



My Approach to Ministering Interviews | A How I Lead Interview with Sharon Kaye Fisher

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In modern times, one of the most difficult issues leaders are faced with is helping those who struggle with mental health. No longer can we simply encourage a good measure of scripture study and prayer and expect everyone's life to stabilize. This is why leading saints felt it was so important to organize the mentally healthy saints library. There, one can find 25 plus presentations all about ministering to those who struggle with mental health. We cover topics like depression, anxiety, screw velocity, or OCD, we even cover how to effectively refer individuals to professional therapists and make sure they're getting the help they need. This and so much more. If you'd like to review all of these sessions, we would love to have you do so at no cost. You can visit [leading saints dot org slash 14](https://leading-saints.org/14) and get access to the full library for 14 days. You'll also receive access to all our virtual libraries where we cover additional leadership related topics. So click the link in the show notes or simply visit [leading saints dot org slash 14](https://leading-saints.org/14). We're jumping to another how I lead episode where we reach out to everyday leaders across the world and just ask them how is it that they lead? And today we're headed up to a beautiful part of the United States of America, anchorage, Alaska to chat with Sharon K Fisher. Welcome to the leading saints podcast, Sharon. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Hasan, now we chat a little bit before we hit record and you've been in anchorage area for about ten years and maybe just put your life into perspective as far as where you originally from and your development and faith in the church. Well, I grew up in Southern California. I grew up in the church, my family was very active. My dad was the bishop or in the bishopric, most of the time

through my teenagers. And then when we got my I met my husband, BYU, and we spent most of our married life in Southern California, a short time in Florida, short time in Texas, and then we moved here to Alaska 12 years ago. Nice. Nice. And what's the best part of living in Alaska? Oh my goodness. This summer's are beyond beautiful. It's so true. I visited in the summers, and it's just mind boggling. I feel like I'm walking around in a postcard. It's so beautiful up there. Yes. And pitchers don't do it justice. Take a picture and you're like, no, it's pretty bad. Yeah, but it's definitely a place everybody has to visit. For sure. I guess a year ago, a couple of years ago, you were released as serving as the ward release society president. How long did you serve in that role? So I was released last July, so it's been a little over months. And I served for 5 years in that calling. Nice. And when you were first called, was this your first go, it really studied president? It was my first English study president. I had been in the primary president a couple of times to take president young one as president, but honestly, and I didn't counselors in all those. Organizations, but relief site president was one I had hoped. I would never have. I never told anyone for fear it would happen. But it did anyway. Nice. Nice. Is there anything to the story of how you recall that stands out or was it pretty routine? Well, I had just been serving as the stake primary president, which I would say that is the calling I probably loved probably almost more than any other calling. And then I get called into the one calling that I had hoped to not get. So in contrast is pretty extreme. And what do you remember just from those first couple of weeks or first couple months of transitioning to that role, selecting counselors or does anything stand out during that time? Well, every time I've been served as a president, I always felt like the hardest thing was picking my counselors because I knew once I had good counselors, they were going to help me with everything else. And so that was always kind of for me because stress, but I was very blessed with good counselors. One of them served the entire 5 years a second. My second counselor, I went through 6 of them, because they kept moving or having babies. And I served with wonderful, wonderful women. And that really that makes all the difference. Yeah. And is there anything to the process that you go through? Is it more of just like a reflective, meditative, maybe going to the temple type thing or how did you go about selecting those counselors? Well, when I was called a state primary president, we were kind of new in the state and I didn't know very many people in this state.

