



Bethany Yeiser Recovery Road

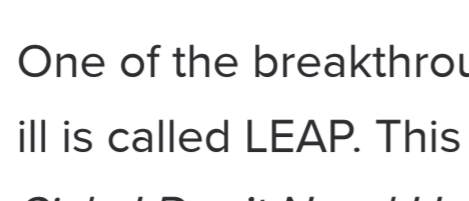
PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY

The LEAP Method: Listening

Making a difference in patients' lives through listening.

Posted February 1, 2021

Reviewed by Jessica Schrader



Are you dealing with a loved one who is struggling with a brain disorder and has no insight?

One of the breakthrough methods in reaching someone who is unaware they are mentally ill is called LEAP. This method is championed by Dr. Xavier Amador in his book *I Am Not Sick, I Don't Need Help*.

LEAP stands for listen, empathize, agree, and partner. As writes the author, LEAP works because it is based on the strength of the relationship, not the strength of the argument (p.112).

Sometimes I remember those who took the time to really listen, empathize, agree, and partner with me during my progressive downward spiral into untreated schizophrenia. They led me toward treatment, which included medication. Their support helped me sustain my medication compliance and eventual recovery.

In this post, I reflect on the people in my life who took the time to listen to me as Dr. Amador recommends, and those who didn't.

At the onset of my schizophrenia, I confidently believed I was a prophet and that when my time of international fame had come, everyone would see I had made the right choice in becoming homeless for a few years. But since I realized that my choices seemed absurd to others, I lied about my dangerous situation and did my best to keep it a secret. I cut off all contact with my family, worried that they would discover I had become homeless and force me to change my lifestyle.

With deep concern, I worried that people I knew would realize I was in fact sleeping outside and might try an intervention. In order to prevent that from happening, I was careful that the new friends I made did not know any of my more established friends.

Years later, I found out that a certain friend actually tried to organize an intervention. However, she could not locate enough of my friends and gave up. Looking back, I'm glad it didn't work out. It would have fractured all remaining connections I held with former friends and made me even more paranoid of them.

During those years, I shared my grandiose thoughts with no one, except one friend named Scott who patiently listened. Scott was a friend from my university who I met at my church during my years as a student in good standing.

He was not trained in Amador's LEAP communication method, but many of his interactions with me were consistent with LEAP.

Scott did not pressure me to divulge where I was living. I'm sure he noticed me wearing the same couple of outfits again and again. He must have recognized that my disheveled appearance was a sign that there was something seriously wrong with my life.

Scott wanted to help but seemed to sense that listening and being kind by spending time with me and paying for a meal was more effective than confronting me and trying to make me admit that things were not going well. I never told Scott that I expected to be a billionaire, but I did tell him enough for him to see that my life was out of balance.

THE BASICS

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Scott did not tell me to seek professional help immediately (as I wasn't yet ready to hear it). Eventually, he found the right moment and gently urged me to talk to a counselor who was a mutual friend. I adamantly refused.

Scott moved away three years into my homelessness. Prior to my schizophrenia diagnosis, he was the only person who broke into my psychotic world of delusions and began to guide me toward treatment.

A year after Scott moved away, I was picked up by police and diagnosed with schizophrenia. Then, it was my parents' turn to listen and intervene, and they did a good job. After a week at their house, I secretly discontinued my medication which led to my second hospitalization. While hospitalized, they successfully convinced me to always stay on my medication. They explained that, on medication, I might be able to attend university classes again, which I wanted desperately.

Because I knew my parents cared, I was more open about my symptoms. About three months after my diagnosis, I finally admitted that I had been hearing voices for a year and a half. The voices were continuing despite the medication. Finally, I told my parents that I was ready to discuss the residual voices with my doctor. This is how LEAP is supposed to work. Listening and building trust led to my treatment compliance and eventual recovery.

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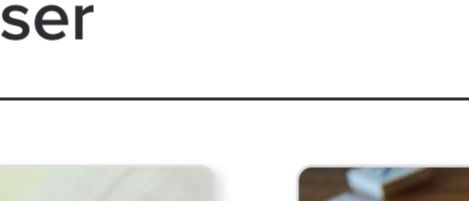
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Today, I share the LEAP method of listening with families who have a loved one with a serious brain disorder whenever I can. Above all, listening as LEAP recommends is rooted in compassion—patiently hearing a sick person's opinions, thoughts, and even delusions without initially disagreeing. Waiting, and looking for just the right moment to suggest they see a counselor (or other professional) as Scott did. Scott only suggested that I begin treatment after spending time winning my trust.

The next step in the LEAP method is empathy, which I will discuss in my next post.

References

Amador, Xavier. *I Am Not Sick, I Don't Need Help: How to Help Someone Accept Treatment*. Vida Press, August 14, 2020.



About the Author

Bethany Yeiser is the author of *Mind Estranged: My Journey from Schizophrenia and Homelessness to Recovery*.

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