

MASTERWORK

Arnaud Maitland

Dharma  Publishing

SKILLFUL MEANS SERIES

Skillful Means

Mastering Successful Work

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To Rinpoche

Foreword

Early in the 1970s, having recently arrived in this country after ten years as a refugee in India, I founded Dharma Press, a company dedicated to printing and publishing the works of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. I had already taught myself the basics of printing in India, but to succeed in the business environment of the United States required learning a whole new set of business skills, such as how to produce works of high quality, use time effectively, monitor finances, coordinate different phases of production, and communicate well with one another and with our suppliers.

I soon realized that Buddhist teachings offered numerous insights and guidance relevant to these concerns, and began to explore this connection in a systematic way. Students sometimes wrote down my informal talks on these topics, and these notes became the foundation for a shared body of knowledge we could all draw on. We were learning efficient and effective ways to do our work, while also developing our intelligence, energy, and decision-making skills.

MasterWork

As we learned the techniques necessary to do increasingly refined printing and operate more successfully as a business, we began to incorporate this knowledge into our lives. The foundation was appreciation for the importance of discipline and hard work to get the job done. Beyond that we had to develop such skills as using energy, time, and materials well and coping with shortages of space, conflicts in scheduling, and limited resources.

We found that we were most effective when we combined three fundamental practices: contemplation that always kept sight of the whole, awareness that kept track of all details and each step in the process, and fresh energy that we renewed every day. In 1978, I presented some of these basic lessons in a small book called *Skillful Means*. This work, which has since been adopted for classroom use in over a hundred colleges and universities, from junior colleges to graduate schools of business, has been translated into Dutch, German, French, Hungarian, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. Fifteen years later, a second volume about Skillful Means, known as *Mastering Successful Work*, followed.

The practice of Skillful Means proved helpful in all the organizations established under my guidance: the Nyingma Institute, which offered classes and residential programs based on teachings and practices of Buddhism; Odiyan, a new home for Buddhism in the West; and Dharma Publishing, where sales people as well as production staff made use of the same principles. We had also begun to do some commercial printing to generate revenue, and this meant applying

Skillful Means in a whole new range of activities, including estimating, marketing, and customer service. We had established centers in Europe and South America, and there too Skillful Means seemed to meet with a good response—not only in our centers, but also in the business community.

All of us at Dharma Press shared the fundamental goal of preserving the twelve-hundred-year-old tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, threatened with extinction through the subjugation of Tibet by a foreign power. Simply wishing that things were different was not enough; if we wanted to keep the teachings intact, we had to take decisive action. The practice of Skillful Means grew naturally out of that intention, for its methods gave us the key to accomplishing a great deal with very limited resources.

In 1981 we completed our first large-scale publishing venture: a complete reprint edition of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, containing the teachings of the Buddha and the commentaries of the great Indian masters. In Tibet the two parts of the canon consisted of about four hundred volumes, which we reprinted in 120 atlas-sized volumes, designed to last for centuries.

In 1997, after years of painstaking effort, we completed a far more ambitious project, known as Great Treasures of Ancient Teachings, which collected fundamental works of the Tibetan tradition in more than 620 volumes. During these years, we also published over a hundred titles in English, produced and distributed more than 180,000 volumes of texts to Tibetans

in exile and in Tibet, and preserved over 700 authentic reproductions of sacred art, donating hundreds of thousands of copies to Buddhist practitioners in India, Nepal, and elsewhere.

Acting together, the Nyingma organizations have created a home in the West for the three aspects of enlightened being (kaya, vaca, and chitta): The mandala of Odiyan and over a hundred thousand statues of Padmasambhava, the founder of Buddhism in Tibet, represent kaya, the physical embodiment of the Buddha; the monumental publishing projects we have been privileged to complete represent vaca, the voice of the Buddha; and the Enlightenment Stupa of Odiyan, one of the most beautiful in the West, represents chitta, the enlightenment of the Buddha.

