**Shepherding Stuff**

**A Good Listener**

Someone has said that this is especially true for the effective counselor (shepherd). Active listening is an essential skill for the one who wants to successfully work with people. The road to the heart is through the ears. A good listener should be able to restate back the content and feelings behind his statements without judging them, adding to them, correcting them, or leaving anything out. This does not mean that the counselor (shepherd) merely acts like a parrot and just repeats verbatim what a person says, but is able to capture the content, feeling, and meaning and restate them in his own words in such a way that it communicates a total grasp of what the peron is thinking and experiencing.

*“The single most important factor in effective counseling* (shepherding) *is the personhood of the counselor* (shepherd)*. Regardless of one’s education, training, theoretical orientation, or counseling techniques, it is now widely accepted that if certain qualities are not brought to the helping relationship, little chance of successful intervention exists.”*

Dr. Keith Olson sums it up well: *“You are the main ingredient in counseling* (shepherding)*. The effectiveness of your counseling*(shepherding) *is determined primarily by the quality of your personality. The techniques that you use and the skills you possess, although important, are secondary to the quality of your being.”****[[4]](https://renew.org/characteristics-of-an-effective-counselor-do-you-have-what-it-takes-part-1/" \l "_ftn4)***

However, research has shown that there are certain characteristics that are found in the most successful counselors. You will want to try and incorporate those into your life if you wish to be the most effective counselor (shepherd).

**The Discovery of the “Big Three”**

What are the essential personality characteristics of effective counselors (shepherd)? Research has proven that clients of therapists improve if the therapist expresses high levels of 1) accurate empathy; 2) unconditional positive regard or warmth; and 3) genuineness or congruence. These findings have been supported by subsequent research and are found in practically every textbook on counseling and psychology. It will be helpful to define in more detail each particular characteristic.

**1. Accurate Empathy**

Empathy is the ability to communicate to another that you feel their pain. As far as it is humanly possible, you are sharing in their experience along with them whether it be grief, anger, depression, or hopelessness, etc. Empathy “implies both the capacity to enter into the feeling states and understandings of another person but also the capacity to communicate this to the person.”

Empathy is different from sympathy; it is deeper and stronger. With sympathy, you feel sorry for someone—but you are personally removed from the situation. With empathy, you feel sorry with someone—you enter into their situation and try to understand and experience it from the viewpoint of the client. “Sympathy is standing on the shore and throwing out a lifeline while empathy is jumping into the water and risking one’s safety to help another.”

**2. Unconditional Positive Regard or Warmth**

This is simply another way of saying “unconditional love” (Romans 5:8,10). It is nonjudgmental acceptance of people. Swiss counselor Paul Tournier said, “I have no methods. All I do is accept people.”

Caution: this does not mean that the counselor (shepherd) approves of all the current behaviors and choices of the teenager, but simply that he accepts the teenager as a worthwhile human being, made in the image of God and deserving of respect and care. “It is friendliness and consideration shown by facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, posture, eye-contact, and such non-verbal behavior as looking after the helpee’s comfort.”

**3. Genuineness or Congruence**

This trait refers to the necessity of the counselor’s behavioral and affective display to match what he is communicating. It must also be in harmony with the content currently being communicated by the other person. In other words, if the counselor is verbally communicating words of care and concern, but his tone of voice and body language are sending a message of boredom and indifference, then he is not being congruent or genuine. Another example of failing to exhibit congruence would be if the individual is sharing about a very painful experience and the counselor has a smile on his face and a very self-satisfied demeanor.

*“Genuineness cannot be faked. Either you sincerely want to help or you are simply playing the sterile role of a “helper”—hiding behind masks, defenses, or facades. In other words, authenticity is something you are, not something you do.”*