

**EPIC**



# EPIC

UNLEASH YOUR FULL  
POTENTIAL THROUGH HEALTH,  
ART, AND TECHNOLOGY

**KOEN KAS**

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## PROLOGUE

Enter a bookstore at the airport. The most popular types of book are those that provide some kind of life advice, with titles such as *Build the Life You Want*, *Success For Life*, *Life Force*, *Manifest Day by Day*, *How to Get the Life You Want*...

How does *Epic* fit into this picture?

I don't sell trance exercises (*Success For Life*) or supplements (*Life Force*). Nor do I introduce the use of energy waves to influence the universe (*Manifest Day by Day*).

This book is written by a scientist and healthcare futurist who understands biology and medical sciences, and who is a global digital health thought leader. So how is this different?

In 2014 I wrote *Sick No More*, a book reviving an old Chinese model of care with doctors being paid to help me stay healthy and well. It was one of the first books about digital technology and the digital revolution taking place in healthcare. Alongside a fantastic team, I'm currently working on the digital execution of that model.

However, I'm no longer completely happy with that title. We will talk about happiness later. But today I believe life is about more than simply staying healthy and "not being sick."

Indeed, we aspire to be more than being not diseased, not disabled, or not suicidal. We want to be able to walk, play, carry, and build for as long as possible without discomfort. We want vitality, centeredness, and resilience. We want our brains to work the best they can. We want to be good at building intimacy. We want to "die young...as late as possible," as I rephrased it in subsequent years.

“*We want to “die young...as late as possible,”  
as I rephrased it in subsequent years.*”

And yet, that focus on prevention is still only part of the story as I see it now – a story that is not sexy.

Technology-enabled healthcare comes with some issues. I quickly learned you do not change a care system – which is basically a bunch of people – with mere technology, some apps, sensors, or a few AI algorithms. You need more than that, because people naturally tend to avoid change.

To deal with that challenge I came up with a “**delight thinking methodology**” in my 2018 book, *Your Guide to Delight*. It introduces delight as the ultimate experience, close to magic, but still real, based on things you didn’t know that you didn’t know. The book scraped the surface – maybe a little more – of using delight to deal with change, with the unknown, and how this will help both you and your company to live a long-lasting, fulfilling life.

In one simple acronym, this looked as follows:

D iscover something new to you (be curious)

E xtract unexpected value from it (be creative)

L iberate, open up, and share your data/knowledge

I ntegrate over different data silos (connect the dots)

G et friction out of the way

H ack people’s perspective (be imaginative)

T rust, empathy, and authenticity can be won by design

Now, in this book, I take this one step further. I reveal how delightful ways to introduce preventative health measures help you to become epic. Even if you’re sick, or disabled, you will be able to convert your potential and dreams into real experiences. Which at the end, the day before you die, leaves you and your relatives with the feeling you got the maximum out of life.

That allows me to deal with the issue mentioned before – the issue that prevention often has a boring connotation. Consider for a minute how well a football club would perform if it only practiced defense. Nevertheless, that is how prevention is perceived: as a defense for later.

But what if one could turn it into an attack? A better name might be “health promotion.”



Or, as my keynote colleague Christophe Jauquet mentioned in one of his excellent blogs: "Nobody does health prevention. Or at least they don't call it health prevention. Prevention is a word (overly) used by the healthcare system. But people don't use the word prevention. They take care of themselves. They do self-care, not prevention. And it goes way beyond the healthcare system. So let's go out into the real world instead of navel-gazing procedural and academic words that have been lacking impact for decades."

Therefore, I'll first introduce the concept and practice of **self-driven healthcare (SDH)**. I'll explore how that type of preventative care becomes a profit center, not a cost center!

Here I'll change the narrative of "dealing with prevention" to "a new way to leave legacy." To become epic. As an individual. As a partner. As a parent. As an employee. As you.

This is a book about how you could become epic. Iconic, even. But that brand name – "becoming iconic" – was taken, and so was "being iconic." Hence **becoming EPIC**.

