

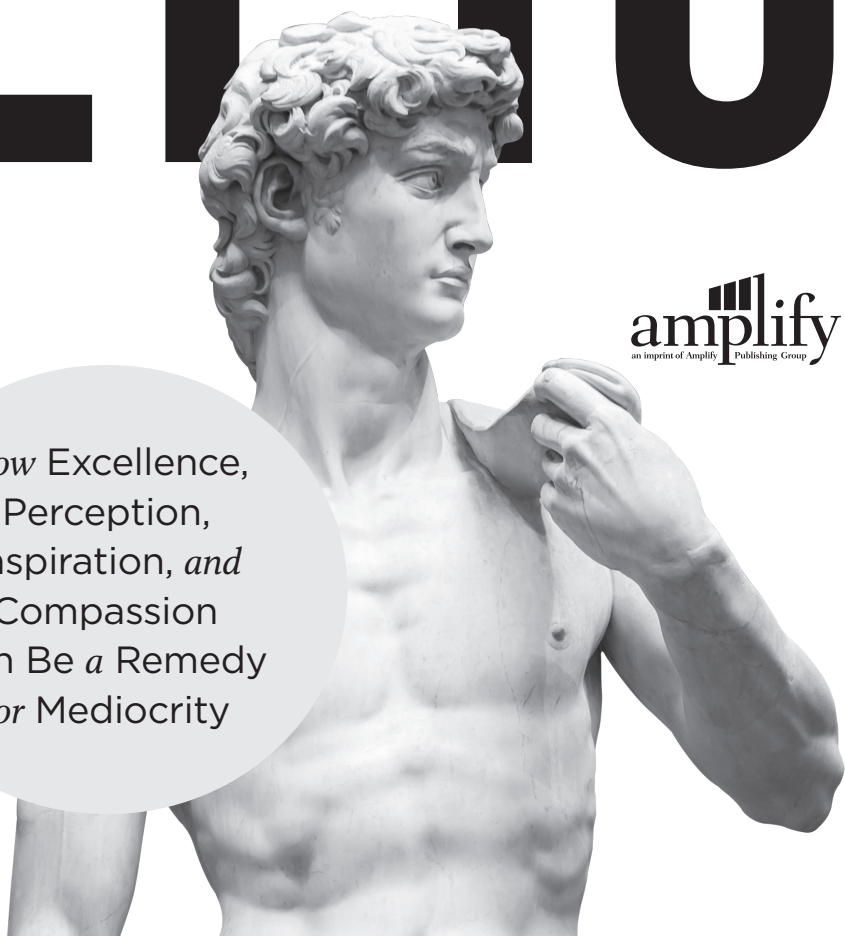
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Foreword by Marshall Goldsmith

# BECOMING EPIC

*How Excellence,  
Perception,  
Inspiration, and  
Compassion  
Can Be a Remedy  
for Mediocrity*

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*Becoming EPIC: How Excellence, Perception, Inspiration, and Compassion  
Can Be a Remedy for Mediocrity*

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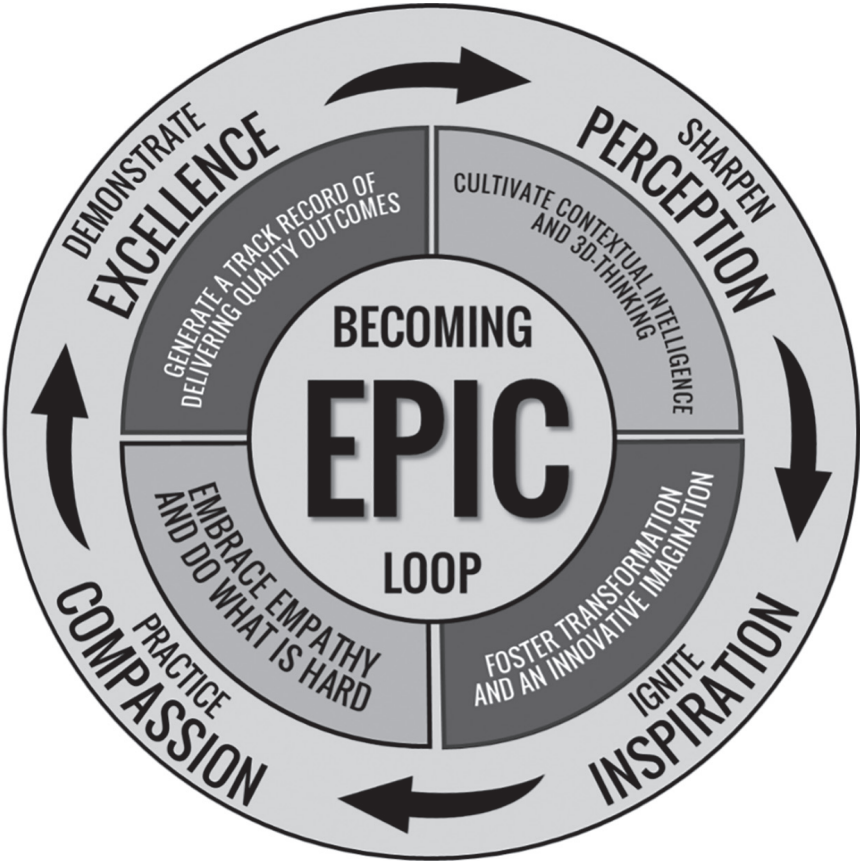
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FIGURE 1: EPIC LOOP



