

## GROWTH STRATEGIES

# Charting Your Path to Market Mastery

Six tips and tools to help discover your strengths and sharpen your skills.

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Despite all the doom and gloom, some entrepreneurs are managing to make a significant amount of money during these tough economic times. What are they doing differently? These people have carved out a niche to differentiate themselves from competitors and become masters in their field.

How do you get on the road to mastery? According to *Outliers: The Story of Success*, authored by Malcolm Gladwell, it takes 10,000 hours of practice in a specific area to achieve true mastery. Here are six tips you can follow to help achieve mastery in your market -- no matter the size of your business.

**1. Educate yourself.** Learning happens in a variety of forums. Getting an MBA or other formal education might help open the door to some companies, but it's not a requirement to start your own business. Facebook, Apple, Microsoft and scores of other companies are filled with founders who don't have college degrees. They did, however, make a point to continue learning about their industries. Whether you enroll in a course on your topic area or work in that market, the key is to continuously deepen your knowledge and experience in your chosen field.

**2. Focus on your signature strengths.** If you can't figure out where to apply your considerable energy and talent, I suggest you get on the "signature" strength bandwagon. In researching character strengths and virtues, University of Michigan's Christopher Peterson, PhD, and University of Pennsylvania's Martin E.P. Seligman, PhD, found that people who operate in their signature strengths (their most significant character traits) were happier and more engaged in life and at work.

Peterson developed [a survey](#) that can help identify your top five strengths. It's a great start. Gallup also has a [book](#) to determine your true passions. If you take both tests, look for the trends. They'll either confirm what you already know or open a path that has been dormant.

**3. Read.** If you can find the time to read at least one book a month in your topic area, you will have more information than the vast majority of people in your chosen field. Audiobooks work, too, of course. No matter how you learn, what's most important is to stay informed.

**4. Write.** Start penning articles for trade magazines and professional associations in your area of expertise. There are a number of organizations looking for relevant content that provides expert advice and practical information. Writing also makes you sharper in your niche because you have to think about it differently.

**5. Be a trendsetter.** Once you're up to speed on the latest trends in your industry, form opinions -- all the better if they are sometimes counter to what's popular. Then, start a blog. But don't regurgitate what everyone else already knows. Be brave, share your views and don't worry about everyone agreeing with you. Mastery isn't for the faint of heart.

**6. Speak.** I speak around the world on the topic of effective performance with a focus on emotional management and neuroscience. It's a great way to make a

living and an excellent way to teach and inspire large crowds. You have to know your topic inside-and-out, if you're going to open yourself up to a live crowd. To get started, check out your local chapter of the [National Speakers Association](#).

It's the era of the niche. Delve deep into what you love to do. Learn more, think more, discuss more and teach more. Become the go-to person in your arena and you'll be well on your way to mastery.