I think there are a number of rules. A number of learnings, which I would like to share. Some are rehashes of famous quotes. By the way, I like books with quotes. This is one such book. The most frequently watched reels on Instagram and TikTok are oracle quotes on living your best life. Some of them carry opposing messages. Like "get out of your comfort zone" versus "excel in what you're good at."

So which ones are true? Or is it not about truth, but rather about mental support in a framework you choose to be comfortable with?

That is what this book will offer: a personalized way to become epic that is different for all of us, and how dealing with one's health also builds the capacity to deal with change, the only constant of the future. A guide to when and how to start. Also a guide for you, mister perfectionist, mister suffering from imposter syndrome, miss overthinker...

Hence this book helps to define your life goals and potential, beyond being merely healthy and happy, and I offer you the proper tools to achieve them.

I'll introduce emerging ways to deal with our biology and slow the aging process. I'll introduce longevity medicine as a novel approach to prevention. Next I switch to digital tools that provide health and life advice via AI. Digital health becomes digital empowerment, maximizing potential. Your digital twin becomes a digital triplet. Expect a novel breed of chatbots (applying a kind of AI called generative AI) and hybrid combinations of digital and physical services. They become your personal GPS for goal achievement; just like a GPS provides you the best route to

a destination, novel tools aim to guide you towards the best path to achieve your goals. A Waze for healthcare. They can teach you how to live a happier life with simple, science-based daily activities.

I explain where a novel, immersive world, formerly called the metaverse (and I guess soon being called the metaverse again) fits into this picture to help you experience such a fulfilling life. To experience the unseen.

Based on my close experience with preparing the launch of a new technology platform to deal with private data in Belgium, I introduce novel data collecting and sharing tools on a novel version of the internet. This platform will provide new ways to deal with health data and to find purpose in life.

I will question what it means, in the era of AI today, the metaverse tomorrow, and brain-computer interfaces the day after tomorrow, to be human. I will discuss how novel technology allows us to digitally live forever and rethink the entire concept of legacy. To address whether my beloved grandfather could always remain with me. Or to wonder "what would Steve Jobs have done in the current situation?" A guy many consider to be epic.

Among many things in this book, on your way to becoming epic, you will also learn:

- why a healthy new year or happy new year is not the most we can wish for;
- how to instill or create the opportunities to make you lucky;
- how to embrace change, and turn dealing with change or simply leaving your comfort zone into a personal asset;
- how that translates to the three things you want to do before you die, and how the combination of these three will make you feel you are living an epic life;
- how to become epic through the mantra "the older the better";
- how to enable constant learning, and why unlearning is as important as learning;
- how aspects of arts and creativity examples will help you grow in your career;
- about novel apps to explore your dreams and support emotional well-being and creativity;
- about practical sites and tools to start using tomorrow and explore your next big move;
- how a new way to deal with data in a personal safe on the internet will help you to receive delightful health and care experiences, to unlock your potential, and to reach your ambitions and goals in life.

Together, art and technology form a bridge between our inner experiences and wishes – sometimes things we don't even realize – and the outer world, offering us fresh vistas of self-expression, creativity, and personal growth. When coupled with the advent of our personal digital twin and digital triplet, a remarkable path-way is opened towards a healthier, more purposeful life. Towards becoming epic.

“ *This book helps to define your life goals and potential, beyond being merely healthy and happy, and I offer you the proper tools to achieve them.* ”



## CHAPTER 1

# THE INTERSECTION OF HEALTH AND POTENTIAL, AND THE ISSUE WITH PREVENTION

“He who has health has hope;  
and he who has hope has everything.”

—Arabian proverb

**A**s an introduction to this book, I want to share a story that's very close to my heart, about my mom and her journey with health and the complexities of prevention. For over three decades, my mom has lived with just one kidney. A few years ago, she was diagnosed with diabetes, a condition fraught with its own set of fears, including the risk of blindness and severe kidney failure.

Despite the risks, changing old habits proved difficult. My mom has always had a sweet tooth. Her tea wasn't complete without at least three spoonfuls of sugar. My brother and I spent years trying to encourage her to cut back on sugar, understanding the risks her health condition posed. Unfortunately, our efforts seemed in vain.

