



By Joe Byerly

*This is the third question, in a five question interview with author [Robert Greene](#).*

**Joe:** You and the author [Ryan Holiday](#) have a well-known mentor/protege relationship. You've both written bestselling books and he's been very vocal about your role in his success. How important is the mentor/protege relationship in our quest for mastery?

Robert: I discuss this aspect of mastery a great deal in my book [Mastery](#). It's a very satisfying relationship. I'm married but we don't have any children, so Ryan is kind of like a surrogate son.

If it's done right, it's a very enriching experience for both the mentor and the protégé. I've had a lot of people come to me who were fans of my books, asking to be a research assistant or work for me. And I found a lot people didn't possess the right character. They weren't persistent and they couldn't take criticism. They didn't want to get inside the spirit of the books I'm writing. They didn't have the right attitude.

Ryan was very unusual because early on he demonstrated that he could take criticism. This is an extremely important quality in people. Earlier, we discussed the importance of character. A key sign of a person's character is their ability to take criticism. Sometimes, criticism is unfair. And you have to know how to distinguish that.

When I was twenty-four, an editor at a magazine told me over lunch, "Robert, you are terrible writer and you're never going to make it in this world and you should give it up and go to law school." It hurt and then I slowly realized that this was unfair criticism, so I quit taking it personally. It strengthened me. It made me realize that this wasn't the right place for me to work.

How do you take criticism? Are you able to step outside yourself and see the value in it? Are you able to see what is true and what's not true? This is an important quality. Ryan had that. And when I recognized that in him, I was very happy and very excited. Our relationship has been very satisfying.

Ryan helped me on the research I did for [33 Strategies of War](#) and [The 50th Law](#), the book I did with 50 Cent. He helped me a lot. He understands what I'm looking for; the kinds of books that I want; the kind of stories that I need. I didn't need to train him as much as I trained other people.

On the other hand, I was able to help him with his career. I helped get him an important job that turned into the material for his first book, [Trust me I'm Lying](#). I've helped him with all of his books. I taught him how to organize his material with [the notecard system](#). I also

showed him the key ingredients to making a successful book.

I had the satisfaction of imparting all I've learned over the years to him. He's had the satisfaction of learning all of this from me.

The relationships between teacher and student or a boss and an employee can be kind of impersonal. Everyone keeps their distance because you don't want to mix work with something personal. But, the mentor/protégé relationship is personal. You become friends in a sense.

There's another level of satisfaction in this relationship. It gives you the opportunity to connect to another generation. I remember when I was younger, I enjoyed talking to my professors and older people because they had a way thinking that was missing from the young people I knew. I was excited to dive into their different look on life. As a millennial, Ryan has a much different background than I do, and it's interesting for me to get inside the spirit of someone of that age and connect to young people.

The mentor/protégé relationship has to be done right. If you find the wrong mentor, it could be psychologically crippling. There are people out there who will humiliate you and use you for only what they need. It can set you back.

In [\*Mastery\*](#), I talk about the importance of finding the right mentor and I give clues on how to do it. I encourage everyone, especially younger people, to try to find a mentor in their life.

***Robert Greene is the author of The New York Times Best Sellers [\*48 Laws of Power\*](#), [\*the Art of Seduction\*](#), [\*The 33 Strategies for War\*](#), and [\*Mastery\*](#). He also coauthored [\*The 50th Law\*](#) with rapper 50 Cent.***

***In his latest book [The Laws of Human Nature](#) he examines people's drives and motivations. Drawing from ideas and examples of Pericles, Queen Elizabeth I, Martin Luther King Jr, and many others, Greene teaches us how to detach ourselves from our own emotions and master self-control.***

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