts. There are only learners.”

Key 4: Intentionality: Which seeds of change do we plant and water? Setting intentions guides this process: “the transformation...was a long and arduous process. Still the thought, the vision, the intentionality was primary.” Following visioning, developing and practicing affirmations keep our intentions in focus.

Key 5: The Edge: The interplay of instruction, practice, surrender and intentionality leads us to the Edge, which may feel like a leap following incremental change: “Playing the edge is a balancing act. It demands the awareness to know when you’re pushing yourself beyond safe limits.” We meet edges

in our daily practices, as well as rites of passage and major life changes. “And afterwards? More training, more time on the plateau: the never-ending path again.”

Published in 1992, *Mastery* predates the era of smart phones, apps & social media; yet even then, George characterized “our hyped-up consumerist society in an all-out war on mastery.” Twenty-three years later, these keys, grounded in many wisdom traditions as well as lived experience, can still guide us, opening doors to transformation.