The turning point came when my mom's health began to visibly decline – her eyesight dramatically worsened. It was a wake-up call for all of us. But what truly motivated her to change wasn't the fear of losing her sight or even her kidney function. It was the moment I sat down with her and explained the direct impact her health had on our lives. I told her about the regular dialysis sessions she would need if her remaining kidney failed and how my brother and I would be the ones driving her to the hospital each time.

Only when faced with the prospect of her health decisions becoming a burden to her sons, her heroes, her legacy, did she choose to adopt a healthier diet.

This personal story exemplifies the intricate dance between health, potential, and the challenges inherent in preventative measures. It's a testament to the power of personal connections in motivating change and the complex interplay of factors that influence our health decisions.

I adore my mom. She's epic, giving her sons all she could to help them flourish, and savoring every moment of the lives of my brother and I, as if she experienced our stories herself. That turned out to be her life dream.

What could we learn from this experience, about how we could have addressed her diabetes in time?

This chapter delves into the fundamental relationship between an individual's health status and their potential for personal and professional development, detailing how a person's health can significantly affect their ability to reach their full potential. To become epic.

It should be obvious that staying healthy increases the odds of leaving a legacy, of making long-lasting human connections, and of encountering plenty of experiences. As I'll mention in the next chapter, these are the three key things people want to do before they die. I'll explain why these are exactly the things to aim for in order to become epic.

One's health encompasses more than just the absence of disease. It includes physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual and financial well-being. All are paramount to unlocking potential and maximizing capabilities. Akin to a well-oiled machine, the human body and mind must function optimally to reach the zenith of one's abilities. Here's how health can significantly affect your ability to reach your full potential:

**Physical health:** A healthy body can greatly increase productivity and stamina, allowing one to pursue opportunities without being hindered by illnesses or fatigue.

**Mental health:** Good mental health enables clear thinking, decision-making, and the ability to cope with stress. In contrast, conditions like anxiety or depression can impair judgment, creativity, and focus.

**Emotional health:** According to Dictionary.com, emotional health refers to the ability to be aware of and manage one's emotions and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically. Emotional health involves understanding your emotions, having healthy coping mechanisms for stress, maintaining a positive outlook, and developing resilience. It encompasses a range of psychological and emotional skills and states.

**Spiritual health:** Spiritual health is a dimension of overall well-being that involves a sense of purpose, meaning, and connection to something greater than oneself. It doesn't necessarily relate to religion or religious beliefs, although for many people, spirituality is closely tied to their religious faith. The concept of spiritual health varies widely among individuals, depending on their beliefs, values, and life experiences.

**Financial well-being:** Financial well-being is a holistic concept that goes beyond mere income or wealth levels. It encompasses the management of financial resources, the ability to meet current and future financial goals (financial security), and freedom from financial stress and anxiety. It is inherently subjective and can vary greatly from person to person based on individual circumstances, goals, and values.

Next, I need to mention the concept of social determinants of health (SDOH). Factors like safe housing, quality education, job opportunities, and freedom from racism or discrimination play a pivotal role in determining an individual's health and subsequent ability to reach their full potential. A person's environment and social networks can both positively and negatively influence health outcomes. A positive environment fosters growth, while negative influences can hinder potential.

The following graph provides a superb overview of the scope and range of SDOH:

This diagram is a model of all factors correlated with health outcomes for an individual





## THE ISSUE WITH PREVENTION

To see the future, look to the past. I have experienced this to be true over and over again. Think of the Chinese doctor, over 2,000 years ago, who got paid to keep you healthy. Once you got sick, you no longer had to pay. What would it take to create that model again? It became the central theme of my first book and my global keynote presentations.

I learned the hard way that it's not that easy to reinstate that model. Off the top of my head, some of the issues with prevention include:

- it is incredibly difficult to engage people in preventative health;
- fear-based messaging evokes negative emotions, leading to avoidance;
- few tangible incentives – most are really long-term and about avoiding possible illness in the future;
- it is not personalized or tailored to unique risks and life goals;
- it seems overwhelming, complex, and a burden, begging the question of where to begin;
- there is plenty of misunderstanding, fear, and distrust due to poor communication;
- with one-off campaigns, there is a lack of follow-through and a systematic approach;
- initiatives are fragmented: there is a lack of coordination and collaboration among stakeholders.

