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**Welcome to SIMPLICITY AND SUCCESS™ — THE E-ZINE**  
**A Newsletter About Creating What Matters Most in Life & Work**  
**Bruce Elkin, Personal/Professional Coach**  
**<http://www.BruceElkin.com>**

Volume 2, Number 5, March 8, 2004. All rights reserved.

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March came to Saltspring Island like a lamb. It's nearly 62F and sunny today. The cherry blossoms are bursting forth across the island. The skunk cabbage is unfurling its brilliant yellow foliage in the creek bottoms. It is truly a wonderful time of year to live on the west coast of Canada. I'm deeply grateful.

I'm also grateful to all of you who forwarded my newsletter to friends, family, and colleagues. We now have 1430 members who receive it. So THANK YOU! Your help is essential and MUCH appreciated.

Please keep forwarding the intact newsletter to those you think would value and appreciate it. That's how we grow. And if you have received the newsletter from a friend, please consider signing up for you own copy. (Details below) Thank you!

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**PLEASE HELP ME BUZZ MY BOOK!**

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Again, I'm appealing to you to call your local library and bookstores and ask if they have copies of Simplicity and Success on the shelf. If you haven't done so, I beg you, please do. You don't have to order one for yourself, just ask them to bring it in so others may benefit. Libraries and bookstores appreciate these kinds of calls and I appreciate you making them. Thanks so much!

In Canada the book is available through Dempsey Distributors in Vancouver.

In the US, it's available through Baker and Taylor, or Trafford Publishers.

In the UK or EU, it's available through the Trafford office in Crewe, England. Their number is +44 (1270) 252-889, fax +44 (1270) 251-609 or you can email Andrew Smith at [andy.smith@trafford.com](mailto:andy.smith@trafford.com).

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<http://www.bruceelkin.com/newsletter.html> Click on "Subscribe to Simplicity and Success Now" and then select sub or unsub as you wish.

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**QUICK TAKE: Mastery**

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This week's feature article is about Creating A Masterful Life. But what is mastery? And why do we need it?

Mastery is that mysterious, incremental process through which something, which is initially difficult becomes easier, more pleasurable, and life-changing through practice.

"Practice?" I can hear many exclaiming. "I don't want to practice, I just want to know."

But that's the problem with so many self-help approaches.

They are more about insight than action. They take an academic rather than experiential approach to learning. But the road to excellence always runs through mastery. And the road to mastery always runs through practice. To get good at something, you have to practice. To master it, you have to practice more.

Even gifted proteges have to practice if they want to keep their gift alive and extend it. Eventually, the not so gifted who do practice catch up to the proteges and even exceed them. There are numerous studies that show that gifted musicians, athletes, and writers who fail to develop deep and lasting mastery in their craft also fail to live up to their potential and fall by the way side.

Most of us aren't proteges and are often not aware of our gifts. But we do have aspirations, things we'd like to do and create. George Leonard, a writer, Aikido expert and author of the slim but profound book Mastery says mastery lies at the root of all success and fulfillment. It also lies at the root of true and lasting simplicity.

There's no way around it. Practice may not make you perfect, but it will help you master the skills and principles of whatever you want to learn and create, and do so in a simple, successful, and rewarding way.

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**FEATURE ARTICLE**

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**CREATING A MASTERFUL, FULLY-ENGAGED LIFE**

**- Part 3 of 4. For previous articles go to <http://www.BruceElkin.com>**

We saw, last issue, that a well-savored material life can bring us much pleasure. However, when we realize that we put more time, energy, and money into enriching their material life than they get back in meaning and fulfillment, many of us simplify by cutting back and clearing out the clutter.

While this kind of simplifying doesn't necessarily lead to the real and lasting results we want, it can lead to the next step. It can open space in which we see that there is a higher form of simplicity based on freedom, challenge, and personal growth. Some also recognize that there are two forms of freedom: "freedom from..." and "freedom to ...".

Imagine that you're standing at the edge of a 1000-foot cliff. You're free to jump off that cliff. That is, you're free from constraints such as fences, laws, or rangers preventing you from

jumping. However, you're not free to jump and, later, describe what a sense of flow you felt as you flew through the open sky — because you'd be dead! We tend to stay away from such cliffs because of the threat of injury or death they present.

However, what if you master the skills of hang-gliding, have a sturdy glider and safety gear, and pick a cliff that is appropriate for your skill level?

