

TRANSCRIPT WITH COMMENTARY

Tristan

Tristan Interview 0: Instructions about DES

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the January 17 interview with Tristan that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/34H71htBa-8>. In green are comments about and explanations of the Descriptive Experience Sampling process. If you have corrections, suggestions, or questions, please post them as YouTube comments.

RTH = Russ Hurlburt

AG = Amber Goto

Tristan = Tristan

0:00 RTH: So you should have gotten a message from me saying that it was recording.

0:05 Tristan: Mm-hmm. Yep.

0:06 RTH: And the rule, the rule for recording as usual is that it belongs to everybody, I guess. Everybody's got 51% of the vote in terms of whether this recording ever gets used for anything. But, uh, it's the kind of a thing that you can't go back and record if you didn't record in the first place. [Tristan: Mm-hmm.] If we don't do it, we don't have it. But, uh, if any one of us says at the end of a session, "I shouldn't have said that," or "I don't want that to ever see the light of day" or whatever, then we will delete this recording. That, I guess is the preamble about that. Anybody got any questions or problems or suggestions or whatever about that?

0:47 Tristan: Good to me.

PRIVACY

0:49 RTH: Okay. Then the purpose of today's meeting: You, I sent you a beeper, which FedEx says that you got yesterday or the day before, [Tristan holds up the beeper] something like that. Is that right? That's good. And our task is to, is to make sure that we understand what we're gonna do about that. And uh, and I guess one more, one more piece of housekeeping about, about Amber, and that is so that, so that Amber works with the same rules that I work with basically, which is to say she and I can talk about whatever it is that we do, just as Tristan and I can talk about it, or all three of us can talk about it, although it's better if we all, all talk about anything that we're gonna talk about. But, but she's not free to talk about it with anybody else until such time as Tristan and I say that it's okay for her to talk about it. Which is, which is the rules that apply to everybody, I guess, except for Tristan. Tristan has some little bit more freedom than the rest of us do. But since we're gonna be talking about Tristan's inner experience, it's, this is private stuff for him. And, uh, and we need to treat that with respect and which, which means that we have to recognize that it belongs to him,

and, uh, and, and to really know no one else until he says it's all, all right for somebody else to see it.

0:49 Russ comments: RTH wants Tristan to *be* in control of the procedure, and to *believe* that he is in control.

2:14 RTH: And I've lost your audio, Tristan. Now he's back.

2:21 Tristan: Okay, cool.

2:22 RTH: So your audio starts out sort of mellow and then,

2:25 Tristan: Oh, maybe I had my, cuz I'm holding my phone, so maybe I had my hand somewhere strange.

2:30 RTH: That's, that's better now. No, that's bad. So it apparently depends on your hand position there, and the

2:37 Tristan: Yeah, I think the, I think the microphone is at the bottom of the phone, yeah.

2:42 RTH: Okay. So any other preamble, preliminary stuff before we talk about what we're gonna do here?

2:51 Tristan: Um, not for me.

THE METHOD IN BRIEF

2:55 RTH: Okay. So, well, the goal is to get glimpses of Tristan's inner experience, the way inner, the way Tristan experiences that as he goes about his everyday world. And, uh, and we've sent him a beeper. And, uh, the beeper is gonna deliver a random beep. Some number of random beeps. There actually are random in the sense that I don't control 'em, Amber doesn't control 'em, Tristan doesn't really control them either. They ha, happen whenever the beeper wants to beep, the, the mechanics inside the beeper are set so that it should beep once every, or no, no, no more than an hour in between beeps could be a minute or it could be half a minute and it could be 59 minutes or anywhere in between. They're actually, uniformly distributed, somewhere along the, along that continuum.

3:48 And your task is to pay attention to the inner experience that was going on one microsecond, like we like to say, *one microsecond just before* the beep occurs. We don't actually believe that it's a microsecond. It could be a *millisecond*, or sometimes we say it's *caught in flight by* the beep, and sometimes we say it's the *last undisturbed moment before* the beep. All those things mean basically the same thing. We want, we wanna capture, what we *really* want is to capture what was going on in Tristan's experience if there was no beeper there. So if there was some alternate universe that didn't have a beeper in it, but was time-locked to this universe, we would like to know what was going on in that other universe just before it gets interrupted by the beep.

