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# Breaking The Bonds Of Mediocrity

by CHIP EICHELBERGER

It is easy to become satisfied with good or even very good performance. We feel content with living a good life, having a good marriage, or achieving good results in business or sales. But very good is the enemy of great. You think great is right next door. It's not. It's in another country. When your work gets very good, it is just the beginning.

**M**aybe you're thinking, "But I'm just an ordinary person." Consider this true story: Steve was an average performer. He worked for an investment wholesaler catering to the needs of outside financial service professionals. His manager challenged him to consider changing his time-management system to more effectively spend the majority of his time with his top advisors.

His manager described the system that he had once used with great success. Steve made a variety of excuses why it would not work for him. Seeing wasted potential in a viable employee, his manager asked this crucial question; "Steve, why are you fighting to be average?"

This question amounted to a career-changing epiphany for Steve. He recognized his excuses

for just what they were: *excuses*. Now challenged to reach his full potential, he adopted the new system and is an over-the-top performer in his field!

Are you fighting to be average? Are you where you thought you would be by this time in your life? Are you at your full earning potential, achieving ongoing distinctions, enjoying the home and lifestyle you desire? If you discover a gap between current performance and your attainable potential, follow these steps to keep from ever being labeled "average" again.

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## Purpose Precedes Plan

You need to be very clear on the compelling reasons for you to move toward greatness. Why will you go for it? What are your dreams? Only you can make a de-

cision to change your direction now. Do not focus just on what it will cost you if you do not change. Spend more time asking, "what if" you do change. What are all the positive ramifications? Once you know your "why" then you can create your game plan to get there.

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## Don't Just Talk About It; Make a Commitment to Do It!

In golf, currently, Phil Mickelson is a top money earner (\$3,237,992) and has a stroke average of 69.40. Steve Flesch is #100 at 71.40 and has earnings

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of \$326,230. The differentiation between good and great in professional golf is only two shots a round, yet the difference in earnings is tenfold. Talent plays a role, but the real difference is commitment. Many people want to take their performance to the next level. Unfortunately, their “want-to” and their “will-do” rarely coincide.

Commitment is hard. Commitment to greatness is even harder. Adversity and set-backs are a given. Don't let past satisfaction with “good” weaken your commitment to be “great.”

**Evaluate Small Changes  
that Could Notably Enhance  
Your Performance**

Years of experience don't automatically ensure excellence. It

is proven that making even subtle changes to enhance that interaction has resulted in better treatment outcomes and cost of care. Record yourself during interactions with colleagues or clients. Simply state you are trying to improve your communication skills and set the recorder aside. Evaluate yourself from every aspect. Listen to your voice tone and quality. Were you the dispenser of enthusiasm or more like Eeyore? Were you really listening? Were you precise, clear and to the point? Self evaluation is often a brutal eye-opener. You may not be as “good” or “great” as you once envisioned yourself.

**Be Willing to Do the Hard  
Work Up Front**

Consistency comes from disci-

pline, and both are essential as you prepare for greatness. Imagine new ways you can prepare: Instead of just winging it on a sales call, for example, jump on the company web site and research, find out who among your colleagues knows the customer, and determine which testimonials will be most effective. Create a checklist of everything you need to get and what specifically you want to accomplish. The bottom line is, you're not always going to win, but don't fool yourself about why you didn't succeed. There is no excuse for lack of preparation.

**Make the Positive Choice**

If you're married, does your spouse have any faults? Are there some things you do not like about your job? When we're around anything (or anyone) long enough, we tend to take it for granted and see only the negatives. Choose to focus on the positive. Be your own best coach, not your own worst enemy. Praise yourself and others for their positive actions, and learn to accept setbacks and put them behind you quickly. See what you can learn from a negative situation and then move on — next!

**Devote 4 Percent of Your  
Day to Achieving Excellence**

Work on a single point of excellence for just one hour of your day, every day, or seven of 168 hours per week. Pick an area first that you have the most passion for. What would get you excited? What will have the most ripple effect on your life? Taking this small amount of time — 4 percent of your daily life — to improve yourself may be difficult at first,

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but it's a gift to others, too. If you're not excited about what you're doing and getting good results, or if you feel like you're letting yourself, your organization and colleagues, your partner and kids down, then you have to carve out an hour to improve your most valuable resource: yourself.

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### Find and Focus

When you play darts, if you want to hit triple 20, you look at that small inner ring, not the whole dartboard. The prescription for overcoming mediocrity consists of first finding one area to get right, one area to strive for excellence in, and to work diligently at that.

Everyone has gifts and possibilities, and you deserve to realize the full potential of those gifts. One new area of excellence can shift your identity and the image you have of yourself. By doing just one thing very well, you begin to crack the monolith of mediocrity. And then you choose your next step, and the crack grows even wider on your path from very good to great.

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### Reach Your Potential for Greatness

If you're not reaching for greatness, ask yourself if you're fighting to be average. If you're honest with yourself, you'll probably see that you could be doing so much more. Very often, you may work **in** it so hard that you don't step back to work **on** it. So is it time for you to go back into the studio? Search for and try new options and strategies; shake things up a little bit and see how you can get much better results in all areas of your life. □

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