

Make Your Next Training an EPIC Experience!

by
Sharon L. Bowman, MA



Think of an experience you have had that stands out in your mind - perhaps a personal one like a wedding, the birth of your child, a death, a miracle. Or maybe it's a professional one - getting your dream job, a sudden reversal of fortune, a promotion. Or it could be a cultural or national event - 9/11, war, a discovery, a celebration.

Those experiences are **epic** events in our lives - **they are larger-than-life and totally unforgettable**. And one of our goals as trainers is to create learning experiences that are larger than life and totally unforgettable for our learners.



Why? So that our learners will not only **HEAR** our information, but **REMEMBER** it and **USE** it when the learning experience is over.

The word EPIC is also an acronym for four elements that help make a learning experience larger-than-life and totally unforgettable.

When we remember to use these four elements in our training, we increase the “memorability of the moment,” helping our listeners retain the information they hear.

EPIC learning experiences are those that are:

EMOTIONAL. Learners engage emotionally as well as intellectually.

PARTICIPATORY. Learners are involved in their own learning.

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IMAGE-RICH. Learners form mental pictures to help remember the learning.

CONNECTED. Learning is connected to learners' personal lives and experiences.

There are a multitude of ways to make a learning experience larger-than-life and totally unforgettable. Listed below are some simple tips to begin using these elements in your presentations. As you begin to "tinker with the tips," more EPIC ideas will spark and you'll be able to create your own EPIC list of ideas and activities.



EMOTIONAL

Emotion directs attention which directs learning. The more emotionally charged a learning experience is, the more it will be remembered by the ones experiencing it.

Try the ideas below to add positive emotions to your training.

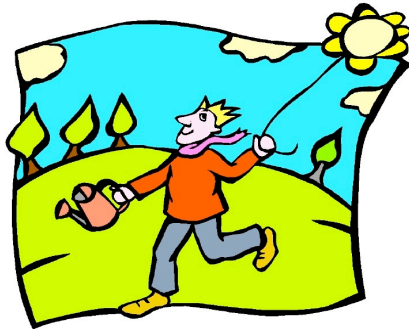
Best-Kept Secret: Anytime you use the other EPIC elements - participatory, image-rich, and connected to learners lives - you automatically create a positive emotional learning experience for your audiences. They begin to associate learning with pleasure, and they will want to learn more.

Stories: Anecdotes, verbal illustrations, metaphors, and analogies create emotional connections to the information. Stories can also be participatory (pause in the story and have your listeners guess what will happen next), image-rich (use as much detail as you can), and connected to learners lives (have them discuss how the story relates to their own lives).

Humor: It's not about telling jokes. It's about opening a space and time for learners to comment or share their related experiences so that THEY can generate humor in learning. It's also about using humorous stories and sayings to accentuate the information in fun ways. Remember, humor releases endorphins - the pleasure chemicals of the brain - and we all like to laugh while we learn.

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Pain: Many presenters want their listeners to feel the pain of a need or unresolved conflict before they move onto the pleasure of filling that need or solving the problem. A caveat to remember: With too much pain, learners will try to avoid reminders of the pain later. That means learners will avoid any learning situation that reminds them of the pain, including your presentations. And the worst pain isn't physical - humiliation, ridicule, shame, embarrassment are all painful emotions that many people have felt while learning something new. Be careful with pain, and move to pleasure as quickly as you can.



PARTICIPATORY

The suggestions listed below all create participatory learning experiences, connecting learners to each other as well as to the topic they are learning about.

Neighbor-Nudge: Also called a Pair-Share, or a Dyad-Dialogue, this activity is the easiest, quickest, and most low-risk to do. Simply direct your learners to turn to the person sitting next to them (making sure no one is left out), and tell that person the most important thing they've learned from the presentation so far. Learners can also share a question or a response to the information they've heard. Total activity time is about 30 seconds to 2 minutes.

Birds-of-a-Feather: Learners stand and find others who like the same junk food (movies, colors, vacation spots, genre of books, sports, whatever). They form small standing groups, introduce themselves to their group members, and tell one thing they want to learn from the presentation, a question they have, an outcome they want, or a fact they already know about the topic. After about 2 - 3 minutes, volunteers shout out a few of the comments made in their groups. You can also make the sorting topic-related (i.e. find others who have the same work experience, who think of the same word or phrase related to the topic, who are from the same department, etc.). Total activity time is about 5 minutes.

