



Qualities and Skills of a Spiritual Director

INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Introduction

A baby fish asked its mother, "What is water?" The mother fish appreciating the wide open wonder of a child, lovingly explained, "Honey, you're in it!" Her response may not have been immediately understood by her child, but it was an invitation to attend to and draw wisdom from the present moment.

You may have asked yourself and surely have had the question put to you, "What is spirituality?" With appropriate adaptation, there is probably no better answer than, "Honey, you're in it!"

The world is immersed in mystery that often eludes rational attempts to unveil it. An unfathomable expansive energy pulses through our bodies and the human family has variously named it, universe, the sacred, spirit, god, truth, grace, or cosmic harmony.

The work of spirituality raises consciousness that the sacred space within mirrors the sacredness of the outer universe. Further, the work of spirituality explores the relationship between cosmic wholeness and the call to personal wholeness.

Spiritual directors, guides, and companions can assist others in this task only to the degree that they are continually with their own inner being and life journey. The *Qualities and Skills of a Spiritual Director*, culled over the history of the Institute for Spiritual Leadership and recently revised, is an inventory for the spiritual director.

It delineates what is necessary to bring to the role and how an individual effectively accomplishes the task. A list of statements following each quality and skill can be both a helpful guide for self-supervision and a focus for peer supervision.

Included here is the Institute for Spiritual Leadership's statement of *Core Values*, which supports the need for continual reflection on the path of personal transformation. May the *Qualities and Skills of a Spiritual Director* provide a rich source of reflection as, with wide open wonder, you gently hold yourself and those whom you guide.

QUALITIES

of a Spiritual Director

1. **INTERIORITY**: the capacity to be engaged with the deep meaning of life experiences.
2. **DISCERNMENT**: the capacity to recognize congruence between inner movement and lived experience.
3. **INTEGRITY**: the capacity to recognize and be faithful to the sacredness of the spiritual direction relationship.
4. **VULNERABILITY**: the capacity to be changed by the spiritual direction relationship.
5. **PRESENCE**: the capacity to meet the directee at a transformative level.
6. **TRUST**: the capacity to recognize and be confident in the activity of the Sacred within the spiritual direction relationship.
7. **COURAGE**: the capacity to be embodied fully so that the wisdom of the director's experience calls forth the inner knowing of the directee.
8. **RELATIONALITY**: the capacity to nurture a safe place that allows the energy of the director and the energy of the directee to interact and create something new.

1. INTERIORITY: the capacity to be engaged with the deep meaning of life experiences.

- a. I invite the directee to speak about experiences in a specific and welcoming manner.
- b. I reflect back to the directee the significant parts of what has been said.
- c. I facilitate a process of self-reflection that enables the directee to see and recognize experiences more clearly and to gain greater awareness in relation to these experiences.
- d. I assist the directee in accepting experiences at a deeper level.
- e. I notice patterns of behavior and appropriately reflect them back to the directee.
- f. I am patient with the unfolding interior process taking place within me and within the directee.
- g. I recognize and honor the value of my own experiences that lead to my own personal integration.

2. DISCERNMENT: the capacity to recognize congruence between inner movement and lived experience.

- a. I believe that the conversion process happens within all life experience.
- b. I invite the directee to see the call toward life in daily situations.
- c. I distinguish germination from stagnation.
- d. I follow the directee's inner wisdom wherever it seems to be leading.

3. INTEGRITY: the capacity to recognize and be faithful to the sacredness of the spiritual direction relationship.

- a. I take personal time to prepare myself to meet each directee.
- b. I create an environment in which the directee experiences safety, trust, confidence, and acceptance.
- c. I am authentically present wherever the directee is on the journey.
- d. I meet regularly with my own spiritual director and have adequate supervision.
- e. I participate in professional organizations and activities.

4. VULNERABILITY: the capacity to be changed by the spiritual direction relationship.

- a. I am present to moments of my own uncertainty during a direction session.
- b. I am open to being profoundly affected by the dynamics of the spiritual direction session.
- c. I share willingly parts of my own life story when appropriate.
- d. I reverence and hold the sacred space as the directee does inner work.

5. PRESENCE: the capacity to meet the directee at a transformative level.

- a. I see the spiritual direction relationship as a transformative experience.
- b. I hear, beyond the words, what the directee is communicating.
- c. I am sufficiently attentive to my own feelings so that I can respond authentically to the directee.
- d. I feel with the directee rather than feel for the directee.
- e. I reflect upon the spiritual direction session and acknowledge my strengths and limitations.

6. TRUST: the capacity to recognize and be confident in the activity of the Sacred within the spiritual direction relationship.