Each of these accomplishments required genuine effort from our small organizations. Often we managed to succeed at projects that experts had told us were impossible, and we noticed that people repeatedly seemed surprised at how much we had been able to do. These signs of success showed us that the Skillful Means approach really works. We got similar feedback from individuals who left our organizations and used what they had learned with us to build a successful professional career. Based on this feedback, and on the interest in the published materials, we began to offer Skillful Means classes and programs.

Over the years, I have personally been quite surprised at the impact of the Skillful Means teachings. After all, I came from a country where Western culture

and Western ways of working were completely unknown. When I arrived in America, my early students thought that spirituality had to do with meditation, or perhaps with chanting and prayer, but they certainly did not imagine it had anything to do with finding satisfaction in hard work. We have had to make those connections for ourselves, through our own experience.

Today, however, there is no longer any room for doubt. Work is a way for human beings to cultivate the qualities of persistence, flexibility, and the courage to deal with challenges. Because it leads to tangible results, work provides useful feedback on one's own state of mind and understanding, and because it promotes success, it builds confidence in one's own abilities. All these factors count for just as much in the spiritual realm as they do in the everyday world of work.

The Skillful Means Attitude

In Buddhist texts, the word for 'means' or 'method' is 'upaya', and the word for 'skill', in the sense of knowledge or wisdom, is 'prajna'. These two terms are interactive; they suggest that possessing 'skillful means' means knowing how to use knowledge itself to achieve your goals. The tradition discusses both these terms on many levels, and it is almost impossible to capture their full meaning in English. Instead, I have focused on how 'means' and 'knowledge' manifest in the activity of working. In our Nyingma organizations, work has become an important way of practicing the teachings of Buddhism.

In Skillful Means, work is seen as a journey into unknown realms. The further you go, the more challenges you encounter. Dealing with these challenges allows you to accumulate important knowledge and develop fundamental skills. You can learn how events in the past gave rise to the present, how to analyze what is happening right now, and how to predict the quality of the future you are creating through your present action. At the same time you learn what to do to reach your goal. The whole process can be enjoyable and deeply rewarding.

Whether this is your outlook on work depends on whether you approach it with the right attitude. If you see work as an unavoidable duty, something unpleasant to be avoided whenever possible, work will end up controlling your life. If you work in order to obtain possessions with the money you earn, or for reasons of ego and status, you still will find little fulfillment in work itself. Even if you work out of a sense of obligation to do well—what is commonly viewed as the ‘work ethic’—you will not be taking full advantage of the opportunities work offers.

If you see work as a journey toward fulfillment, however, then each challenge you master transforms who you are, automatically bringing abundance and a sense of well-being. Work becomes more like art: You work for the joy of working. You may not be able to say for certain whether you will succeed at whatever you do, but by giving your full effort, you create the possibility of producing something richly creative—unimaginable and unique.

This approach to work is the attitude that Skillful Means fosters. A Skillful Means attitude means starting each day, each project, each activity with a positive outlook, preparing for what needs to be done to bring about success. It means preparing for work the way an athlete prepares for an event or game, focusing on essentials and on letting energy flow freely. With that kind of attitude, you can easily apply your skills and talents to the task at hand, learn something new, and generate creative solutions to problems as they arise.

Anyone who develops a Skillful Means attitude will naturally become a leader, playing a key role in any enterprise. Whatever projects you take on will be charged with beauty, depth, purpose, and dynamic creativity. With a Skillful Means attitude, it is easy to inspire other people to do more, because you are getting results that look almost magical.

Of course, you know that the secret is in your control, and that anyone else could share the same secret, but that is not the way it looks to others. They want to know what you are doing that is special; how you are able to do what you do. They wish they could do the same: not just to get ahead or make a favorable impression, but because they can see that getting good results is a part of what makes work enjoyable and makes every day into an adventure. When several people in a business share this same attitude, the consequences are even more dramatic. Success follows on success, building the confidence to take on new challenges and accept greater risks for the sake of the guiding vision.