4:32 And, and that's not, we, we recognize that that's *aspirational* rather than *perfect* because it *is* gonna be interrupted by the beep. And we're asking you then to

sort of rewind your experience, whatever that means. We *think* for most people, not, not necessarily for everybody, and not necessarily for Tristan, but for *many* people, maybe most people, the what's was going on in inner experience is sort of in short term memory. So it, it, it may exist for you to grasp it if, if you do it relatively quickly. So, so we wanna, we wanna structure a situation that defines a moment. That's what the beeper is for. And we want you to take stock of what was directly experienced when interrupted by the beep. [Tristan: Mm-hmm.]

5:19 And by *directly experienced* we mean sort of what you might say before the footlights of consciousness. There's thousands of things that *could be* in at any particular moment could, that *could be* competing for your attention. Y'know, you could be hearing my voice, you could be seeing Amber's red shirt, or you could be seeing the green square around whatever, and you could be hearing the sound of the air conditioner, or you could be feeling the floor underneath your feet, or you could be whatever. There's a whole lot of stuff that *could be* occurring at any particular moment. We don't want you to give a catalog of all those things that *could possibly be* an, an occurrence. That's *not* what we're interested in. What we are interested in is what, of all those things (whether it's zero things or one thing or a few things, however many) that happen to be directly apprehended by you at that particular moment.

5:19 Russ comments: RTH gives an informal, brief description of the sampling procedure, because a fundamental characteristic of the DES process is that the procedure unfolds over time as both the participant and the interviewers become more skilled in dealing with each other (the process that DES calls *iterative*). The initial description is relatively unimportant, except that RTH wants to convey that he's genuinely interested in Tristan's experience.

6:17 Tristan: Mm-hmm.

6:19 RTH: And we expect that it's gonna take you a while to get good at that. That's the way people are, people, people aren't very good at it on the first day and maybe on the second day. You've done a little bit of this kind of thing with, with your brother back in the day. And, uh, I would like us to forget that we ever did that. [Tristan laughs] We're gonna start over again. And, uh, and that's, that's basically true with, with us as well. So I'm not casting aspersions on your brother or whatever. Here we, we, we, we want to take each day as being a new but better attempt at this than we had before, and not be, not be captured by what we might have said that was incorrect or half-correct or whatever on, on previous, previous days. So, so that's, that's basically the, the story of what it is that we're gonna do. And I'm happy to answer any questions about that if you got 'em.

7:14 Tristan: Uh, I think I have a pretty good sense.

ABOUT THE BEEPER

7:16 RTH: Okay. Then let's talk about the beeper. So the beeper has, uh, let's turn on the beeper and tell me what happens when you, when you turn the beeper on.

7:26 Tristan: Okay, so what is turning on? Is that switching the, the little button?

7:29 RTH: No, it's, there's a, the black thumbwheel on that thing. So twist the black thumbwheel until it clicks and then continues to move.

7:37 Tristan: Okay. It's still, I'm gonna set my phone down and then... So I presume I'll only know if it's on by hearing it, don't I? Which direction? So there's a click and there's a click. Okay. So there's more space on this click side. So I think this is on,

7:59 RTH: So is it beeping in your ear?

8:02 Tristan: I do not hear a beep.

8:03 RTH: So un let's, let's unplug the earphone. Pull it out. Yeah. And now do you hear a beep? So let's turn it, let's turn it, turn it off until it clicks again. And did it click?

8:19 Tristan: It clicked.

8:20 RTH: And then turn it back out again. And is there any kind of a beep at all? You shouldn't have to hold it up to your ear. This, in this case it should, you should just be able, it should be, there's an onboard speaker and it, it should be loud enough for you to hear it. So there shouldn't be any question about it. If it, if there's no question for you about whether it's beeping and then it's not beeping.

8:42 Tristan: Okay, then it's not beeping. Maybe beep. Okay.

