

The Zinn-Segaran-Beene Experiential Greatness Scale

Created by Toby Segaran, inspired by comments from Andrew Zinn, tiny addition by Jeff Beene with Toby's authorization

0. Forgettable

Events that could be forgotten and have no impact on your life. A typical example is a regular morning commute, which people often cannot recall at all due to having spent the time daydreaming about other things.

1. Inconsequential

Many day-to-day events occur at this level. Running into and greeting a neighbor on the street, an uninteresting work project or a mediocre meal at a diner are all inconsequential. These events are distinguished from "forgettable" by the fact that they are usually remembered briefly, but usually not considered.

2. Eventful

Experiences at this level are moderately memorable, and will possibly be discussed by those present for no more than a day or two after they occur. They are unlikely to come up in conversation with others except in responses to specific questions like "what did you do last night?". Usually active concentration will be required to remember much of the event a week later.

3. Noteworthy

Noteworthy experiences tend to elicit a fairly strong emotional response at the time whether confusion, amusement or anger. Usually the subject is eager to share them with others in the following few days, even without being prompted.

4. Significant

When reminiscing about important things that happened in the past year, most events that are recalled will be significant. Typical examples include winning a minor award or totaling one's car without serious injury.

5. Remarkable

Remarkable experiences are those that have a strong impact on behavior or change strongly held views. They may not always be remembered, but they stick with a person in a meaningful way through their outlook and opinion.

6. Exceptional

This is the lowest rating at which things will likely be somewhat memorable for one's entire life, and recalled on occasion with a moderate emotional response.

7. Monumental

These experiences are always remembered and likely to be discussed with those present for life. Oblique references to stories are understood without too much explanation. Many monumental experiences will elicit a strong emotional response upon recollection.

8. Epic

Epic experiences become folklore not only among those present, but those familiar with them. Neologisms, handsigns or movements which reference but do not describe the experience may be invented and be recognizable to a large group of people for many years afterward.

9. Legendary

The highest category of Experiential Greatness. Experiences that fall into this category, when related to others, become stories in their own right which are retold by others who are several steps removed from the original parties. The platonic ideal of a legendary experience is one that, years after having it happen to you, is relayed to you by stranger beginning with the words "I heard about this guy one time..."

10. Religious

The updated ultimate category of Experiential Greatness: individuals completely removed from the event, having heard the Legendary tales thereof, re-enact the oral history or written descriptions of the Experience in a futile attempt to recreate the Experience for themselves. This likely occurs years or even centuries later. It is possible that the original participants and witnesses would never become aware of a Religious-level Experience.

Toby Segaran

January 20th, 1979 – August 11th, 2021



Notes on the ZSB Experiential Greatness Scale:

- 1) This scale is not linear. Almost all experiences are forgettable, inconsequential or eventful. A mathematical model for distribution of experiences into the categories has not yet been developed.
- 2) The proper way to use these terms is either "my trip to Las Vegas was Monumental, bordering on Epic", "I would give the trip a 5.5 on the Zinn-Segaran", or "I would say its Experiential Greatness was 'significant.'"
- 3) This scale describes the magnitude of an experience, not how pleasant it was. An extremely funny movie can be merely eventful, while being chased by a lion is quite likely to be epic.
- 4) There is a tendency to inflate when using this scale. Objective criteria are given as a guide in some cases. There is nothing higher than legendary. People who think there is are using the scale incorrectly.
- 5) Levels 0-9 were developed by Toby & Andrew Zinn in college, circa 1999. Level 10 was adopted in 2012.