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Take-A-Stand: One wall of the room stands for a certain issue related to the topic. Another wall stands for the opposite issue. Learners take a stand at either wall or in between depending upon their responses to the issues. Walls can also stand for strongly agree/strongly disagree, yes/no, love it/hate it, or other topic-related facts. Learners introduce themselves to persons standing closest to them and discuss their “stand.” You process the activity with the whole group by asking questions like, “What did you notice about the group? What did you learn from the activity? What patterns emerged? What questions did the activity raise?” Total activity time is about 5 - 10 minutes.

Four Corners: A variation of Take-A-Stand, with the four corners of the room representing topic-related material. Learners move to a corner (or in-between corners), introduce themselves to those in the same corner, and discuss why they chose to stand in that particular place. Process the activity as in Take-A-Stand.

People Sorters: Use small objects such as miniature toys, erasers, card decks, plastic tools, colored dots, or stickers to sort learners into random groups (one object per person). Each

learner chooses an object and then makes a group with three or four other people who chose the same object. Objects can relate to the topic in some way. After learners form small groups, they discuss something related to the topic or to the information just presented.

From: *How To Give It So They Get It!*
and *Shake, Rattle and Roll!*
Author: Sharon Bowman

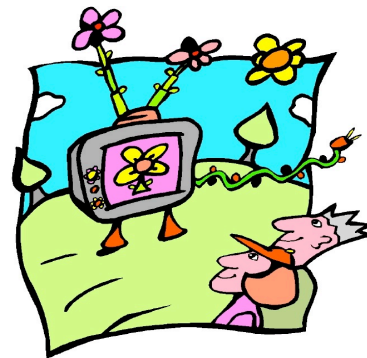


IMAGE-RICH

Think TV commercials, movies, billboards, magazine ads, street signs, Microsoft Windows, and the multitude of ways we are bathed in images throughout the day. We are an image-rich culture, and we rely on images in order to learn and remember information. Here are a few ways to make your training image-rich.

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Metaphor: A metaphor is a way of giving the learner the essence of any idea by representing it with something else. Metaphors paint mental pictures inside the learner's head, which is one of the most powerful ways of moving information into long-term memory. A few reminders: Keep the metaphor simple, use metaphors that everyone understands, let learners create their own metaphors, and create visual as well as verbal metaphors. Need some ideas? Direct learners to choose or name an object and then create ten ways the topic is like that object, or ways the object represents information related to the topic. Or have learners draw or sculpt a representation of the topic and its various components.

Stories: See comments under "Emotional" in the first section of EPIC tips.

Illustrations: Whenever possible, use a cartoon, photo, doodle, logo, shape, picture, or symbol to illustrate an important point. Or have your listeners create their own "doodles" as they take notes. The images will be remembered long after the words are forgotten.

Learning Aids: Simply put, a learning aid is anything that helps the listener learn better and remember more. Examples of learning aids that are image-rich include: toys, props, tools, household gadgets, nature items, musical instruments, blank paper, worksheets, skits, simulations, improvisation, stories, songs, jokes, one-liners, games, cartoons, metaphor, movement, music.



CONNECTED

We remember best what is linked to what we already know as well as what is connected to our own life experiences. When we link new learning to old, we remember the new information longer and we can assimilate it into our lives more easily. The following ideas help learners connect the new with the old.

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Learner-Created

Connections: Audiences need time, even if it's a simple Neighbor Nudge minute, to connect what they have heard to their own lives. You don't necessarily need to make these connections for them. All you need to do is to create the space and time for them to discuss the connections. Afterwards, allow a few more minutes to process their connections verbally so that others in the group who may have had trouble making the personal connections can hear how to do it.

It's About Them: Always bring your stories and activities back to your learners' lives. Know enough about them to be able to make your presentation relate personally in some way (remember, apart from their jobs, your listeners are human beings, and information that connects them to things we all experience as humans is powerful).