8:44 RTH: So what that probably means is that the batteries jostled loose in the shipping. So there's a battery compartment.

8:53 Tristan: Oh. Oh. There, we, we go. There we go.

8:56 RTH: So what did you, what did you do to make it do that?

8:59 Tristan: Um, I just pushed the batteries further in.

9:01 RTH: Okay, good. All right. So put it back together again. And, uh,

9:20 Tristan: There

9:20 RTH: We go. So now let's do this, let's do this exercise again. Let's turn it off and then turn it back on again and tell me what happens.

9:27 Tristan: Beep.

9:28 RTH: Okay. And it continues on, it's continuing to beep. And if you push the white button, it'll stop the beep.

9:36 Tristan: Yes.

9:37 RTH: Okay, then that the beeper is, so let's, let's, uh, let's turn it off again. And given that, given that we've got some kind of a problem now, what I want you to do is to push the white button down and *hold it down*, and then turn it back on again. Keep holding the white button down and turn it back on again.

9:58 Tristan: Holding, turning on. It gave some song

10:04 RTH: And did that sound, did that sound, did that chime-y thing sound like [sings] da da da da da da?

10:12 Tristan: Yep.

10:13 RTH: Okay, good. That means that the, that, that's what tells.... So you don't need to worry about that anymore. What that means is that the switches that are inside the beeper are set the way I want 'em to be, be set. Uh,

10:22 Tristan: Excellent.

10:23 RTH: So that, that's for me to know. You don't really need to know. We're just checking to make sure that the beeper is operating. So right now, is it beeping or is it stop beeping?

10:32 Tristan: Well, I took my hand off the white thing, so it's kind of got the prolonged beep again.

10:37 RTH: Okay, so let's stop the beep by pushing the button one more time and unhold. So next time when I, for, and for every other time when I say push the button, I mean push it and release it, push it. [Tristan: Okay.] Okay. So now it's doing nothing.

10:51 Tristan: Doing nothing.

10:52 RTH: Okay. Now one more thing that I want you to know about this is that if you push the button and *hold it down*—do that, push the button and *hold it down*—it should get, emit a square wave: beep [pause] beep [pause] beep.

11:08 Tristan: Yep. Yep.

11:08 RTH: That what it's doing? [Tristan: Yep.] That is designed for you to check to see whether the beeper is operating. If you push the button and hold it down, then it's on. And it also gives you a chance to adjust the volume. That thumbwheel is a volume control, right?

11:21 Tristan: Right.

11:21 RTH: So you can adjust it, you can hold the white button down and move the wheel back and forth and adjust the, adjust the volume. And what you want is a comfortable volume so that it doesn't startle you, but so that it's not so soft that it's, you're

thinking *is that the beep? Is that the beep? Is that the beep? Oh yeah, that's the beep!*
What you want is an easily apprehendable volume control.

11:47 All right, so now we know how the beeper works with one minor exception.
We'll talk about a little bit. Let's put the earphone in. First off, before you put the
earphone in, lemme show you the ear. Show me the earphone, an the,

12:01 Tristan: So I, the way I thought it would be is that this goes through this and then I hook it
around here and then put this little guy in there. Is that it?

12:19 RTH: Well, you missed your ear! So the, so push that thing on hard, the, the hook on hard,
right?

12:32 Tristan: And that's, no, it's kind of broken. The hook is kind of broken at the end. Is that
normal?

12:37 RTH: The hook is broken.

12:39 Tristan: Yeah, this is broken. Maybe a little glue. You see that?

12:47 RTH: I see that. I see that I, somebody must have handled, handled this material or opened
it up or something because, because the beeper was working when I sent it to you.
And that hook *should not* be broken.

13 Tristan: I wonder if it's my fault though.

13:02 RTH: That doesn't matter....

13:03 Tristan: It all be my fault?

13:04 RTH: So a little bit of, a little bit of crazy glue in there probably is gonna be all right. But
hold, hold it up for, hold it up for me one more time so that I can, so put the, put no,
put the, put the earphone into it.

1. 13:04 Russ comments: RTH mails Tristan a replacement earphone hook.

