

THE PHOENIX

Recovery • Renewal • Growth

Reprinted from The Phoenix, Vol. 23, No. 2 (February 2003), page 10, 13
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JUST ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

LearningMethods brings clarity and resolutions
to perplexing problems like depression.

By Ben Kreilkamp

A year ago last May I attended a workshop by David Gorman on LearningMethods, a process that he developed for creating positive personal change. This encounter changed my life in significant ways. In a single talk of about three hours, he managed to change my perspective on the depression I'd suffered from for some 40 years. This change in perspective eventually resulted in a happy miracle—an end to my depression, and I have since learned how to apply LearningMethods to create changes in other areas of my life.



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LearningMethods grew out of David Gorman's discoveries from his work as a teacher and trainer of the Alexander Technique (a widely-taught approach to efficient muscle use) and other independent study. The LearningMethods process consists of some very simple techniques. Its underlying premise is that we are born with built-in abilities to solve any problem that arises in our lives. All that is needed is a process for looking quite closely and clearly at the exact experience of the problem itself.

In Gorman's workshop, I described my problem to him as "chronic low-level depression," and I told him about the sadness I suffered from and how it affected my life. Gorman used the LearningMethods process to help me clarify my thinking, mostly by asking simple questions. He explained some of his techniques as we went along and I have since come to understand and use them on my own.

One of these techniques is completing a word or phrase. There are many words we use which, in effect, represent incomplete thoughts. We use the words, and we know what they mean in a general sort of a way, but a lot is left unsaid. What's unsaid often contains some unexamined misconceptions which can lead to unconscious behavior. Completing a word or phrase that we use can help us understand what exactly we are thinking and check it for accuracy.

For instance, when I said I was sad, Gorman asked me to complete that word (or thought). He asked me, "Sad about what?" I told him that everything seemed to make me sad. I added that, because the problem was so pervasive, I had concluded that the cause was an imbalance in my body chemistry. I told him that, on the advice of a therapist, I had tried the antidepressant *Zoloft* briefly. Gorman said that it was possible that some chemical intervention might prove necessary but he suggested that first we took to see if there was something in my own actions or beliefs that might make a difference. That sounded reasonable to me and we continued.

When I told Gorman I was sad about many things, and how that could at times "paralyze me with sadness," he asked me for a specific example from my life. It is another technique of LearningMethods to look at a specific experience. This was how Gorman's process brought our investigation and analysis out of the realm of theory, where I had stalled so often in my past efforts at therapy. Since any problem exists only in the experiences of actual moments, that is also where any possible understanding must be sought.

When Gorman asked for a specific example of my sadness, a very common experience of mine came to mind. When depressed, I would wake up and feel sad about the list of tasks for that day. These could seem quite overwhelming. Gorman asked me if, in fact, the list itself was overwhelming. I admitted it wasn't, nor was anything on the list. This was precisely why I called myself depressed, because I couldn't explain why ordinary things should overwhelm me so.

Gorman then asked what made the list seem overwhelming. The best I could answer was because I didn't want to do the tasks on it. Gorman asked me why I didn't want to do them. I answered that it was not an "attractive" list. It was quite "humdrum." For Gorman, these words I used about the list presented opportunities to look for more information about how my depression worked. He asked me what "humdrum" meant.

I have never experienced quite the level of clarity about my own experience as I achieved with Gorman's method of questioning me. Through his very simple techniques (completing words, filling in the content of vague terms), I became aware that my sadness might not be due to a chemical imbalance but rather to something I was doing unconsciously — comparing current "humdrum" moments to past moments. I was judging present moments of doing tasks on my list — such as making phone calls for my job—as inadequate compared to past moments of satisfaction or great joy.

This realization is what came out in David's questioning of me, and it is easy to see why any such comparison would be bound to make the present moments look bad. It was an unrealistic comparison, like apples to oranges, but until my encounter with LearningMethods, this fact had managed to escape the scrutiny of my consciousness. Veiled as it was, this comparison could make me very sad, even to the point of the paralysis I experienced.

As I write about this conversation now, it is somewhat embarrassing, as depression often has, been for me. From talking with various therapists and from my readings about cognitive therapy, Buddhism, and Taoism, I had long understood that my suffering was due to something I called unrealistic idealism, but it had remained only a theoretical understanding for me. What was eye-opening, even thrilling, was the amount of difference this one conversation with Gorman has made in my life. What he managed to do, with his LearningMethods process and the techniques that comprise it, is to bring these pieces of realistic wisdom into actual relevance within my own life.

The results of this new awareness continue to unfold as I've applied the process in my life since. At first the changes were surprising and even bewildering, as I found myself no longer seeing the world through my accustomed filter of being "depressed." For instance, some weeks after my conversation with Gorman I found myself enjoying a garden party. It

hit me suddenly in the midst of conversing with friends that I'd felt no discomfort at all at this party. This may not seem like much, but I'd grown quite used to something close to panic in social situations, even with friends I'd known for some time, and this feeling had disappeared.

LearningMethods is designed to address any personal problem, from a hurt foot to psychological problems or relationship problems. The main point when studying LearningMethods, however, is not so much to solve a particular problem, but to learn the tools for how to solve any problem that comes up.

Learning this process is a matter of studying with a trained teacher. All it takes is a willingness to address one's problems directly and a curiosity about how humans are designed to function. There are certainly problems that seem intractable, but it's surprising and interesting to discover how many problems arc within our own built-in powers of transformation.

There is an article with a longer and more complete version of this session with Ben and his liberation from depression on the LearningMethods web site: www.learningmethods.com/encounter.htm

Ben Kreilkamp is now a certificated teacher of the LearningMethods work. Contact him at 612-721-3569 for more information about the work or to set up an appointment.

There are three other LearningMethods teachers in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area: Babette Lightner (612-720-7127), Elizabeth Garren (612-375-9142 who also hosts David Gorman's workshops in Minneapolis), and Rebecca Frost (612-827-7956).

Visit the web site at www.learningmethods.com for a calendar of workshops, for more information on LearningMethods, a collection of articles about the various aspects of the work and available publications and recordings.