

A Review: Top 10 Things to Remember While Shepherding

1. **It takes courage for staff to ask for help and wisdom to care well.** Thank them for reaching out, affirm your interest in them and commitment to walk with them. Then begin and end your time with prayer, asking the Lord to lead.
2. **Create a safe space.** Define expectations and clarify your commitment to listen.
3. **Our part is to care, not cure.** We come alongside to serve staff with care. The pressure is off to cure them (that's God's part). Remember: We never ask the question "why?" as this objectifies the person, breaks relational one-ness, and puts them on the defensive.

David Benner writes: "Cure refers to actions that are designed to restore well-being that has been lost. Care [shepherds' wheelhouse] refers to actions that are designed to support the wellbeing of something or someone." -Care of Souls

4. **This is their time.** We listen attentively and give them dignity by not interrupting or directing the conversation to our perception of their situation. Our goal is to create a relational environment that serves God's formational work in them.
5. **This is about *their* struggle.** We draw out their story and refrain from sharing our own story, unless they ask or if a brief story will serve to build rapport for them to share more deeply. As you listen, there may be things they say that trigger your own feelings and underlying issues. Your intentionality of personal awareness will help you to separate your feelings and stay focused on listening to him/her.
6. **Practice curiosity through active listening.** Don't assume you know how they feel. Ask questions, reflect back what you are hearing, and then verify with open ended question like: "And in what you have relayed, do you believe/feel that I understood your concerns regarding _____ just now?" The goal here is for them to feel heard and known, enjoyed, and that they would know your empathy.

"He who answers before listening, that is his folly and his shame" (Proverbs 18:13, NIV).

7. **Follow the feelings to the needs below the waterline.** Help them expand on the feelings they initially express. What feelings are below the feelings? What is it like to feel like that? What's the intensity of the feelings? When else have they felt like that in their life?
8. **Normalize feelings.** In your empathy, reflect how you see the feeling they are experiencing as normal. Remember there are no positive or negative feelings. Feelings are lights on the dashboard telling us there is something below (we can't see) that needs to be addressed.
9. **Help them frame next steps for themselves.** After you are sure they feel heard and known by you, you can then ask what ways they are/or could use to address the need. If they struggle to know, help guide (not direct) them with questions like, "who do you trust that you could share this with?" and/or "What characters in the Bible might identify with you in your feelings? Is there anything from their story you can draw upon?"
10. **Ask permission to give your perspective or counsel.** Do not just offer a fix/resource/tool without asking if they want your counsel. They may just want someone else to hear their pain and need. If you do offer help, frame your comment with a clarifying statement like, "My primary concern is to hear your heart and be with you. As I listen to you, I wonder if ..." and then always circle back and ask how that help sets with them and/or if that help sounds feasible to act upon. If you give resources, give them sparingly. Too many resources may inadvertently put emphasis on self-help rather than create greater awareness and openness to God's help.