Success through Work

Buddhist teachings emphasize the quality of virya, which means vigor or discipline. In the practice of virya, mind and body interact in a way that promotes the virtue and discipline of each. Virtue has its own discipline, and discipline has its virtue. When you bring them together, you replace being fooled with finding fulfillment. Challenging your awareness and energy, perfecting your inner resources, you can be successful in any activity. When you have learned how to make the most of your time, your energy, and your potential, it is like inheriting a great fortune: a source of abundance that transforms your life. You wake up to a new way of creativity and beauty, and you can pass your appreciation on to others.

In everyday terms, acting skillfully means doing things in a professional way by relying on your own resources. For instance, seeing skillfully means being able to judge accurately what is going on and make good decisions. Seeing with panoramic awareness means making fewer mistakes, so that the time and energy you invest in your efforts pay substantial dividends. This process of perfecting your capacities is transformative at a deep level. By contemplating your situation thoughtfully, learning to be aware of each detail, and cultivating a sense of the progression of time across days or weeks or years, you can learn to act accurately and efficiently. You can produce work of high quality, inspire those around you, and discover that challenges are what make life worthwhile. Business is a wonderful

arena for working in this way because it constantly asks you to produce, and this ongoing challenge brings you alive. There are enormous benefits—both spiritual and practical. Compared to others, or compared to your own past performance, you steadily improve over time. You are gaining the knowledge you need to conduct your life in the best way.

Working ‘In’

When you work with Skillful Means, you do not just work for or to; you work in—in the mind, in time, in energy, in space. You do not just learn skills, but learn who you are and how to develop your inner capacities: your knowledge, your communications, your decision-making. You discover how to use the raw materials for success and spiritual fulfillment alike: contemplation, awareness, energy, and time. Fully engaged, doing your best, you contribute to the success of the business and guarantee your own deep satisfaction. You can be loyal to your work because of what it gives you; in fact, there is no separation between you and your work. Because it does not descend upon you like an outside force, work does not produce pressure and stress; instead, it provides opportunities to taste the joy of meeting new challenges.

Working in this way, you discover that you can embody experience as you go along, drawing on each new event to develop more skill and greater knowledge. Learning through each activity, you realize that learning itself is knowledge, and prepare yourself to

become a master of learning. The more you learn, the more full and meaningful life becomes. Because you are using the abundance of knowledge available to you, your actions automatically generate inspiring results. You yourself become the source of success.

I have sometimes thought that if there were just one person in the world who worked solely for the joy and challenge of working, that person could work magic. That individual would be the one true economist, the one real expert, the unparalleled investor, knowing how to hit every target. He or she would be the irrepressible magician of work, knowing how to invest in knowledge so that knowledge itself becomes the means to success. For such a person, work would have fulfilled its potential as a spiritual practice. It would hold out the promise that each of us could do anything—create anything!

Sharing the Experiment

In 1987, my student Arnaud Maitland had come to the end of his four-year term as Dean of the Nyingma Institute. Even though he had no experience with printing, he was devoted to the teachings, and especially to the practice of Skillful Means, and I asked him if he would like to work at our commercial printing operation, helping it maximize its financial contribution to our Dharma work. As a result of these discussions, Arnaud and some other students founded a company known as Dharma Enterprises. Originally he and I had thought the new business would continue in existence for only five years, but since its financial contribution

to our Dharma projects proved very important, it ultimately continued to operate for ten years before being sold. Throughout this time, Arnaud worked very intensively, and he got good results. He also deepened his understanding of Skillful Means and was able to share this knowledge with others, both in formal classes and programs and more informally with his fellow workers and the members of our community.

This book grows out of the discoveries that Arnaud made while he was working at Dharma Enterprises and at the Nyingma Institute. It presents an example of how it is possible to work with Skillful Means, producing tangible benefits while simultaneously practicing a spiritual path. It is a kind of success story, just as many of our other projects have been success stories. I am proud of the work our community has done and the results they have obtained, which send ripples of positive energy through space and time.

The story Arnaud tells here could be understood as a report on an experiment. It shows that we can work without pressure or pushing ourselves, that we do not have to rely on fear, greed, and similar emotions to get good results. It shows that work is not just a means to an end, but can be intrinsically meaningful; it demonstrates that accepting challenges as they come gives richness and depth to life. Working in this way brings upaya and prajna to the West in a new form.