While researching this book, I discovered *The Code of Hammurabi*. Written in cuneiform nearly four millennia ago, it mandates the measurement of outcomes from medical procedures and incentives for doctors to provide the best form of care. It also specifies minimum standards of care for even the least privileged members of society. In short, it introduced SDOH. Thousands of years later, the majority of countries still struggle to realize those Mesopotamian standards.<sup>1</sup>

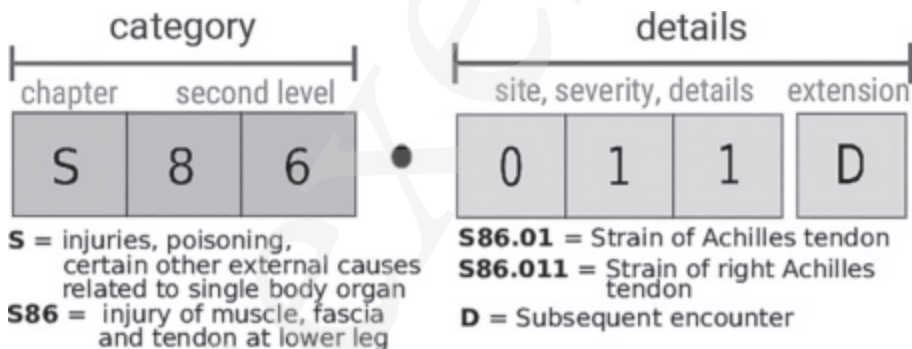
Education is considered a key social determinant of health. Adequate education equips individuals with the knowledge to make informed decisions about their health and overall well-being. I'll address this in more detail in the following chapters.

“*Adequate education equips individuals with the knowledge to make informed decisions about their health and overall well-being.*”

*The Code of Hammurabi* is something I would like to link to one of the biggest issues with prevention as a business model. Indeed, while there are medical codes – so-called ICD-10 or ICD-11 – for every disease and ailment, there is no medical code for prevention.

The ICD system, which stands for the international classification of diseases, is essentially a global standard for identifying health trends and statistics, and it is used to classify and code all kinds of medical conditions and symptoms, and the causes of injuries or diseases. Think of ICD-10 and ICD-11 as different versions of a health dictionary. ICD-10 is the 10th edition, and it has been around for a while. ICD-11 is the latest edition, released by the World Health Organization (WHO). It's like an update for a software program, but for health conditions. Each new version gets more detailed and precise, so medical professionals and health systems worldwide can keep up with new diseases and medical knowledge.

When you visit a doctor and they diagnose you with something, they'll use an ICD code to record your diagnosis. These codes are important because they're universal – whether you're in Amsterdam, Johannesburg, or São Paulo, the code for a broken arm or diabetes is the same. This standardization is crucial for tracking public health trends, billing and insurance purposes, and ensuring that everyone, no matter where they are, gets consistent medical care.



EXAMPLE OF ICD10-CM CODE STRUCTURE<sup>2</sup>

Given the situation described above, how could we apply *The Code of Hammurabi* today?

Imagine that "preventative care" became billable, forming a doctor's profit center and not a cost center! A doctor could prescribe a mindfulness class in a museum, or watching a sunset in Buenos Aires. I'll explore these ideas throughout the book.

**Sutter Health**  
**Prescription for Health & Happiness**  
*A dose of joy and self-compassion*

Provider: Dr. Leif Hass Date: 2/20/2021  
 Prescribed to: Suzie S.

**Rx** spread the love  
watch a sunset

Refills: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☒ 4 As Needed

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Take a few deep breaths	<input type="checkbox"/> Call an old friend
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Give someone a hug	<input type="checkbox"/> Help a friend in need
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Write a thank you note	<input type="checkbox"/> Sing in the shower
<input type="checkbox"/> Dance to your favorite song	<input type="checkbox"/> Go for a walk in a beautiful place
<input type="checkbox"/> Forgive someone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Talk to yourself with a kinder voice

Nurturing our physical, mental, and emotional health allows us to show up as our best selves. Self-care isn't selfish; it's essential for maintaining balance in our lives.

