

*Interview with Dr. Steve Ralph at Pepperdine University, Malibu California*

**How did the idea behind the EPIC Summit come to be?**

**What is the root goal behind the summit itself?** The idea behind the EPIC International Summit happened during my doctoral studies. My doctoral research was focused on creativity training for leaders in a world of information overload. In this process I discovered how information overload can negatively impact our creative thinking and how being in nature can actually improve it. After attending various conferences, I really wanted to be part of designing a new conference experience incorporating the unplugged element in a retreat setting, with a cross-pollination of professionals from around the world. With a team of amazing individuals and unique talents, we joined together to build a Summit experience that centered around the EPIC acronym: Experiential learning, Pause, Ingenuity, Community engagement. The goal behind the Summit is produce an experience that helps attendees disconnect from devices for reflection, disrupt the status quo and to discover new innovative insights to transform their lives, organizations and communities.

**What do you think it is about the EPIC International Summit that makes it so impactful?** I think there are key elements that make the Summit impactful. First, the cross-pollination of industries represented is such a key aspect of the Summit. When you have an opportunity to engage with very successful professionals from diverse industries, it helps foster an environment ripe for creative insights. Second, the disconnect pledge. This is an optional opportunity to unplug from your devices for the Summit experience. This allows you to focus on interactions with other attendees, enjoy a distraction-free learning environment and take in the whole experience in an inspiring location. Third, the multi-layered programmatic elements create such a dynamic experience. It's the balance of experiential workshops, themed panels, keynote spotlights, lunchtime exchange discussions, the Innovation Awards night, with the moments designed for "pausing" to reflect in a very beautiful location, just a few minutes walk to the beach.

**Tell me a little bit about the workshops. What do you think attendees will take away from it?** The workshops at the Summit are highly interactive. Attendees will be able to choose from a unique selection of workshops from topics related to business, education and personal growth.

Throughout the three days, attendees create their own pathway on what they want to gain from the Summit experience. The experiential and application-based workshops provide innovative tools and methodologies that people can directly apply to their professions after they leave the Summit.

**Tell me about the unplugged part of the EPIC experience. Why is it beneficial for engagement and creativity?** The unplugged component of the Summit is really an important element to the EPIC International Summit. We live in a world of information overload, driven by our tech-saturated world. While there are amazing benefits of technology and the Summit is definitely not an "anti-technology" conference, the Summit provides a space for attendees to disconnect from devices so that they can connect with themselves, with other attendees and really reflect on whether they are managing their devices or if their devices are managing them. Information overload can actually negatively impact our creative thinking and the Summit provides that space to reflect, learn, engage and be inspired without the typical daily distractions. The disconnect pledge is optional and we do have a "tech-zone" for those that need to use their cell phones for personal or professional reasons.

**What is your favorite part about the EPIC International Summit?**

My favorite part of the Summit is seeing so many brilliant thought-leaders, creatives, researchers, corporate executives, artists and entrepreneurs come together to learn, connect and grow in their creative leadership abilities. It is not often you can have a conference experience with such diverse industries represented and sharing ideas, new methodologies and tools to help contribute to creative change in lives, organizations and communities.

**Anything else you'd like future attendees to know?**

I think we are living in a time with extreme distraction and volatility. To have a space of three days where you can unplug from devices and connect and learn from some of the most amazing international creativity thought leaders, researchers, artists and executives in a beautiful oceanside venue like the Music Academy of the West, is quite unique and highly valuable. I believe we need to learn how to increase our creative thinking to meet the unpredictable challenges we will face. My hope is that those who are able to attend the Summit will take what they gain from the three day experience and catalyze creative change in their organizations and communities.