- a. I believe that the directee has the inner resources necessary to meet self, others, and the Sacred with authenticity.
- b. I trust that the directee holds the personal wisdom necessary for life.
- c. The directee is comfortable in my presence.
- d. I trust my own insight and intuition when responding to the directee.
- e. I welcome and accept graciously feedback from the directee that will help me to know the accuracy of my perceptions.
- f. I accept willingly that my perceptions are not always accurate.

7. COURAGE: the capacity to be embodied fully so that the wisdom of the director's experience calls forth the inner knowing of the directee.

- a. I risk making a response based on insight, observation, intuition, or feeling.
- b. I honor my authentic self and my experiences as I engage in the direction relationship.
- c. I appropriately invite a directee to acknowledge and be present to self while respecting resistances.
- d. I willingly access my experience in order to shape responses that facilitate the directee's deeper reflection on personal experiences.
- e. I know when it is appropriate to reveal my limitations to the directee.
- f. I face my own resistances.



8. RELATIONALITY: the capacity to nurture a safe place that allows the energy of the director and the energy of the directee to interact and create something new.

- a. I balance a contemplative presence with an active engagement and response to the directee.
- b. I honor the flow of energy by naming it, holding it, caring for it, and engaging it.
- c. I notice and hear, as well as reflect back, the energy of the directee's statements, stories, or body language.
- d. I encourage the directee to remain in relationship to the energy that surfaces in a session and to pay attention to where it resides in the body.
- e. I recognize the dynamics of my energy with the directee.
- f. I connect appropriately my energy to the directee's energy.
- g. I help the directee to welcome and integrate new insights.
- h. I am aware when I am reacting to the directee.
- i. I am aware that transference and counter transference can be present in a spiritual direction relationship.

SKILLS *of a Spiritual Director*

1. Listening to and hearing what another is saying, trying to say, or not saying.
2. Engaging the feelings and the emotional tone of another.
3. Recognizing the energy of the directee and facilitating the directee's exploration of this energy.
4. Inviting another to self-reflection in order to recognize, name, and honor inner experiences.
5. Challenging or confronting the directee in a respectful, compassionate manner.
6. Providing honest support and encouragement.
7. Identifying appropriate role expectations.
8. Recognizing and being comfortable with the directee's resistances.
9. Using a variety of skills to facilitate the directee's engagement with the life story.
10. Seeking personal and professional growth and supervision.

2. Engaging the feelings and the emotional tone of another.

- a. I am mindful of the directee's choice of words and their affective quality.
- b. I am attentive to sighs and other forms of verbal expression as well as to silence.
- c. I hear the emotions which lie hidden underneath the words that are expressed.
- d. I recognize when the feeling being expressed does not match the tone of voice or body language.
- e. I am aware of the directee's ability or lack of ability to express negative as well as positive affect.
- f. I reflect back appropriately.
- g. When I miss affect, I check to see if this feeling is too hard for me to acknowledge within myself.

3. Recognizing the energy of the directee and facilitating the directee's exploration of this energy.

- a. I am attentive to words and themes that the directee repeats.
- b. I sense when the directee's body language is an indication of energy.
- c. I am aware of affect, lack of affect, and/or shifts of affect as an indicator of the directee's energy.
- d. I recognize when my experience of the energy does not match the directee's stated energy.
- e. I am aware of my own energy level in the direction session.
- f. I am aware when there is incongruence between my energy and the directee's energy.

4. Inviting another to self-reflection in order to recognize, name, and honor inner experiences.

- a. I am attentive when the directee names and enters into inner experience.
- b. I am aware when the directee is making and seeing patterns.
- c. I meet and accompany the whole person in order to encourage the directee to meet and hold gently one's whole self.
- d. I am comfortable with a difficult emotional experience in order to allow the directee to stay with what is named as a difficult emotion.
- e. I stay with a directee in celebration and assimilation of insightful, peaceful, and joyful experiences.

5. Challenging or confronting the directee in a respectful, compassionate manner.

- a. I assist the directee to hear clearly what the directee is thinking, feeling, and saying.
- b. I point out patterns in the directee's life.
- c. My questions invite the directee to deeper reflection that facilitates the directee's challenge or confrontation of self.
- d. I understand that there is personal risk involved in raising difficult issues.
- e. I address difficult issues with the directee in a way that is constructive and growthful.
- f. I challenge and confront in various ways.
- g. I understand my own needs and am appropriately assertive with the directee.

6. Providing honest support and encouragement.

- a. I show verbal and non-verbal support for shifts that I observe in the directee.
- b. I make appropriate responses that support the directee's reality.
- c. I resist rescuing the directee from painful or conflicted feelings that need to be experienced or worked through.
- d. I affirm the directee's process without lending support for any particular decision.