Then, you are free to jump. The jump is no longer a threat, it's a challenge. It's a way for you to stretch, to express your mastery and knowledge, and to experience that Zen-like flow state in which we come most fully alive. It's also a way to experience a focused, higher-order form of simplicity.

"When goals are clear, feedback relevant, and challenges and skills are in balance," says Positive Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "attention becomes ordered and fully invested. Because of the total demand on psychic energy, a person in flow is completely focused. There is no space in consciousness for distracting thoughts, irrelevant feelings. Self-consciousness disappears, yet one feels stronger than usual. The sense of time is distorted: hours seem to pass by in minutes. When a person's entire being is stretched in the full function of body and mind, whatever one does becomes worth doing for its own sake; living becomes its own justification. In the harmonious focusing of physical and psychic energy, life finally comes into its own. "

"Flow" is a state of being fully engaged and focused. It's not limited to adventurous physical challenges such as hang-gliding or rock climbing. Tango dancers experience it, as do artists and sculpturers. Public speakers and jazz musicians talk about "getting in the groove" and "flowing" as a highlight of what they do. Parents experience flow interacting with their children. Most of us experience flow when we totally immerse ourselves in a good book and lose all track of time and place.

Merely being "free from" material needs is not enough. To live a masterful, fully engaged life we must develop the capacity (the freedom to...) to create the results we truly want. We must develop and apply the skills and discipline to do things that matter – and to do them with mastery. The engagement and flow we experience when we express mastery bring a focused simplicity to our lives.

Martin Seligman and others have found that true happiness comes from exercising what they call "signature strengths" every day. For example, my signature strengths include "gratitude," and "appreciation of beauty and excellence." I exercise these strengths daily by going for regular walks during which I appreciate the changing beauty of nature and feel deeply grateful for my place in the scheme of things.

My strengths also include "love of learning," "perspective" (wisdom), "intellection" (thinking in multiple directions), and "input" (collecting ideas, stories and quotes). I exercise these strengths through my writing, workshops and coaching. I weave the insights and ideas I find into stories, articles and books. My last skill, "bravery and valor," is exercised when I go beyond convention, push the edge a bit, and take risks. Exercising these strengths in challenging ways often puts me into "flow."

In flow, we no longer seek comfort or pleasure. We no longer compare ourselves to others. We no longer measure success by the feelings or emotions it generates. Indeed, the flow state is free of emotional content.

Only after we finish the climb, create the painting, or hear the tango music die away do we become aware of the results we produced. Instead of fleeting pleasure, we feel a deep sense of gratification and gratefulness for those results and for our mastery in producing them.

One of the most important things that people give up when they reactively over-simplify their lives is the opportunity to get involved in meaningful challenges and to exercise both "freedom from..." and "freedom to...." By exercising both forms of freedom through taking on challenges appropriate to your skill and experience, you too will find yourself in flow.

Many people these days are voluntarily limiting their consumption of material goods and experiences in order to be free to engage in mastery-building activities such as yoga, skiing, running, do it yourself renovations, gourmet cooking, new languages, and all sorts of other challenging activities.

When we add a challenging, fully engaged, and masterful life to a simple yet well-savored material way of being, we are better able to rise above the messy complexity that life presents. We begin to move toward the focused, lasting, and integral simplicity on the other side of complexity.

However, there is more to an integral life than material pleasures and even the deep gratifications that come with mastery and flow. There is also meaning and purpose. We'll examine "the meaningful life" in the next issue.

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## **RESOURCES YOU CAN ACCESS**

### **=====** **SIMPLICITY AND SUCCESS: CREATING THE LIFE YOU LONG FOR**

My book SIMPLICITY AND SUCCESS: CREATING THE LIFE YOU LONG FOR continues to receive rave reviews from critics and readers around the world. Here are some examples:

>Review from The SIMPLE LIVING OASIS current issue:

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Bruce Elkin's new book *Simplicity and Success* does a great service for the simple living movement. Elkin draws on his extensive expertise as a personal coach and organization development trainer to engage the power of creative process to the work of fashioning a simple and fulfilling life. Intimate, practical, and positively focused, Elkin's book moves well beyond "hairshirt simplicity" and even simplicity as a "leisure expansion movement" to challenge readers to identify what really matters in their lives (their positive visions) and then set out methodically to realize them. In emphasizing creativity over critique, the book echoes Gandhi's sage advice that "we become the change we wish to see in the world." Elkin intuitively grasps the principle that only positive action has staying power; only authentic visions leading to fully creative acts can move us beyond consumer culture and help forge a constructive alternative to it.