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And I was really felt at a loss. And this state president gave me some really good advice. He said, think about the type, the kind of woman you want to serve with you. And then look for that kind of woman. Rather than just going through names, what would she be good? Think of the kind of woman, the qualities you need to balance your weaknesses or whatever, and then look for that kind of person has that. And I loved that. Nice. And not to be on the spot, but as far as considering your own weaknesses and making up the gap with the counselor, what comes to mind is you think, what are your weaknesses and then how did you feel that gap? Well, let me

say I need someone that's maybe has a stronger personality than I do. Okay. More of a push forward kind of person because I tend to take a softer approach and so I need someone that can. Be direct and say it like it is and you know I need that to balance me out. Nice. Awesome. So I want to give a shout out to your husband Brent to also listen to the leading saints. And I think he's the one that put this interview in motion by reaching out to me and suggesting your name. Which I appreciate because I know this will be a great opportunity to learn from you. But he had mentioned sort of your approach to ministering with ministering interviews and connection and just ministering on a one to one level. And I don't think anybody really has it figured out per se, but this is definitely something that a lot of really society presidents, elder scorn presence, seek guidance on prey about just how do I do these ministering interviews in a way that is sincere that's effective and whatnot. And so just talking broadly about this concept of ministering and one to one connection, where should we start with that concept? First of all, when I was called, I felt like my priority needed to be one on one ministry to sisters. And that I would have my counselors do as much as possible the activities and the Sunday and the temple and family history and I had wonderful compassionate service leaders and I wanted my time to be able to use one on one. And we did my cancers to administering interviews also, but I still stepped in even they were being interviewed formally for ministry. I still stepped in and talked to sisters just throughout the ward and really it was a prayerful thing knowing who needs a little bit more attention right now who needs a little bit more support. And mostly these were like informal. I mean, sometimes I would go to homes and visit a lot was done on the phone, especially during COVID. Lots and lots of phone calls. Sometimes at church, like I'd make a conscious effort to seek someone out to make contact. And I'd always pray before church. If there was someone that needed. Needed some attention or needed some love, you know, that I would be guided and directed to who needed that. So like I said, most of these were informal contact, you know, just calling up saying I've been thinking about you. How are you doing? And through those frequent contacts and a lot of time sisters would open up and start sharing with me because I felt like a relationship of trust had been established. And so I had the opportunity to, I guess you could call it counseling, but visiting with sisters and there's so there was a couple principles that I tried to keep in mind and these visits. And number one, to be a safe place, and number two to be a listening ear. So let me just kind of break those down just a little bit. So to be a safe place, or sisters felt safe sharing with whatever was on their heart. And that meant listening without judgment. To know that they weren't being judged. And to keep confidences, if someone told me something very personal, I would let them know I will not share this unless you gave me permission. And sometimes I would feel like my counselors would be a support to or that it needed to the bishop need to be aware, but I would ask permission. Is it okay if I share this with my counts first or with the bishop? Just so that they knew that what they said was safe because if people don't feel it safe, then they're not going to share next time.