As readers of this book, each of you should feel free to conduct your own experiment with new ways of working. Parts of Skillful Means practice are subtle, but

there are also aspects that anyone can put into effect right away. It is useful to see how someone else has been able to get results and to read about new approaches that you can implement to make success more likely. But it is more important to develop your own skillful means, based on your specific background and temperament, your own personal approach.

Skillful Means is not just a specific set of techniques. It is a way of putting knowledge to work, producing results that everyone is free to celebrate. For those of you with spiritual concerns, Skillful Means teaches that you can make your life far richer and more fulfilling. You do not have to go off to a monastery; you can practice in the present, with the job you have right now. You are free to become an entrepreneur in the marketplace of achievement and inner fulfillment, taking matters into your own hands. The knowledge you need is already available. As you march toward success, you can find enjoyment and fulfillment in whatever you do, and you can make a difference.

The work you do can be your psychology, your philosophy, and your plan for fulfillment. Work well, and you will have no regrets about what you have done with your life. I hope you learn for yourself that this is so, exercising your own capacities to the fullest. Then you can report back to the rest of us on your own journey of discovery.

Tarthang Tulku
Odiyan, USA
November 1999

Introduction: Path to Success

Knowledge, freedom, and responsibility are our most valuable assets, the essential ingredients for our growth and prosperity. With them our potential for growth is unlimited.

In 1959, when the Chinese government took control of Tibet, thousands of Tibetans went into exile. One of them was Tarthang Tulku, a highly educated Tibetan lama. In 1969 he established himself in the United States. Settling in Berkeley, California, he founded the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center to sustain the wisdom of the threatened Tibetan culture. Thus a prophecy by Padmasambhava, who brought Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century, came true:

*When the iron bird flies and horses run on wheels,
the Tibetan people will be scattered like ants
across the face of the world,
and the Dharma will come to the Land of the Red-faced Men.*

The dramatic and cruel turn of events in Tibet brought good fortune to many of us in the West. For the first time Westerners gained access to the ancient teachings of wisdom and compassion refined for over a thousand years in Tibet, which had benefited so many people over the centuries. Tarthang Tulku arrived in the United States with the aim of preserving from extinction the vast literature and art of Tibetan Buddhism, and especially that of the Nyingma lineage to which he belongs. Moreover, he was determined to offer this culture insights and methods that would complement the Western understanding of the mind. The numerous books he has written and published, the translations he has sponsored or undertaken, and the companies he has founded—Dharma Publishing and Press, Odiyan Retreat Center, the Nyingma Institute and others—all speak of Rinpoche's care and determination, and of the depth and breadth of the teachings he represents.

Over the past thirty years, countless Western students like me have been inspired and guided by Tarthang Tulku, known to his students as Rinpoche. In 1971 I completed my studies for a degree in law in the Netherlands. For five years I worked for a large international shipping company in New York and Hong Kong. But then I made a major shift, deciding to dedicate my time and energy to working and studying under Rinpoche's guidance.

Why did I make this change? Basically because Rinpoche's teachings make perfect sense, and are so utterly positive. The philosophy and psychology of

Tibetan Buddhism is all about the awakening of human potential, drawing out what is best over time. The heart of the teachings is the recognition of our intrinsic freedom, from which we fall away over and over again, mostly out of habit and ignorance. As Rinpoche once put it, the Buddha's teachings are all about 'making things lighter'.