# 1

## THE PATH TO MASTERING YOURSELF

In today's world, success is often defined by external achievements: wealth, status, accolades, or the number of social media followers we have. But true success isn't about what we accomplish outwardly—it's about who we become along the way and how we become that person. Lifelong personal development forms the foundation for any lasting success, transcending professional titles, accomplishments, or material gain. It's about conquering yourself, changing your mind, controlling your actions, and developing your relationships all with the intention to live a life of meaning and fulfillment.

Whether you're looking to excel in your career, improve your relationships, or simply lead a more purposeful life, the journey starts from within. When you take the time to invest in personal growth, you're not just improving yourself—you're creating a ripple effect that impacts everyone around you. When you become better, the people around you become better.

The sports world is full of historical icons and athletes who validate this reality. It is well-observed among fans, players, and coaches that high-caliber athletes elevate the level of play of the others on their team. The same is true in the corporate world and the world of relationships. When you work hard to improve your performance and conquer your defeating mindsets, the people around you will also elevate their performance. Leadership guru John Maxwell refers to this as the law of the lid. In his book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, Maxwell states that a person's leadership ability is the "lid" that determines their level of effectiveness. In other words, an organization or individual's success is limited by the capacity of those around them. Please, don't let your limited capacity be the reason someone else does not succeed. If your ability is low, it acts as a lid that keeps the potential for others' success capped, no matter how talented or motivated the people around you are. To raise the overall potential of an organization, team, or individual, you must continuously improve.

The journey toward personal growth has been more than just a series of professional ambitions or academic achievements for me. It has been profoundly shaped by one of the most significant and unexpected challenges of my life: my battle with advanced metastatic prostate cancer.

In November 2023, I was diagnosed with an aggressive form of prostate cancer that had already metastasized to my bones and lymph nodes. While initially paralyzing, it ultimately became the moment that brought my life, my work, and my sense of purpose into sharp focus. As a college professor, leadership consultant, and thought leader in contextual intelligence, I had always pursued excellence. But cancer forced me to look deeper, to reassess what

excellence really meant, and to explore new perspectives on life, success, and fulfillment.

Through the darkest days of treatments—surgery, radiation, and ongoing hormone therapy—I began to develop a framework that I now call the **EPIC Mindset**: a way of approaching life through the lenses of **Excellence, Perception, Inspiration, and Compassion**. These four principles didn't just help me battle cancer—they helped me thrive. I am convinced they can help you too. They became the foundation of how I approach every challenge, whether personal or professional. And in this book, I want to share these principles with you.

### **WHY PERSONAL GROWTH IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS**

Personal growth isn't just a buzzword or a trendy concept. It's a lifelong commitment to becoming the best version of yourself. The process of personal growth involves self-awareness, continuous learning, deep spirituality, and intentional action. It means reflecting on where you are, understanding where you want to be, and making deliberate choices to bridge that gap. Becoming your future self is possible, but you must be EPIC to do it!

