

## Dabblers: Go Deep!

by Tim Cleary, ITP Mastery teacher and co-leader of ITP San Rafael

It's the New Year! Many of us are excited because this is the year that we've decided to finally learn how to \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in blank). Paddle board? Speak French? Play chess? Most of us have had this experience before already ... and most of us, at some time or another, have crashed and burned. As George Leonard points out in *Mastery* we tend to hit a plateau that feels endlessly long and insurmountable, the exact opposite of the initial excitement and growth we experienced in the early stages of this endeavor. And, unfortunately, many of us interpret this seeming setback as a sign that this activity just isn't for us - we don't have enough natural talent; it's not as much fun as we thought it would be; it's just not INTERESTING enough. At this point there is a tendency to look in another direction for something that WILL sustain our interest. We become what George referred to as a "dabbler."



In her seminal book *Grit*, Angela Duckworth explains that the word "interest" comes from the Latin *interesse*, which means "to differ." To quote Ms. Duckworth, "To be interesting is, literally, to be different. We are, by our nature, *neophiles*." She interviewed Paul Silvia (author of *Exploring the Psychology of Interest*) for insight into how to sustain interest over the long term. Silvia explains that the need to notice new things and seek novelty is hardwired into us evolutionarily - it is a drive that allows us to learn through experience, thus increasing our chances for survival. He also said "For the beginner, novelty is anything that hasn't been encountered before. For the expert, novelty is nuance."

Herein lies one of the secrets to Mastery. *It is easier to move from good to great than it is to move from beginner to good!* The trick is to become aware of the finer and finer distinctions. As one moves closer to Mastery in a chosen field the ability to zero in on the nuances becomes all important. Asking questions like "What is the exact angle of my arms in relationship to my body that will allow me to generate the most powerful stroke on this paddle board? How does my hara, or center, come into play? How about my breathing?" will allow us to hone in on the subtleties of our particular interest. Noticing the smaller and smaller details allows us to polish our skills to achieve an even higher level of expertise.

An important part of this process of growth is the cultivation of presence. After all, if we are not deeply engaged in our chosen activity by giving it our full attention, how can we even begin to notice subtleties that would allow us to move incrementally deeper into Mastery? Fortunately the foundational practices of ITP, namely the Kata and meditation, tend to refine our ability to stay present and focused. This attentional awareness will greatly increase our chances of discovering the novelty within the nuance and will allow us to move more easily from "dabbler" to "Master!"