

Senge lists five new “component technologies” or disciplines that “provide vital dimensions in building organizations (or professionals or professions) that can truly ‘learn,’ that can continually enhance their capacity to realize their highest aspirations”:

- **Systems thinking** (*a conceptual framework to make the full patterns clearer, and help see how to change them effectively*)
- **Personal mastery** (*achieving a special level of proficiency—the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively; or to use another writer’s phrase—“the marriage of sense and science”*)
- **Mental models** (*deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action*)
- **Building shared vision** (*the practice of unearthing shared “pictures of the future” that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than mere compliance*)
- **Team learning** (*developing extraordinary capacities for coordinated action, producing extraordinary results and growing individual members more rapidly than could have occurred otherwise*)²

All of these skills, and systems thinking in particular—which combines elements of the other four—are not only critical to a designer’s development and “personal mastery” of the profession, but are also at the heart of designers’ ability to understand, interpret, and develop solutions to clients’ dilemmas. Taking each of these disciplines in turn, designers can begin to see their relevance as individual practitioners, as members of firms, and as members of the profession.

PERSONAL MASTERY

Senge describes personal mastery as “the discipline of personal growth and learning.” He explains, “People with high levels of personal mastery are continually expanding their ability to create the results in life they truly seek.” He adds that “‘Learning’ in this context does not mean acquiring more information, but expanding the ability to produce the results we truly want in life. It is lifelong generative learning—[and] suggests a special level of proficiency in every aspect of life—personal and professional.”²

Bill O’Brien, president of Hanover Insurance, explains why this personally motivated growth and learning is important in the professional context: it is an important precondition for realizing full potential and becoming successful. He says, “Whatever the reasons, we do not pursue emotional development with the same intensity with which we pursue physical and intellectual development. This is all the more unfortunate because full emotional development offers the greatest degree of leverage in attaining our full potential. We believe there is no fundamental tradeoff between the higher virtues in life and economic success. We believe we can have both. In fact, we believe that, over the long term, the more we practice the higher virtues of life, the more economic success we will have.”³

Designers who seek personal mastery seize every opportunity to add to their understanding of their profession, their clients’ circumstances, and the world at large. They nurture passion—their own, their staff’s and their clients’. They encourage their team to look beyond the obvious and the expected and to develop a shared vision of what is possible.

Firms promote personal mastery when they nurture the development of the person as a professional and encourage designers’ contributions to each other and to their communities. Some have even offered sabbaticals to their staff to pursue subjects that not only challenge them personally but also add balance to their lives. At minimum, many firms encourage their staff to attend the programs offered by professional associations, industry partners, or outside educational providers; some even offer their own internally developed coursework. Others support personal mastery by encouraging their staff to do what they do best. The most supportive employers try to spot the