13:17 Tristan: Okay.

13:18 RTH: So that's the way it should be. And you, and feel free to put a little drop of crazy glue
in there, right? You're not gonna send me back any of that stuff. This, this stuff is for
you. And when we, when you're done with it, you're done with it,

13:30 Tristan: Okay?

13:30 RTH: And, uh,

13:33 Tristan: Alright,

- 13:33 RTH: So feel free to put a free, a piece of crazy glue or a little piece of tape or whatever works for you to make that.
- 13:40 Tristan: Yeah.
- 13:42 RTH: And now lemme see that looks, that looks like what it's supposed to be doing. Yes. That's, so that's our, that's our goal. And you might have to do a little repair work on the, to make that feel secure.
- 13:56 Tristan: And I can test the volume to see if I hear it well. Yeah, could hear it pretty well. Okay,
- 14:06 RTH: Good. So, and you, and, and go ahead and play around with the volume and make sure that you can, you can hear the volume get louder and softer when the, with the thumbwheel.
- 14:18 Tristan: Yeah.
- 14:18 RTH: Okay. So now is it beeping? Right now?
- 14:23 Tristan: It is not.

DES INSTRUCTIONS

- 14:25 RTH: Good! So what that means is that the beeper has decided that when the beeper knows when it's going to beep again. I don't know, you don't know, nobody knows. But sometime within the next hour it's going to beep. And when it beeps, it's gonna emit a long beep, more or less like the first one that you heard when you turned it on, except it won't go [sings an increasing pitch whoop], it'll just go beep [sings a rapid onset beep]. But then it'll keep going for basically ever. And *your task* is when you hear that beep, to rewind your experience to just one microsecond *before* that beep occurred and freeze, quote, "freeze," take a snapshot of quote, "take a snapshot of," "pay attention to," whatever, what was going on with you in that microsecond right before the beep occurred. And that, and that, it doesn't mean that your experience has to be short. It could be a long experience could be going on for an hour, or two minutes, or 30 seconds or one second, or whatever. But we want it what was caught in flight by the leading edge of that beep.
- 15:28 Tristan: Right?
- 15:29 RTH: And then jot down some notes about that. I sent you a notebook. [Tristan: Mm-hmm.] Did you get a note? Did you get a notebook?
- 15:35 Tristan: I got, I got the notebook. Yeah.
- 15:36 RTH: You can feel free to use that notebook or do it in your phone or whatever. I think, I think the notebook is probably the best way, but people, people are different about, about that. But basically the notes are your *tool* to capture whatever was going on in your experience so that we can talk about it the ne, within the next day. So I don't

care what you write, if one word's enough, write one word. If whole page is enough, write the whole page. If you wanna draw a picture, draw a picture. If you wanna do it on your phone rather than a notebook, that's okay. Whatever is the, [coughs] excuse me, whatever is the best way for you to be ready to convey to us what was going on in your experience when we get together and have an interview about it.

16:27 Tristan: Mm-hmm. Great. Yeah.

16:32 RTH: And that's basically all there is about the whole procedure with one exception. And that is, I'm gonna tell you about it, but we're not, probably not gonna demonstrate it here. But if, if for some reason you were to take the beeper off, but not turn it off when you're done, you should turn it off by, by rolling the thumbwheel until it clicks off.

16:55 If you were to forget to do that and say you, you were to take the beeper off, but not turn it off and you were to set it aside, it would sooner or later beep. And when it beeped, it would beep for a long time. And by a long time, it's like a minute. (It's actually not a lifetime, but it beeps for a minute or so.) And then, to save its battery, it goes into what we call the *chirp mode*. [Tristan: Mm-hmm.] And the chirp mode is just a battery saving deal, but it, it, and it sounds more or less like a smoke alarm when the battery gets low, a little chirp [coughs] and then a 30 seconds later it goes chirp and then 30 seconds later it goes chirp again. That is *not* the beep. The beep is the sound that you've already heard, but there's this little chirp if you hear that, what that means is you set me aside and forgot to turn me off. So turn me off. And then it turned me back on again. And then we're ready to go again.