In essence, optimal health provides the necessary foundation for an individual to harness their skills, talents, and opportunities, maximizing their potential in every sphere of life. To become epic.

In my previous works, *Sick No More* and *Your Guide to Delight*, I illustrated the paradigm shift from reactive "sickcare" to proactive healthcare, emphasizing the pivotal role that technology plays in this transformation. I introduced the impending era of personal digital twins that will not only revolutionize our health but keep us and our enterprises forever "young." This new dawn requires us to re-envision health not as an endpoint but as a means to an end – an enabler for living an "epic life."

## THE EMERGENCE OF SELF-DRIVEN HEALTHCARE (SDH), SELF-HEALTH, OR SELF-CARE

Imagine a world where healthcare is not just a system we access when something is wrong, but an integrated part of our daily lives, a journey of self-discovery and optimization. This world is not a utopia but a reachable future through self-driven healthcare (SDH). SDH is an umbrella term (introduced by Innovate UK) to conceptualize aspects of healthcare delivery that can support people in becoming more engaged in their own health and well-being management, rather than being passive receivers of healthcare.<sup>3</sup> I also like "self-health," the term used by the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

In general, if people get control over something, they are able to play with it. Innovations that deliver self-driven healthcare (SDH) solutions promote citizen engagement. As a result, this should streamline access to evidence-based self-care interventions in the broader community.

Again, from my own experience, I knew for years that eating white bread was not particularly healthy. But I didn't care. Or was not motivated to reconsider. Not until I wore a skin patch for two weeks,<sup>4</sup> which allowed me to encounter in real time, on a simple smartphone app, what the impact was on my blood sugar from anything I ate. Something clicked in my head.

I'm not saying that a granola purchase was my immediate second step, but it definitely helped on my path to motivated self-health.

Since that personal experience, my partner at Healthskouts has been organizing showcase events to convey such personal care insights to care providers, as well as to the general public. It engages people, big time. A little bit like that Benjamin Franklin quote: "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn." Being told something is fleeting, being taught something is more memorable, but experiencing something is unforgettable.

In the last five years, we've seen a shift from patients being passive recipients of healthcare to empowered self-carers, capable of contributing data and participating in decision-making. SDH focuses on engaging people in their health and well-being management. SDH aims to empower individuals and patients to manage their health data using digital tools and online platforms. I'll list a representative number of examples, both established ones (e.g. weight, blood pressure, blood glucose) and newly emerging (gait, speech, handwriting, cognitive attention). It encompasses activities that empower individuals in health maintenance and promotion, including early disease detection and proactive collaboration with healthcare professionals. This includes a holistic approach to self-care, for early disease detection and, when in doubt or concerned, for online consultations with real doctors.

The healthcare industry is adapting by digitizing services, offering personalized care, and embracing self-measurement through technology, apps, and remote monitoring devices. Until a few years ago, such data was not trusted by the medical establishment. Now it can no longer be denied as a growing number of self-care devices can upload the generated data in one's medical dossier. This trend is leading to new, person-driven healthcare models, which go hand in hand with the great migration from hospitals to hospitals-at-home. In a next step, I envision this will become the foundation for hospitals that you pay in order to remain healthy.

This emerging SDH ecosystem will connect to broader healthcare systems, allowing for various health and well-being activities, possibly consolidating into a single, modular portal like a healthcare Facebook. I'll introduce that here. But it will no longer comprise the "harmful" features of Facebook (Meta). Your private self-care data will no longer enrich companies like Meta or Google. In this book I'll show how you will be rewarded for dealing with your (health) data yourself. Therefore, I will introduce personal online datastores (PODs) on a novel version of the internet. You'll meet these in chapter 7.

