

Introduction to DEAR MAN

As we enter into the work of building effectiveness in Interpersonal Relationships, those real authentic connections we are trying to make with other people, there are three potential goals we need to be aware of in every situation we engage in. The first of which we are going to introduce in this PDF, and it's known as "Objective Effectiveness." This basic principle, which is often the starting point for every conversation, refers to actually getting the objective or goal that we want from the interaction we are about to participate in. Generally, this is the case when the objective is the primary reason for the interaction in the first place. In order to do the work we need to do in developing this part our relationship building skills, we need to know exactly what our objective is to begin with.

When I look back at my old way of doing things, it was often the case for me that I would go barreling in with all gun's blazing trying to get my point of view across in an extremely confrontational way. Now this ineffective way of doing things still shows up for me from time to time, but it's usually tied to some sort of story that I'm currently working on. When using the skills of DBT to work on achieving our objective, the key question we ask ourselves is, "What specific result or change do I want from this interaction?" This often means we first have to develop our ability to identify the particular change or outcome we want from the other person by the end of the conversation. This means paying mindful attention to what it is we are trying to achieve. Once we know what it is that we want, we have to communicate it clearly to the other person. In DBT, we do this by using a skill known as DEAR MAN.

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~Steven Morris RP.

Following the guidelines laid out for us in the DEAR MAN skill helps us to effectively communicate what our objective is to the people we need to communicate it to. As I previously said, this means first knowing what it is that we want, which can be a challenging thing for us to know, let alone communicate. Maybe we want the other person to do something, or even to stop doing something. Perhaps we want them to commit to a particular action we want them to take in the future, to agree with our point of view, or to give us an opinion or different perspective. Sometimes its true that we simply want them to validate us for something that we want validation for, so knowing exactly what it is that we want is an essential place for us to start.

Establishing what our true objective is often means practicing Self Honesty, so we can understand what it is that we actually want to achieve, then we can look at whether this expectation is actually something that's achievable. Expectations revolve around the standards that we set, and the probability that people can meet them. Is the person I am connecting with able, capable, and willing to do what it is I am asking. Do they have the time and the space in their lives to meet my need, do they have the skills that are needed to achieve the eventual outcome, and have they demonstrated a desire to do these things in the past? If the answer to any, or all of these questions is no, then we have to look at the expectation we are setting to understand why we keep asking people to do things they can't achieve, then getting upset at them for not achieving them.

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If the answer to all of these questions is yes, then it's important for the objective we're trying to achieve to be communicated in the most specific way possible. The clearer we are about we want, the easier it will be to apply the objective effectiveness skills, and the clearer we will be as to whether or not we were actually successful in reaching our desired goal. As with many of the other DBT skills, DEAR MAN follows the standard rules of Mnemonics, so let's explore each of the letters in this skill set, so we can build a deeper understanding for what they actually mean.

D = Describe the Situation

Sometimes, when it's necessary, it's important to begin the interaction by briefly describing the situation we are in. When we do this, we have to make sure that we stick to the facts of actuality, with no judgmental statements that might be attached to a schema or a story we are carrying into the interaction. We have to be as objective as we possibly can in order to maintain the possibility of achieving our interpersonal goals.

E = Express Clearly

Next, express clearly how you feel or what you believe about the situation. Don't expect the other person to read your mind or know exactly how you feel. Regardless of how long you've known this person for, it's impossible for someone to know exactly what's going on in your mind every single time you have a thought or a feeling. For example, it can often be helpful to give a brief rationale for a request you're making, or for why you might be saying no to a request.

A = Assert Wishes

The third DEAR MAN skill is to actually ask for what you want, or to say no clearly in a way that there is absolutely no doubt in what you mean. It is incredibly important that we don't fall into the trap of expecting people to know what we want them to do if we don't tell them what it is, then resenting them after the fact, or using this as a reason to solidify a particular story that's attached to an early childhood schema.

R = Reinforce

The fourth DEAR MAN skill is to reinforce the other person in a positive way. That is, identify something positive or rewarding that will happen for the other person if they engage in the way you want them to. This can involve taking time before hand to consider the other person's perspective and possible motivations. Draw connections between what you're asking for and what the person wants or needs, then use the skill of Planning Ahead to Build Mastery for what it is you want to say.

M = (Stay) Mindful

One of the primary techniques we use in staying Mindful of your objective in your Interpersonal interactions is to "Act Like a Skipping Record on a Turntable." That is, when setting a boundary, keep asking for what you want, saying no to the request, or expressing your opinion over and over and over again. This can include starting the DEAR script you developed in Planning Ahead to Build Mastery again from the top, or from any part that seems to make the most sense at this particular point in time.