One of my favorite authors, Dr. Benjamin Hardy, outlines in his book *Be Your Future Self Now: The Science of Intentional Transformation* the idea that who you are today is not fixed, and that your future self can be intentionally shaped by the actions and decisions you make now. I believe that you can become your future self by bringing your best identity out of the future into the present. Hardy argues that to achieve meaningful growth and success, you must clearly envision your ideal future and then align your present behavior with that vision, making deliberate changes to become your future

self. By setting goals, clarifying outcomes, adopting new habits, and making choices that reflect who you want to become, you can transform your current self into a person capable of living the life you aspire to. Do not underestimate the power of intentionality and forward-thinking when becoming your future self.

Success, in its truest sense, is a byproduct of dying to self. Personal growth may seem paradoxical. True growth comes only when your current self-identity dies and old habits are left behind. When you focus on growing as a person, it will cause you to realize the best place that growth occurs is in the ground—planted like a seed. I don't mean a literal death, but a spiritual one. Success (i.e., growth) naturally follows when you die to your ambition and give up self-promotion. You become better equipped to handle challenges, more resilient in the face of adversity, and more capable of building meaningful relationships. The habits you develop, the mindset you cultivate, and the way you approach life all determine the trajectory of your success. As you are now, that can't be done.

My cancer diagnosis was the ultimate test of this philosophy. Before that moment, I had achieved what some would call success—awards, advanced degrees, leadership positions, influence, and a solid career. But cancer stripped all of that away and left me with a new challenge. I had to dig deep and redefine what success meant for me. Was it continuing to chase achievements, or was it something more meaningful? Could I find a way to excel even when my physical body was fighting for survival? That's when I realized that becoming my future self wasn't just a nice idea; it was essential. My future self was vibrant, vigorous, healthy, and alive!

This type of growth is key because it builds the foundation for everything else. It doesn't matter how high you climb or how much

you achieve if you don't have the emotional resilience, clarity, or spiritual strength to sustain it. Success that's not rooted in this type of growth is often fleeting. That's why conquering self is the ultimate pathway to true and lasting success.

### **THE FOUR MAXIMS OF A LIFE WELL LIVED**

In this book, we will explore the four maxims that form the foundation for a life of purpose, fulfillment, and success: **Excellence**, **Perception**, **Inspiration**, and **Compassion**. I believe these maxims are interconnected, and together they create a balanced and holistic approach to becoming who you were meant to be. Mastering each of these areas will enable you to unlock your full potential and lead a more impactful life.

As I faced cancer and its ongoing treatments, these four maxims became my guiding lights. They reminded me of what mattered most, kept me grounded, and helped me push forward. Let me walk you through how these principles have shaped my life—and how they can shape yours too.

#### **Excellence**

Excellence isn't about being perfect or outperforming others—it's about determining to be the best version of yourself. It means setting high standards and committing to continuous improvement in everything you do. Excellence is a habit, a mindset, and a way of life. It's about showing up every day with intention, putting in the effort to grow, and giving your best in every situation. Excellence begins with a desire to win and the determination to pursue victory. No one sets out to compete in a race with the intention of losing. The countless miles of training, blisters, and leg pain would



all be wasted otherwise. When we decide to run a race, we do it to win! The reward for excellence isn't always immediately manifested. Sometimes the benefits of excellence are not realized until much later.

For me, excellence became less about achieving goals and more about showing up with integrity and discipline, even on the hardest days. During my cancer treatments, there were days when I couldn't control the outcome—whether it was the effectiveness of a therapy or how my body would respond. But what I could control was my commitment to showing up as the best version of myself, whatever that looked like in the moment. Some days, excellence meant pushing through fatigue to work on my projects; other days, it meant honoring my need for rest and recovery.

When you pursue excellence, you begin to see the power of small, incremental improvements. Excellence is an iterative process! Excellence isn't achieved overnight—it's the result of consistent effort, discipline, and focus over time. It is about trying, adjusting, trying again, adjusting again, and repeating that pattern until excellence is recognized. In the long run, the pursuit of excellence leads to mastery in both your personal and professional life. Excellence will eventually provide opportunities for you that you once thought impossible. Excellence is a better credential than experience or academic achievements. Excellence eventually becomes an example others aspire to.

## **Perception**

Perception is about how you see and understand the world around you. It's the ability to go beyond the surface, to read between the lines, and to pick up on subtle cues that others might miss.

Perception is right discernment. Being perceptive allows you to make better decisions, navigate complex situations, and build stronger relationships. Perception is about where you set your mind. If you set your mind to focus on the immediate issues of your current situation, you are more likely to get frustrated and lose focus and clarity.

