



Are You Fighting To Be Average? Seven Steps to Break the Bonds of Mediocrity

By Chip Eichelberger

After twenty-six years of making monster hits together, U2 front man Bono and his band know a thing or two about making “good” work “great.” In an interview with *USA Today*, he recalled that an early version of their hit single “Vertigo” had been “massaged, hammered, tweaked, lubed, sailed through two mixes, and got U2’s unanimous stamp of ‘very good.’ But *very good is the enemy of great*. You think great is right next door. It’s not. It’s in another country.”

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. The members of U2 have held each other to a higher standard since their inception. They know that when the work gets very good, it is just the beginning.

Maybe you’re thinking, “Well, that’s fine for rock stars, but I’m just an ordinary person. Pause a moment to 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, which Steve’s system didn’t allow him to do. 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 reaching his full potential, he adopted the new system and is an over-the-top performer in his field!

Evaluate yourself and be honest. 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 performances and your attainable potential, follow these seven steps to keep from ever being labeled “average” again.

1. 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? An Old Chinese proverb says, “If you don’t change the direction you’re going, you’re going to wind up where you’re headed.” Only you can make a decision to change your direction now. Recent medical research in dealing with patients who must make a change to save their lives is showing that focusing on the “joy of living” is a more powerful force than the “fear of dying.” 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? Pain is a motivator and pleasure can be even more powerful. Once you know your “why” then you can create your game plan to get there.

2. Don't just talk about it; make a commitment to do it! In golf, at the time of this article in 2006, Phil Mickelson is the top money earner (\$3,237,992) and has a stroke average of 69.40. Steve Flesch is #100 at 71.40 and has earnings of \$326,230. The differentiation between good and great in professional golf is **only 2 shots a round**, yet the difference in earnings is **ten fold**. Talent plays a role and 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.”

3. Evaluate small changes that could notably enhance your performance. Years of experience don't automatically ensure excellence. Doctors may interview patients in excess of 120,000 times in the course of their practice. 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 communications 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? Are 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. Very few doctors have every recorded their interviews or bed side manner and gone back to review them to see how they could improve. The professionals that do give themselves check-ups move to great performance.

4. Be willing to do the hard work up front. Consistency comes from discipline, 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 check list of everything you need to get and specifically you want to accomplish. Even more important than winning to Jack Nicklaus was putting himself in the *position* where he could win. He prepared to win by doing what he needed to up front so that he would be poised for greatness at the end. The bottom line is, you're not always going to win, but don't fool yourself about why you didn't succeed. Jack always said, “There is no excuse for lack of preparation.”

5. 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!

6. Devote 4% of your day to achieving excellence. Work on a single point of excellence for just one hour of your day, every day, or 7 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% of your daily life—to improve yourself may be difficult at first, 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.

7. Find and focus. When you play darts, if you want to hit triple 20, you look at that small inner ring, not the whole dart board. 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*.

Reach Your Potential for Greatness

While most bands would have been content with a job well done and put the “very good” version of “Vertigo” on their album, U2 went back into the studio and outfitted the song with a new arrangement, melody, and rhythms. In that process, the band discovered untapped reserves of ideas and fortitude that took it to the next level. The effort paid off when “Vertigo” won another Grammy Award in 2005 for Best Rock Song.

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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A peak performance strategist and motivational dynamo, Chip is positively great at making your next convention unforgettable. Former Tony Robbins international point-man, Chip has a magical ability to generate **enthusiasm, contagious energy** and **results** that will last well beyond the presentation. His clients include Marriott, Tommy Hilfiger, ADP, Century 21 and Bank of America.