A = Appear Confident

Using a confident tone of voice, and displaying an assured physical manner and posture, with the appropriate level of eye contact, so you don't get perceived as evasive or aggressive, is essential to the skills we are trying to practice implementation of. Such a manner conveys to both the other person, and actually to yourself too, that you are a valuable aspect of this interaction, and you deserve respect for what you want.

N = Negotiate

The final DEAR MAN skill is to practice the art of negotiation, in other words, we have to be willing to give something in order to get what we want. Being effective in negotiating for what you want often means being open to alternative solutions to the problem, which sometimes means we may have to reduce the level of our own personal requests. When this is a problem for us, it's often tied to a rigid perspective about being right in some way. We are attached to particular outcome and have no desire to move on this point of view. While this can sometimes be necessary, it's often an aspect of ineffective interpersonal connections, so keep this in mind when negotiating outcomes.

We can use the DBT DEAR MAN Skill in many of our Interpersonal connections and interactions. It helps us to establish what it is that we want, then communicate it in a way that's effective to meet our needs. The following are some examples of when this can be an effective perspective to take:

- Standing up for your rights in such a way that they are taken seriously.
- Requesting others to do something in such a way that they do what you ask.
- Refusing an unwanted or unreasonable request and making the refusal stick.
- Resolving interpersonal conflict.
- Getting your opinion or point of view taken seriously.

Take some time to contemplate the importance of these situations for you personally, notice how emotionally activated you may become when you sit with the circumstances described, and see if you can recognize the parts of you that are reacting to the story that's associated with this list. Discuss your thoughts and feelings about these things with the support network, and see if you can explore the different times in the past when, if the skills of DBT were available to you, they could've helped you get what you wanted, instead of the situation becoming worse, or even toxic for you to be in.

On the Following page, you'll find a worksheet to help you figure out what your objective might be in any situation you are preparing for, and then creating a script for you to practice prior to the interaction. If it's possible for you to do so, download and complete it, then use it in conjunction with the DBT skill called Planning Ahead to Build Mastery to build your ability to reach your objective in any interpersonal interaction. The more that we practice these two skills together, the more ingrained this way of thinking will become in our behaviours. So, remember to practice, practice, and practice the skills, then when you think you've practiced enough, practice some more.

DEAR MAN Scripting Worksheet

In which Domain of Life does the relationship you are working on exist?

- Marriage, Partnership, Intimate Relationship _____
- Parenting _____
- Family Relations _____
- Friendship and Social Relations _____
- Career and Employment _____

What level of importance does this area hold for you in Living the Life you want to live?

RATING SCALE

Not important at all to me on my agenda for life at this point in time.	Sometimes important, but mostly not high on my current agenda for life.	Middle of the road, fairly average level of importance on my agenda for life.	Quite important most of the time, fairly high on my current agenda for life.	Extremely important to me, at the top of my agenda for life.
0	1	2	3	4

What is your intended objective for this interpersonal interaction?

Describe what your end goal is, what is it that you want to get out of the interaction. Be true to the real intention, try not to mask what you want to achieve behind manipulation of any kind.



D = Describe the Situation

Document the facts of the situation you are working with.

E = Express Clearly

Document your emotional experience, own the feelings you're having.

A = Assert Wishes

Document what it is that you want, be as clear and concise as you can.

R = Reinforce

Document what the other person might get out of complying with your request.

M = (Stay) Mindful

Document your Objective for the Interpersonal Interaction.

A = Appear Confident

Document ways you can communicate your confidence through body language.

N = Negotiate

Document ways you can give to meet your objective in the situation.

Now that you have a clear understanding for how to meet the objective you have in the situation you are working on, use this information to create a script for what you want to say. Use the formula for Positive Communication and setting healthy boundaries, if needed, to help you with this if you're struggling to put it together. Remember, when using any formula for communication, it's important to make it your own, simply reading it the way its written will only make you come across like a robot, so use language that fits your relationship with the person you are communicating with. Make it your own, and speak from the heart, with authenticity and humility. Take the information you have created in this worksheet and use it in conjunction with the Planning Ahead to Build Mastery skill of DBT to rehearse achieving your objective over and over again. Plan for the different emotional triggers so you have the skills available to you, no matter how it goes. Remember, Planning Ahead to Build Mastery is done for the emotional experience, not the physical situation, keep that in mind when developing this skill.