I have always loved the proverb that says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” Perception requires closely examining those things that seem (or feel) right. Many times, those are misleading and ultimately take you in the wrong direction. To perceive accurately often means to look beyond or past the opportunity right in front of you and to plan for the obstacles that are “down the road” that may hold you up from becoming your ideal self. It is often the lack of perception that lures us into pursuing the convenient opportunity directly in front of us.

As I navigated my cancer journey, perception took on a whole new meaning. I had to become acutely aware of my body, my emotions, the world around me, and what I would need from my future self. I learned to read my energy levels, interpret medical advice, and understand my emotional responses to both good and bad news. It taught me to be more spiritually discerning and acutely aware of the condition of my soul—my mind, will, and emotions. Perception also helped me reframe my situation—not as a tragedy, but as an opportunity to grow, to learn, to unlearn, and to share my journey with others in a way that could inspire hope.

Perception isn’t just about being observant—it’s about cultivating self-awareness and contextual intelligence. It’s about seeing situations from multiple perspectives, challenging your own biases, and staying open to new insights. When you become more perceptive,

you gain clarity and insight that enable you to handle life's challenges with greater wisdom.

## **Inspiration**

Inspiration is the fuel that drives creativity, passion, and purpose. It's the spark that ignites your motivation and keeps you moving forward, even in the face of obstacles. Innovation and creativity are the outcomes of inspiration. It doesn't strike at the whim of the Muses. Inspiration obeys you as you conquer your thoughts and defeat undesirable imaginings.

During my treatments, there were times when inspiration felt far away. But I learned that inspiration isn't about waiting for the perfect moment—it's about creating it. I began to cultivate inspiration in small ways, whether it was through journaling, finding moments of beauty in nature, or reflecting on the reasons why I wanted to keep going. Inspiration wasn't always a big, bold feeling; sometimes it was a quiet but steady reminder that life, even with its challenges, is worth engaging in fully.

Learning how to cultivate inspiration means knowing how to tap into your inner creativity. The spirit within you is stronger than the situation around you. When you realize this, you can find inspiration in everyday moments of life. That's living an inspired life. It's about connecting with your purpose, aligning your actions with your values, and staying energized by the things that matter most to you.

## **Compassion**

Compassion is the foundation of meaningful relationships and personal fulfillment. It's the ability to connect with others on a deep

level, to understand their pain, and to offer kindness and empathy. But compassion isn't just about showing care for others—it's also about doing hard things.

In Steve Magness's great book, *Do Hard Things: Why We Get Resilience Wrong and the Surprising Science of Real Toughness*, he challenges traditional ideas of toughness and resilience, offering a unique perspective on mental strength and how to cultivate it. Magness argues that real toughness isn't about brute force, pushing through pain, or ignoring emotions, but rather, it's about understanding when to persist and when to adapt. He emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and flexibility in achieving long-term success. Magness provides strategies for developing resilience, handling stress, and overcoming challenges by embracing discomfort in a smart, thoughtful way. Magness promotes a balance between mental toughness and self-compassion to help individuals perform their best, especially under pressure.

Compassion implies the idea of feeling sorrow for someone in grief or suffering with or alongside someone. In its original Latin it is a compound word: *com*, meaning “with” or “alongside of,” and *passion*, meaning “to suffer.” While not traditional, it is not too large a stretch to understand compassion as being intentional about doing the hard thing now; it might be painful, but it leads to long-term benefits. The compassionate thing is to help others, and to decide to suffer a little bit today so that you don't have to suffer as much tomorrow.

Cancer forced me to learn self-compassion in ways I hadn't before. It taught me that pushing through isn't always the answer—sometimes, the most compassionate thing you can do for yourself is to rest and live to fight another day, which is hard with

deadlines and undone projects pressing in on you. I also found that showing compassion to others—whether through sharing my story, offering encouragement, or simply being present—brought immense healing, both to myself and those around me. Compassion is two-fold. It means to suffer with others and to do the hard things now so that it's easier later. Practicing foresight manifests when we have compassion for our future selves as well!

True compassion requires strength, courage, and vulnerability. It's about being present with others, even in difficult moments, and offering support without judgment. Compassion also means doing the hard thing and setting healthy boundaries, knowing when to give and when to protect your own well-being.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK TO TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE

This book is your roadmap to transformation. Each chapter will dive deep into one of the four maxims, providing you with practical strategies, mindset shifts, and actionable steps you can take to master each area. By the end of this journey, you'll have a comprehensive toolkit for living a more purposeful, fulfilled, and successful life.