Warmed by recognizing the value of these truths, I began to study at the Nyingma Institute in Berkeley, California. A few years later, I received an MA in Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy and Psychology. Through studying these teachings I made a most important discovery: We already have all the knowledge we need to be successful. To awaken this knowledge and return to the authenticity of being, and to help others who wish to do the same, has become my mission in life. One sentence from the teachings in particular reflects my motivation: . . . *to lead a life that in retrospect seems worthwhile.*

Yet that was not my only motivation. In his teaching for the West, Rinpoche emphasized work as a method for spiritual growth that at the same time lets us be useful, and this spoke to me. A sentence from his book *Skillful Means* has inspired me for over twenty years: *Life exacts a price for less than full participation.*

I was particularly stimulated by participating in two large projects that achieved success against great odds. Working on these projects, we became familiar with gut energy and creativity, and managed to accomplish more than we had ever imagined possible, under exceptionally tight deadlines. I realized from this experience that

a small group of enthusiastic and dedicated people could accomplish things that professionals in the field considered impossible.

This way of working, which Rinpoche called Skillful Means, was one that I wanted to make my own, and that is what I set out to do. Although it has not always been easy, there has never been a doubt in my mind that I am using my time well. I have learned a great deal about work as a training ground, as a way to develop the mind and open the heart, and a means to contribute to the betterment of this world. That is the topic of this book.

The Art of Working

Most of life is spent working, one way or another. Many people feel unhappy about this. Working for someone else or making a living without being appreciated for it may seem like a waste of time. Work may appear to be an energy drain, preventing us from doing what we really long to do, being who we really want to be. But once we realize that working is our life, we will find that in our work, more than in any other area, it is possible to be creatively and dynamically engaged. On any level, in any job, we can explore and pursue how we would like to be. At the very least, we can choose to make the activity of working into a positive effort, directed towards goals that we value and cherish.

How we work is who we are. In pursuing the art of working, we can find a way to appreciate ourselves, to foster the satisfaction of working well, and attain the

enjoyment of accomplishments. We can tap into the resources that fuel personal joy and professional success in equal measure. Through the exploration of these inner resources, we can grow in personal and spiritual terms, while at the same time benefitting the organization we work for.

Learning to work well is an art that can be mastered. Once we establish a relationship with what we do and the way we work, we can learn to elevate the level at which we apply ourselves. To develop *what* we do with our time, *when* we act, and *how* we work—that is the art of working. In the process of training in this art, we become familiar with our own energy and may also learn to master the mind. We end up experts at working well, and find the source for satisfaction, enjoyment, and success.

Working with everyday obstacles, learning to deal with frustrations, and pursuing the new possibilities work offers day after day—these are both the essential ingredients of a gratifying personal life and the foundation for the growth of an organization or company. While we work, the results we get will give us immediate feedback; they mirror our attitude on the job. If we are absent-minded or dreamy, or caught up in internal dialogues, the results will tell. Mistakes will probably occur; deadlines may be missed, conflicts and misunderstandings will arise. Yet deep down we know it is possible to take full responsibility. In taking responsibility we take hold of our lives and get a grip on the success of any endeavor. The secret of this success is to work hard and to have faith in getting results.

A Classic Business Story with a Twist

For ten challenging and inspiring years, a small core group applied Skillful Means at Dharma Enterprises, a commercial press that grew out of the operations of Dharma Press, one of the non-profit companies that Rinpoche founded to accomplish his aims. Founded in 1987, and intended from the outset as a business venture with a limited life span, Dharma Enterprises offered my co-workers and me the opportunity to study the principles of Skillful Means from many different angles.

It was a journey of adventure, at once a business opportunity and a chance to practice Tibetan Buddhism in daily life. We could earn a livelihood for ourselves and generate income that would provide a livelihood for many others, while also making substantial contributions to the preservation of ancient texts and art. Again and again experts told us we were being too ambitious; that we were setting impossible goals. Yet we had a vision. We had the motivation. We had faith based on experience. We set out to give form to what we knew to be true—that time, money, and spiritual development work together well.

The team that started Dharma Enterprises consisted largely of novices, with little general business experience and still less specific knowledge of the printing industry. As we went along we acquired many new skills. We learned how to run a business, and more specifically we got acquainted with the craft of printing. We learned how to motivate ourselves, to cooperate, to recharge our vitality while working, and most of

all to get results. We noticed and appreciated that the results we get inform us of how we work and who we are, at the same time presenting us with the tools for change. Gradually our vision took on a much more specific shape. In our own way we began to embody basic teachings on taking responsibility and applying gut energy to achieve our goals. The fruits were immediately apparent. In the first three years of operations, the company quadrupled its sales to six million dollars a year. And throughout its existence it continued to enjoy healthy profits. Ours is a classic success story, but with a twist.

