



By Joe Byerly

There's a great fictional scene from Steven Pressfield's [Virtues of War](#). A young Alexander III of Macedon ("The Great" would be added much later) arrives at the royal riding school and observes another boy riding a horse. He stands in awe as Haphaestion controls his mount with "Spine erect, shoulders square, belly muscles working, he impelled the beast with a forward lean so subtle you could barely see it."

In this moment, he experiences several emotions at once. He envies Hapheastion's abilities. He feels shame with himself and starts cursing his complacency in his own skills. He also expresses anger toward his father, blaming him for not hiring a better trainer. Clearly, if he had better coaching, he would be a better rider!

Alexander then takes a pause and shifts his mindset:

*But immediately my anger turned upon myself. I alone am master of my life! I vowed in that instant not only to dedicate myself to the study of horses and horsemanship, to make myself without peer as cavalryman and cavalry officer, but to educate myself in all things, to become my own tutor selecting the subjects I needed to master and seeking instructions on my own.*

The real Alexander the Great grew up to conquer the ancient world and his battles and leadership have been studied by military leaders of every era. Even though this encounter is fictionalized, we know that at some point early in his life he took ownership for his development and he became one of the greatest captains of all time.

We all have a Hapheastion in our lives. Someone who elicits envy, shame, and anger because they are better than we are. Our Hapheastion is a better athlete, a better leader, a better spouse, or a better parent.

And just like Alexander did at first, we focus on the product rather than the process. We see our Haphestions riding their horses but not the work they put in to get there. We confuse the trappings of success with the path itself. So many of history's greatest artists, military leaders, statesmen, and athletes spent boring and tedious hours perfecting their craft. They didn't adopt the latest life hack or scheme to short-circuit the process of mastery—they embraced it. They are better athletes, leaders, spouses, and parents because that's where they choose to put their time and energy.

So, we have a choice. We can sit in the first series of emotions that Alexander experienced and watch with envy, shame, and anger as other Haphestion's expertly ride their mounts. Or we can do something about it. We can own our development. We can say to ourselves, "I alone am master of my life!"

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