17:52 So the, the, the.. We're gonna decide when we're gonna meet again, which will be for the first sampling interview. And then, so why don't, why don't we do that now? Actually, let's, let's, let's, well, let's do that later. Let's do it. But let's say we figure out, we're gonna meet to, we're gonna meet a week from today at the same time. Let, let's, let's say we figure that out. Then sometime within,

THEY COMPARE CALENDARS

18:15 Tristan: You wanna do a week from today? Cuz I, I could, I could do starting now, but I guess you're, you're busy maybe.

18:20 RTH: Well, so let, so tomorrow would be good as far as, um, maybe not tomorrow. Tomorrow is Saturday. We could do Monday. Well, let's, let's figure it out. Let's figure out when we're gonna meet. [pause while they look at calendars] I could actually do tomorrow if we wanted to do tomorrow. We wanted to do it in the morning tomorrow. Or Monday is a holiday, but I'm, I'm happy to do it in the morning of tomorrow as well.

19:03 Tristan: Or Monday. Yeah, mark, just gimme a time and I can probably, what would work for you?

19:11 RTH: Uh, same time on Monday? That work for you, same time on Monday work for you? So

19:18 Tristan: Noon for me. Okay.

19:18 AG: Could we do, are we able to do one hour later or is that too, is that too late?

19:24 Tristan: Works for me. That works for me.

19:25 AG: Okay, that's fine. Yeah. 10 our time is, is fine.

19:28 RTH: 10 10 o'clock our time, which would be one o'clock New York time. [Tristan: Okay.]
On, on Monday the 20th.

19:37 Tristan: Oh, on Monday. I thought you were talking about tomorrow.

19:39 RTH: We could do tomorrow. Tomorrow is okay with me too. Okay.

19:44 AG: About Yeah. I, I too thought we were talking about tomorrow.

19:46 RTH: All right, tomorrow's, tomorrow's good.

19:48 AG: Okay.

19:49 RTH: So tomorrow at 10 o'clock?

19:51 AG: Yeah.

MORE ABOUT DES PROCEDURE

19:52 RTH: All right. So what that means, Tristan, is that sometime between now and tomorrow at 10 o'clock, you should wear the beeper until you get about six beeps. And, and by about six, I mean five or six or seven or something like that. It's not, it's not a magic number. But it's gonna take you roughly three hours to get, wearing the beeper for three hours to get six beeps. And the reason for that is that the beeps are uniformly distributed—length of the intervals between the beeps are uniformly distributed with a maximum of an hour. And so the average is gonna be like a half an hour. And to get six beeps is gonna take you roughly six half hours or three hours. Might be two hours if the beeper is in a hurry. And it might be four hours if the beeper is slow or five hours, actually it could be, it could be six hours, but it isn't likely. So *probably* it's gonna be more or less three or four-ish hours. And uh, and then when the thing beeps, well, so, so at some, at some time between now and tomorrow, when you think you can wear it for three hours, turn the thing on, put the earphone in (glue, glue, I guess glue the earphone together first) and then put the earphone in. And, uh, the object, the object about glue in the earphone is you want the earphone to be secure. You don't want to be ha hassling with the earphone over and over again. You want to,

21:15 Tristan: Yeah, I think it might be fine. It feels pretty good. It doesn't feel like it's going anyway. Okay.

21:19 RTH: And then another hint is that it might, you might find it convenient to run the wire for the earphone inside your shirt. [Tristan: Right.] Because that will keep the wire for the earphone sort of pinned against your neck and then it won't be going anywhere. It's won't be flopping, but, but I don't have any, I don't have any, I don't really care one way or the other. You gotta work out the mechanics of whatever works for you is... The other advantages. If, if you have the earphone wire out there, it snags on doorknobs or whatever as you go about your everyday life. So on inside your shirt has some advantages, but I'm not trying to talk you into that. I'm just saying work it out. However, whatever is convenient for you.

21:57 Tristan: Yeah.