Mastering Work

This book began as a modest project to document the history of a company, Dharma Enterprises: a chronicle of what we had done with ten years of our lives. When I mentioned the idea to Rinpoche, he not only approved of it, but added: “Why don’t you write a book on how to run a successful company?” This came as a surprise, although in the introduction to his book *Mastering Successful Work*, Rinpoche encourages everyone to write his or her own book on how to use time well. And so I set to work.

Certainly *MasterWork* has been written in the spirit of sharing what all of us at Dharma Enterprises learned during our ten-year quest. Rinpoche’s visionary force is behind every page, and his teaching, as expressed in three books—*Skillful Means*, *Mastering Successful Work*, and *Knowledge of Freedom*—informs its content. Rinpoche

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himself has developed Skillful Means into an inspiring and powerful management training system. We had the opportunity to put this system into practice. My hope is that this record of our discoveries will encourage others to investigate these methods and verify their value for themselves, both on an individual level and the success for the company.

MasterWork is divided into two parts. Part One (Chapters 1–3) introduces Dharma Enterprises, in many ways a regular commercial printing company battling with everyday problems: how to get clients and how to keep them; how to establish quality and how to maintain it; how to stay ahead of the competition; how to deliver the product on time; and last but not least, how to pay the bills in spite of continuing cash flow problems. What distinguished us from other printing companies was our commitment to the Skillful Means Management Training. Dharma Enterprises is a manifestation of what we did with Rinpoche’s vision of how to run a profitable business, of how we turned theory into practice. Rinpoche attributed the success of Dharma Enterprises to our practice of Skillful Means at work.

Part Two presents some of the Skillful Means topics that helped us develop a creative and positive attitude towards time, meet high standards of quality, increase productivity, benefit the bottom line, inspire the employees, and foster a solid team spirit. Like the chapters in Part One these seven chapters contain a host of examples, as well as practices drawn initially from Tarthang Tulku’s teachings that we put into

effect in daily application, *while* working. The themes of the chapters in Part Two are as follows:

4 **Wisdom in Action:** Daily activities to attain and express the highest wisdom

5 **Mastering Time:** Making time central in our lives, and drawing on its dynamic vitality and knowledge to realize our goals

6 **Instant Success:** Promoting leadership through wholehearted participation to improve communication, cooperation, and responsibility

7 **Positive Knowledge:** Learning to guard against negativity and strengthen what is positive for growth

8 **Inner Resources:** The resources to be successful—awareness, concentration, and energy

9 **Questioning Mind:** Discovering that we already have the knowledge we need to be successful

10 **Meditation, Just Being:** Learning to meditate while we work, to become calm and clear and expand our mind in time and space

11 **Quality on Time:** The importance of productivity, efficiency, and profit to both the individual and the company

If you take the themes and exercises in these chapters to heart and practice them, you will find that the situation at work and the results you get soon improve.

Working with Skillful Means every day for ten years, we learned to consider work as a path of knowledge, a spiritual journey. Anyone can create within himself the opportunity for a similar undertaking or enterprise.

Skillful Means provides maps to the unknown territories we enter on this journey. They may guide us at many different levels, depending on our predisposition and personal situation. But one thing is certain. No matter where we start or how we proceed, we will soon begin to appreciate and take advantage of the opportunities that work provides.

Work will teach us how to develop the mind, create a positive atmosphere, improve our level of energy, and overcome obstacles. The methods of Skillful Means encourage us to care about what we do with our lives and what we accomplish, while dedicating the results to a greater cause. Our own well-being and that of others, the success of the organization we work for, and even the health of the society at large will gradually improve. Working in this way, we participate in a timeless, never-ending story, as time perpetually offers fresh possibilities for growth and ample opportunities for a satisfying life.