Here's how to get the most out of this book:

1. **Read with an open mind:** Be willing to challenge your current beliefs and perspectives. Personal growth requires a willingness to change, and this book will push you to think differently about yourself and the world around you.
2. **Take action:** This isn't just a book to read and put on the shelf—it's a guide for transformation. Don't just read the content; take the time to apply what you

learn. Personal growth happens through action, and each chapter is designed to help you make meaningful changes in your life.

3. **Reflect regularly:** Personal growth is a process, and reflection is a key part of that process. Take time after each chapter to reflect on how the concepts apply to your life and what changes you need to make. Consider keeping a journal where you can write down your thoughts, insights, and progress as you work through the principles in this book.
4. **Be patient with yourself:** Becoming EPIC doesn't happen overnight. Be patient with yourself as you work through the challenges and embrace the changes that come with personal growth. Just as I learned through my cancer journey, there will be ups and downs, but each step forward is progress, no matter how small.
5. **Revisit the content:** As you grow and evolve, the lessons in this book will take on new meaning. Come back to the chapters that resonate with you the most and continue to refine your understanding of the four maxims as you move forward on your journey. Becoming EPIC is a lifelong pursuit, and these principles will support you at every stage.

The journey toward mastering yourself through Excellence, Perception, Inspiration, and Compassion is not a straight path. It's filled with twists, turns, and unexpected challenges. But through those challenges, you can discover the strength, resilience, and clarity that allow you to lead a life of greater purpose and fulfillment.

Remember, this book is more than just words on pages—it's a blueprint for living an EPIC life. The more you invest in your personal growth, the more you'll see the results reflected in every area of your life. By embracing the principles of Excellence, Perception, Inspiration, and Compassion, you'll not only achieve success, you'll thrive in a way that feels deeply meaningful.

As you move through this book, let my journey be a reminder that adversity doesn't have to define you—it can refine you. You can access the power to create a life of purpose, joy, and fulfillment, regardless of the adversity you face. With EPIC thinking as your guide, you can overcome anything and live a life that truly matters.

## THE DANGERS OF MEDIOCRITY

I have always been inspired by this quote from Robert Brault, “We are kept from our goals not by obstacles but by a clear path to lesser goals.” Mediocrity is a big problem. It is a plague of pandemic proportions. Andrew Carnegie said, “People who are unable to motivate themselves must be content with mediocrity, no matter how impressive their other talents.” So many talented people are settling for partial achievement because of fear of not measuring up or failing. As we saw in the prologue, David’s brothers and other soldiers suffered from mediocrity. They were afraid they wouldn’t measure up and it paralyzed them. Being EPIC is about embracing risk and accepting the possibility of trying and failing.

Mediocrity is not just a barrier to becoming EPIC; it can have profound effects on those around you and their motivation and morale, and it can even stress the body itself. Choosing to remain in a mediocre state can lead to a range of psychological and



physiological problems, leaving you unmotivated, disconnected, and unhealthy.

Being mediocre is not the same as being satisfied with the status quo. Both involve resistance to growth, yet they operate in slightly different ways.

### **MEDIOCRITY: ACCEPTING “GOOD ENOUGH”**

Mediocrity stems from the idea of being “halfway up the mountain”—neither striving for excellence nor failing, but instead operating in a state of moderate quality. A mediocre person is not bad, but they are not good either. It carries with it the connotation of being lukewarm. No one enjoys anything served lukewarm; it often makes you gag. Either be hot or cold, bad or good, but don’t try something with the intention to do just enough to not be bad—don’t half-ass life!

As a twenty-five-year college professor, I have seen my fair share of students who consistently turn in average work despite being capable of more, because they don’t want to put in the extra effort. They aren’t failing, but they aren’t excelling either. They’ve accepted “good enough.” They live by the old adage: Cs get degrees.

Mediocrity is about individual effort and mindset. It’s a personal choice to not push for your best. People who are mediocre focus on being slightly better than some but are afraid to push themselves to excel. Mediocrity is often self-imposed and manifests when someone has the potential to achieve more but chooses not to.

### **STATUS QUO: PRESERVING THE CURRENT STATE**

Keeping the status quo, on the other hand, refers to maintaining existing systems, structures, or norms. The status quo is about

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