— Reviewed by: Mark A. Burch author of *SIMPLICITY*, and *STEPPING LIGHTLY*

#### REVIEWS FROM READERS:

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"I love your book. Why don't you charge for the e-book? It's the best one out of the hundreds I've read. I liked it so much I sent away for a hard copy. It's even better when you can hold it in your hands and underline it. It's a great book. Thanks!"

- David S., Sydney, Australia

"*Simplicity and Success* is a wonderful addition to the simplicity literature. It takes the notion of simplifying to a whole new -- and exciting -- level. I've been recommending this book to everyone at my work."

— Suzanne B., Nashville, TN

"The best simplicity book I've read in years — and the most practical success book."

Dale W., Vancouver, BC

If you'd like a personalized, signed copy of *Simplicity and Success*, they're available from me at a special subscriber's price. It's \$20 plus \$3.00 shipping and handling in Canada. In the US, send \$17 plus \$3 shipping and handling.

For more information about SIMPLICITY AND SUCCESS: CREATING THE LIFE YOU LONG FOR, go to: <http://www.bruceelkin.com/simplicity-book.html>

If you can't afford to purchase a book, you can download a PDF copy at <http://www.bruceelkin.com/whats-new.html>

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## **FROM MY BOOKSHELF**

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MASTERY: The Keys to Success and Long-Term Fulfillment by George Leonard (Plume, 1992)

In this thin but inspiring volume, George Leonard explains how the process of mastery will help you to overcome the pitfalls of the quick fix and attain a higher level of excellence and satisfaction in whatever challenge you choose to take on. He describes five keys to mastery, including instruction, practice, surrender, intentionality and something he calls "the edge." He introduces us to three stalled personality types -- the Dabbler, the Hacker, and the Obsessive -- and shows us how to get beyond them. This is a great little book that can complement any learning approach you use or are studying. Highly recommended.

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## **MY BASIC COACHING PROGRAM**

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Since developing my basic 8-week coaching program, I've seen a significant increase in the results my clients produce and in the ease with which they produce them. This coaching program integrates basic skills for creating outstanding results in almost anything. It also and builds mastery of a dynamic life-planning framework through focussed practice and timely feedback.

The Creating Results That Matter Coaching Package will help you:

- Determine what matters most to you in your life, work and relationships,
- Craft clear, compelling visions of the results you truly want to create,
- Ground your visions in an objective assessment of current reality,
- Hold vision and reality in "creative tension," setting up a powerful container for creativity -- an organizing framework for ensuring that decisions and actions consistently support what most matters to you.
- Take actions that consistently support your visions and values — in spite of the problems, obstacles or adversity you encounter
- Identify patterns and structures that prevent successful action and results and replace them with more powerful, functional patterns and structures;

The coaching package is ideal for those starting new businesses or wanting to integrate their business and/or career needs with their greater life goals and plans.

It's also very useful for mid-career professionals who are stuck or stalled, not living up to what they know is their potential but don't know what do or where to go next.

If you'd like more information about the Basic 8-Week Coaching practice, send me an e-mail at [belkin@saltspring.com](mailto:belkin@saltspring.com) with "Coaching Package" in the subject line.

You can also e-mail me to set up a 30 minute coaching session to help you clarify whether coaching would help you create what most matters to you.

I currently have 3 spaces coming open for new clients in March.

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**THE SMALL PRINT: Copyright and Getting On and Off the List**

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<http://www.bruceelkin.com/newsletter.html>**

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**THE LAST WORD: QUOTABLE QUOTES**

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"He, who moves not forward, goes backward."  
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

"Don't wish it was easier; wish you were better. Don't wish for less problems; wish for more skills. Don't wish for less challenge; wish for more wisdom."  
- Jim Rohn, speaker and author

"Action springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility."  
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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Well, folks, that's it for this issue.

I hope you're inspired to take a mastery approach to your life, work and relationships. For me, this works much better than trying to make big changes at all once. It's easier, more pleasant, and almost always more successful. Why not give it a try.

Thanks for reading and please keep forwarding the newsletter. I appreciate it. All the best.  
Cheers!  
Bruce

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Bruce Elkin: High Performance, Full Potential Coaching  
Author of SIMPLICITY AND SUCCESS: Creating the Life You Long For  
< A book about organizing life, work and relationships  
around what most matters to you.

<http://www.bruceelkin.com/simplicity-book.html>

" Find what you really care about and live a life that shows it."  
— Kate Wolf

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