WIIFM: "What's In It For Me?" In pairs or small groups, learners discuss what they want to learn, what outcomes they want to walk away with, or how they can use the information they've heard. They explore their own WIIFMs before, during, or after your presentation. Or you can tell

them what they will get out of the time they spend with you - and how they will be able to use what they learn.

Action Plans: As part of the closing of your training, learners write and discuss their action plans with you and each other. An action plan can be simply completing the sentence: "I plan to ..." and saying/writing what they plan to do with what they've learned. Or it can have timelines and procedural steps. The action plan becomes the learner's commitment to himself/herself to use what has been learned.

Koosh Throw: Learners form a standing circle, or stand by their chairs, and toss a koosh ball (or other similar soft throwable object) randomly to each other. The catchers share the most important thing they learned and what they plan to do with the new information. If time allows, they can tell the group what they appreciated about working together, or compliment individuals in the group. The koosh is tossed until everyone has had a chance to respond. If the group is really large, they can divide themselves into smaller standing groups, each with its own koosh ball.

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Let's Trade: Each learner writes his name and work phone or email address on the front of an index card. On the back he writes "I plan to ..." and finishes the sentence, writing how he plans to use the information learned. Then learners stand, pair up, and read their action plans to their partners. They trade cards, find new partners, and read the action plan they have in their hands. They trade again until they have read and traded at least three cards. Then they take the card they end up with and, in two or three weeks, call the person whose card they have to see how they are doing with their action plan.



***Final Thoughts on
Creating EPIC Learning
Experiences***

All four EPIC elements help move learning from short-term memory into long-term

memory. They help learners not only HEAR information, but REMEMBER and USE it. And, best of all, these teaching tools make the learning experience larger-than-life and totally unforgettable.

You don't need to make every presentation or training EPIC in size - only the ones you really want your audiences to remember.

If you find it hard to include all four EPIC elements, then simply choose one to concentrate on during a single presentation. When you're comfortable with one EPIC element, then include another, then another, until you finally have a presentation that is emotional, participatory, image-rich, and connected to learners' lives.

Down the road, when you've become accustomed to creating presentations that are larger than life and totally unforgettable, you may be standing in a grocery store check-out line, perhaps a little weary and preoccupied as you wait. Suddenly a voice behind you calls your name. You turn and the person exclaims, "I heard you speak five years ago. You were wonderful! I remember everything you said. And I've used so much of what you

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taught me!” It’s a larger-than-life moment you’ll never forget!

The acronym EPIC is adapted and used with permission from a keynote speech given by Dr. Leonard Sweet at the South Carolina Baptist Convention, spring 2002.

Dr. Sweet is a traveling teacher and preacher. For more information, log onto www.leonardsweet.com.

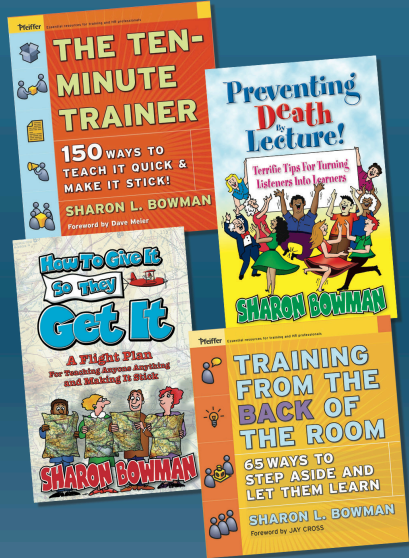
The acronym EPIC was modified by teachers in the Texas Pasadena Independent School District at a staff development training facilitated by Sharon Bowman in the fall of 2002.

Author and traveling teacher Sharon Bowman helps educators and business people “teach it quick and make it stick,” - fine-tuning their information-delivery skills and turning their passive listeners into active learners.

Sharon is a professional member of the National Speakers Association (NSA) and the American Society of Training and Development (ASD). Over 70,000 copies of her seven popular training books are now in print.

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Bowperson Publishing & Training, Inc.
P.O. Box 564, Glenbrook, NV 89413
P/775-749-5247 • F/775-749-1891
SBowperson@gmail.com