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Reimagining Mastery Through Anaheim Peppers



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Downtime used to be hard to come by. Remember just a couple of months ago when the pace of operations prevented us from doing all we needed to just to stay on top of things? Back then, it seemed like there was no time to study new policies, procedures or software updates. No time to think or plan about making our organizations better or preparing ourselves for the next stage of our careers. We were just too busy.

Well, we aren't busy now—at least not most of us—and it seems odd how it has become difficult to leverage this downtime. For the millions out of work, or the rest of us worried about the future, downtime—once seen as an opportunity to relax, recharge and prepare for what's next—eats away at our psyche, our confidence and even our self-esteem. It's weird. The presence of this extraordinary societal anxiety has put a damper on what we used to long for.

It need not be so.

Capitalizing on Downtime to Make Personal and Professional Progress

Downtime—regardless of its source—should be recognized as a gift. It is a perfect time to plan a personal and professional relaunch—a turning point in our organizations, careers and lives. While many will fill this time with unproductive activities, wondering what scary things lurk in an unknowable future, others will focus and create their future regardless of what the post-pandemic situation is. But how?

There are as many variations on this question as there are people, each of us having our unique skills, passions and goals. But regardless of the path forward we choose or are forced into, there is a word that we can all anchor to: mastery. It's another one of those words we hear every once in a while without a true comprehension of its power or how to harness it.

Author Robert Greene, puts it this way.

"We imagine that creativity and brilliance just appear out of nowhere, the fruit of natural talent, or perhaps of a good mood, or an alignment of the stars. It would be an immense help to clear



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up the mystery—to name this feeling of power, to examine its roots, to define the kind of intelligence that leads to it, and to understand how it can be manufactured and maintained. Let us call this sensation mastery—the feeling that we have a greater command of reality... and ourselves. Although it might be something we experience for only a short while, for others—masters of their field—it becomes their way of life..."

What is important to understand at this point is that I am not suggesting that over the next few weeks we have time to actually master something, but rather we can learn the process of mastery and carry it forward as we return to whatever future presents itself.

Mastering Peppers to Understand Mastery

The pursuit of mastery begins with a simple desire to learn and apply all we can about a specific topic. On Day One of our stay-at-home order here in my neck of the woods, I decided to grow the perfect Anaheim pepper. I read voraciously about sunlight, acidity levels, soil composition, fertilizers, plant strain genetics and all kinds of bugs. Then I got my hands dirty, tilling soil, composting and fertilizing. I grew my plants from seeds indoors until that day a couple of weeks ago, when they went into the soil on schedule with both the instructions on the back of the seed pack and guidance from the Old Farmer's Almanac.

I planted in three different soil compositions, and use different watering schedules as a control to ensure I am learning as I go. I track both the rain and my watering carefully, and am already seeing differences in growth rates.

All of this is not really about peppers, it's about me. I long to learn something new from experience, to show myself I can do something new and do it well. Perhaps even better than well. I have no innate skill at gardening, but my goal is to learn how to replicate this process, and grow the finest Anaheims in Bandera County next year, and sit on the side of the road with my grandson as the cars line up to buy them until we are out of stock, and then teach him how to do the same.

That is how mastery works, I think. It's made up of passion, curiosity, preparation, humility, persistence and patience; skills that can be applied to anything by anyone.

Returning to Work the Right Way

As we all return from our extended "vacations" or work from home lives, it will become readily apparent who has used their time well. Some will be rusty, struggle to get back in the saddle and resist or complain about the changes that will be required. Others will hit the ground running, with renewed vigor, purpose and a plan to excel in the new environment, whatever it may be.



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To be among the latter group, seek mastery in some small form while the gift of time is still here.

Stay well, be safe and keep getting better!



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