7. Identifying appropriate role expectations.

- a. I meet the directee exactly where the directee is without resorting to habitual and/or planned strategies.
- b. I acknowledge but put aside my own agenda, needs, or expectations in order to be present to a directee's experience or issues.
- c. I express intuitions, felt senses, and insights in a non-threatening, respectful manner and let go of the outcome.
- d. I know my own dynamics well enough to appreciate when to respond immediately and when to wait.
- e. I notice when I rescue, teach, instruct, or give advice.
- f. I relate my own experience when appropriate.
- g. I am fully present to and journey with someone whose belief system is different from my own.
- h. I am mindful of the importance of fidelity to my own journey, to my own self-knowledge and woundedness.

8. Recognizing and being comfortable with the directee's resistances.

- a. I am attentive to the directee's patterns of response that may be signs of resistance.
- b. I respect resistance as a place of growth or a place that needs protection.
- c. I respect and have compassion for the directee who is resisting.
- d. I recognize the directee's resistance without taking responsibility for it.
- e. I address and work with the resistant behavior so that the directee comes to greater knowledge of self, especially in areas that are frightening.
- f. I can experience resistance without blaming either myself or the directee.

9. Using a variety of skills to facilitate the directee's engagement with the life story.

- a. I understand the process of Active Imagination, including grounding the image[s] to the directee's life.
- b. I understand the various processes of dream interpretation and help the directee to relate dreams to everyday issues in the directee's life.
- c. I understand the process of sub-personality work.
- d. I understand the Focusing steps, including savoring what has surfaced for the directee.
- e. I recognize the appropriate moment within the direction session for using these approaches to awareness.
- f. I use these approaches confidently.
- g. I continue to deepen my understanding of developmental stages and the ways a person blocks growth and change.

10. Seeking personal and professional growth and supervision.

- a. I meet regularly with a spiritual director.
- b. I am an active member of a peer supervision group or I meet regularly with an individual supervisor.
- c. I seek some form of supervision when I sense that I need assistance immediately.
- d. I am a member of a professional organization of spiritual directors.
- e. I set aside time and resources to participate in enrichment opportunities for spiritual directors and/or supervisors.
- f. I recognize the limits of my competencies and refer when appropriate.

ISL Core Values

A belief in the oneness of all spiritual traditions.

A belief in rediscovering and expanding the wisdom of the Christian tradition.

A belief that we are in the midst of a foundational paradigm shift that affects our core identity and our relationship with the entire cosmic community.

A belief that it is in and through the interior journey that individual and world consciousness changes.

A belief that the interior development of the spiritual leader as a person supports that individual's development as a skilled professional.

A belief that a person can be present to another in a companioning way to the extent that a person is in touch with one's own inner being and life journey.

A belief that an incarnational spirituality that reverences the holy in all areas of life encourages the exploration of the unity between psychological development and spiritual growth.

In light of our commitment to the Core Values,

ISL's Board and Staff are encouraged to:

- Provide a safe and supportive environment in order to attend to life experience.
- Invite participants into the process of personal transformation.
- Teach a process of self-reflection and self-revelation which leads to deeper affective self-knowledge.
- Model a contemplative attitude toward all of life.

ISL Program Participants are encouraged to:

- Become familiar with the sacred space within themselves which mirrors the sacredness of their outer Universe.
- Engage in an exploration of the relationship between cosmic wholeness and their call to personal wholeness.
- Acquire an ability to name, accept and integrate their personal experience.
- Grow in deeper appreciation of their own life stories.
- Gain an understanding of the dynamics of the transformative process.
- Integrate the conscious and unconscious elements of their own personality.
- Explore the myths and symbols that have power in their lives and the inner dynamics that have driven their behaviors.
- Develop a contemplative attitude toward life.
- Learn to trust the process of life.
- Develop a capacity for living in full and present awareness.
- Learn to companion self and others.
- Live more holistically.
- Become familiar with the sacred space within, where God dwells.

The Institute for Spiritual Leadership offers a program for men and women who value the inner life and desire to be of service in the world. Founded in 1974 by Paul Robb, SJ, and Irene Dugan, rc, this unique program facilitates the discernment of a call to the ministry of spiritual direction. By focusing on personal growth and professional training, the participants discover the ability to listen deeply, be present to the moment, and access inner wisdom. This process significantly transforms them, whether they are spouses, parents, counselors, administrators, or pastoral ministers.

Through an experiential process facilitated by caring mentors, participants learn the dynamics of self-knowledge and continuing transformation while growing in their ability to companion another with skill and compassion. More than 1,000 participants, who have taken up this challenge of personal and professional integration, are now engaged in ministry around the world in over sixty countries. Although centered in Chicago, the Institute for Spiritual Leadership is participating in the transformation of the world.

for further information, contact:



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