This goes hand in hand with a wave of novel, private "prevention and early diagnosis" initiatives that pop up all across the globe. Some examples are:

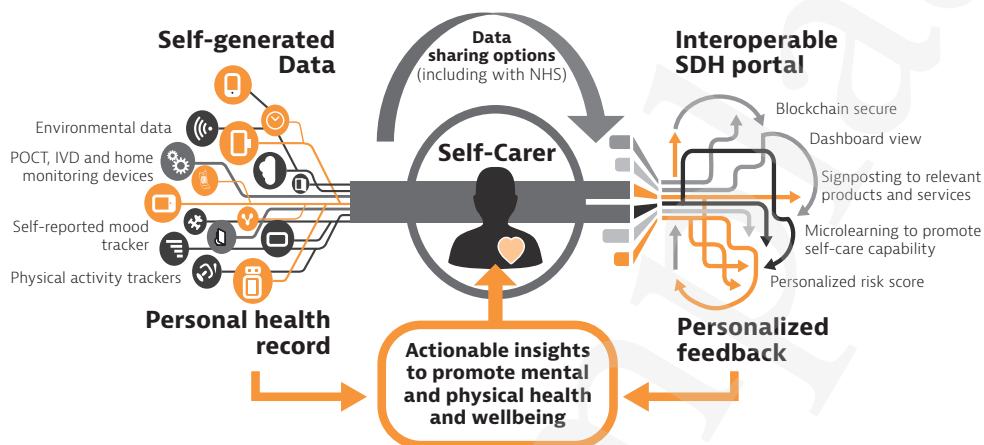
- Q Bio<sup>5</sup> – Operating at the intersection of AI, physics, and biology, Q Bio is working to automate the physical exam from data collection to triage and routing, to make preventative personalized healthcare available to everyone.
- Neko Health<sup>6</sup> – From the founder of Spotify. Full body scans use AI to track patients' health over time across over 50 million data points.
- Of note, at the end of 2024, Forward, a 99 dollars-per-month subscription that allowed visits to an AI-powered, automated body scanner called a Carepod, ceased operations. Nevertheless, insurance company Ping An has been making this normal in China for years.

**“ In this book I'll show how you will be rewarded  
for dealing with your (health) data yourself.**

In Belgium, my team got involved with Mediport Medical Center. It forms a new link between primary care, the general practitioner, and more specialized care in hospitals. It offers expertise in early screening and early diagnosis, with the most modern imaging equipment available on the market.

It should be clear that SDH shifts the focus from "sickcare" to proactive wellness. With advancements in AI, devices that are constantly linked to the internet (so-called Internet of Things or IoT devices) and real-time data analytics, individuals can monitor their health status continuously. People become their own healthcare providers, identifying early signs of ailments and taking immediate remedial action. They have access to an enormous range of health metrics that were traditionally only available in a clinical setting.

This shift resonates with the broader theme of taking control of one's destiny, a popular subject in narrative art and novels. And now in this book as well.



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Let's take a look at how this would play out in everyday life through a case study.

Meet Sarah, a middle-aged woman suffering from diabetes and obesity. Through SDH, Sarah starts with a basic fitness tracker and gradually incorporates more advanced tools like glucose monitoring systems. Her watch captures her wrist movements and allows her to track what she is drinking.<sup>8</sup> A cup of coffee, a soda, or a glass of wine. This gives her virtual coach a cue to remind her of the alcohol-free option, or the sugar-free soda cans she bought last week. This service (developed by a small AI company called Klue) will be introduced in 2025 by Medtronic, one of the leading medtech companies focusing on management of people with diabetes. Sarah also joins an AI-assisted nutrition program that analyzes her dietary habits and generates a customized meal plan. With time, she gains more control over her health, and her clinical indicators improve dramatically. The key, however, as in the personal story about my mom, is: would Sarah be motivated to change?

These two AI tools will seemingly coordinate with each other, and turn into a single agent at Sarah's service. This single agent serves as her digital assistant, her digital twin or triplet. Two leading companies propelling this model are Twin Health and Replica Health. Dexcom, a company developing glucose measuring patches for people with diabetes, announced the launch of a platform that leverages advanced AI to provide personalized insights and recommendations, enhancing diabetes management.