21:59 RTH: And then so the thing, the, so the thing is gonna beep, you're gonna jot down some notes about that beep. Well first off, you're gonna, the thing's gonna beep, you're gonna freeze your inner experience, then you're gonna stop the beep, then you're gonna jot down some notes about it. And then if some number of minutes later, the same thing is gonna happen and you're gonna get us six beeps and then tomorrow at 10 o'clock, 1 o'clock, we're going to talk about those. And that conversation is gonna be like, Walter, Tristan, what was in your ongoing experience at the moment of the first beep? And, and we'll do that second beep, et cetera. And we expect that we'll have to learn how to talk to each other about that. And so it's a process where, where maybe we're gonna get better at it as we go and we don't have any preconceptions about what, what we're gonna find.

22:47 Tristan: Okay. Yeah. Good.

22:52 RTH: Any other questions, comments? Amber? Did I say everything I was supposed to say here?

22:59 AG: I think that all sounded about right. Yeah.

23:03 RTH: Okay. We don't have a script because we don't think a script is a good idea. Our ob, the object is for the three of us as, as interested intelligent people to try to get us high fidelity of view of Tristan's experiences we can get. And, and I've sketched out what experience has shown *me* to be sort of a good thing to do to do that. Maybe it'll work for him, maybe it won't. We'll find out. Maybe we will, we'll alter it as we go to try to get better at it.

23:03 Russ comments: Using a script suggests that there is a best procedure, and we are the experts in the procedure, and that Tristan should do as we say. All that is off the track. Instead, we wish to suggest that *Tristan* is a fundamentally important expert, and that we will wish to *collaborate* with Tristan to *create* the procedure that works well for Tristan (and us).

23:32 Tristan: Right. I'm very curious so see what turns up.

23:37 RTH: Okay then I think I am good as far as what we have, we have... I think we have accomplished what it is that we should accomplish today.

23:51 Tristan: Mm-hmm.

23:51 AG: Uh, maybe just letting Tristan know about the reminder emails and all that, just so that

23:58 RTH: Yeah, we'll we'll send you an email. Actually Amber will send you an e, an email which she'll do right now probably reminding you that you should wear the beeper between now and then. That's our standard procedure.

24:09 Tristan: Okay, cool.

24:11 RTH: And we'll make a calendar invite that has the dates, so make sure we keep, keep our time, time zones straight. And

24:22 Tristan: Mmm.

24:26 RTH: The ab the, the, it's a simple game that we're about to play here in the sense that we're, we are trying to do whatever it is that we need to do in order to get a high fidelity glimpse of whatever happened to be going on in Tristan's direct experience. And we're gonna try *not* to worry about what he thinks he does in general, or what I think *he* does in general, or what I think he doesn't do in general, or what he thinks he doesn't do in general or whatever. We're *not* interested in generals. If there are generals, they will emerge from the process. We're gonna try to take each beep as if it was its own thing. Not typical of Tristan, not typical of people in general. Not the same thing as I do or Amber does

25:10 Tristan: Trying. Yeah. Well see. Might be, it might be reading some very, uh, [laughs] annoying texts so that that may be the, the topic, but we'll, we'll see. We'll see.

25:23 RTH: That's what, if that's what the topic is, that's what the topic is. And that's part of the reason why we do this on multiple days, because presumably you'll be doing different things on different days. This is going to be a Friday, Saturday, and next time we do it, we might be some other day. And so there would be different things to do. And even if you are engaged in the reading of something, that doesn't mean that your experience is tied to that. So at the moment of some beep, you might have been distracted to think about what you're gonna have for dinner or whatever. And uh,

25:52 Tristan: Yeah,

25:52 RTH: Then that's, then, then that's what we'll we'll find.

25:55 Tristan: Alright. Yeah, that, that's great. Um, I think, I'm think I've got it. The mechanics comprehended, so I'm ready.

26:06 RTH: Alright, good. Well let's, uh, I think we're done for today then. And, uh, we will see each other in 24 and a half hours.

26:19 Tristan: Okay. Thanks Russ. Nice to meet you Amber.

26:21 AG: Hi. Nice to meet you too.

26:25 RTH: See you later.

26:26 Tristan: Bye.

26:27 AG: Bye.