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Yeah. So to make it a safe place and then to listen with your heart. And something really valuable that I learned from one of my counselors is to begin by simply validating and acknowledging what they're saying. A lot of times we want to jump in with a suggestion or a solution or a pat answer, but really to just validate what they're experiencing and just say, I can see this is really hard. And this is painful. I am so sorry that you're going through this. I'm not even sure what to say, but thank you for sharing what you tell me more. And just to validate and then let them share and to listen, really, just listen. To understand, and as I would listen, I would be praying the whole time. If there was something I should say or do, that I would be inspired because honestly, I have no training in counseling. And I'm just like, I'm clueless. So I would just be praying. And sometimes I thought would come to me and at the appropriate time I would then ask permission. I would say, you know, as we talked, I thought has come to me is that, okay, if I share that, and I found that if I were to ask permission, people are more willing to be accepting of what you have to offer. And then to ask the question, what do you want and what do you need? Because sometimes we just assume we assume we know their needs and sometimes if we're asked, we might be very surprised. And is there a camp by share example of that? Yeah, please do. I love that. So I remember this one time as sister in the ward, had a baby and she had she had a C section. So it was going to be a longer recovery and physical restrictions. And she was prone to postpartum depression, and she knew that. And so as I touched base with her and checked to see how she was doing and what she needed, what she wanted. In my mind, I'm thinking she probably had some meals and maybe some help with the housework or whatever those kinds of things. And she said, what I really need is I need someone to come and be with me during the day. Just for an hour or two, when my husband's gone and the kids are at school, I need someone to come talk to me because if I'm alone, that's when I feel that I may fall into the depression. And so I was so thankful that she was honest about that and I was glad I asked because then I was able to line it. Sisters to give an hour or two. During the day and difference sisters offered that support and it was good for the sister that needed it. It was good for the sisters that were able to go and get to know her. It wasn't a hard thing. It was just going in visiting for an hour. So just asking, what do you need and what do you want? Is really an important thing. And then to be a connector. And our presidency meeting, we would always kind of look at each other and smile and say, we're just the connectors because as we would find out, needs of sisters as we would discuss that, and actually that's a good part of what our presence see meeting was. Was talking about needs. We had all the administrative stuff, but most of our presidency meeting was spent talking about individual needs. So as we became aware of needs, and then a sisters who could help meet those needs would say, well, we just need to connect them. We're just the connectors. We don't have to do it all, but we're aware of the needs where I'm aware of the gifts and we can connect these sisters so that they can be a support to each other. Yeah. And I'd love to just stay concept of that that it removes a lot of the weight of sometimes these calling that we put on ourselves because of these callings. I got to do it all or they're depending on me, but just say, I'm just the connector. I don't have to do it all, but if I can facilitate the connection, great. Right, exactly. And then to encourage them to continue praying and reading their scriptures even if it's just opening up and reading and sometimes when people are going through really hard things or painful things, sometimes they can feel disconnected from the spirit or not feel it and it's easy to let go of those habits of prayer

and scripture time that just encourage them to continue that because Jesus Christ is going to be the healer.

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The true healer and they need to keep that connection. And then probably the most important thing is to express love. Let them know that you love them and heavenly father and Jesus Christ loves them. And to let them feel your love and be the bridge to feeling heavenly father and Jesus Christ love if they can't feel right then that can feel your love and be the bridge to win. They can feel that. So I love that. I love that. There's so much there, Sharon. To consider because I would have asked if you were to talk to a brand new release site who's taking on this role of doing ministry interviews that there's some great key points here. First of all, I'd love this routine of taking on a posture of service by just before you go to church or engage in this role as releasing president you're doing so prayerfully. You're saying help me pick up on the needs and who I need to reach out to and I love that inviting that guidance of the spirit. And frequency is as far as this building relationship of trust, like frequency is definitely underrated in my opinion. And that's why I'm a big proponent that the really studied president or the elder scorn president that they are the one that does the interviews again and again and again, I know it's a lot of work, but if you delegate everything else, it is possible. And because when they see you sharing, every time they have an interview, they're like, oh, this Sharon Kagan. I'm connected with her, but if it's different, it's harder to build that deeper connection. So frequency is a huge one. Love the validation, asking permission. To me, this is a great outline. Again, not that everybody should follow this outline or do it this way. But if you're lost, what a great way to approach these ministering interviews. And a lot of them were not ministering interviews. They were just I felt a need to make contact and just check in. How are you doing? And that was it. Just how are you doing? Yeah. Yeah. And so how did that connect it? And that's obviously everybody wants to be in that posture with this. We're not just trying to get through the list of ministering interviews. But how did that overlay with the administrative duty that you had to do ministering interviews, did you sort of count these casual interviews as that connection like, okay, well I just met with Susan on a casual meeting or I called her and so I'm going to count that as the ministering interview or how did you fulfill that? It just kind of depended and actually when the intent was to do administering interview, the very first question I would ask was how are you doing? And sometimes that's how we talked about. Right, yeah. Because that's what was needed. We never even got to who they minister to. And that was okay. That was okay because that was the need. So it just, I just let the spirit guide, you know? It was kind of different and depending on the situation. Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense. Anything else with counseling with sisters, administering that we have a hit on or do we hit the main points there? Well, just a couple more things. To recognize when the situation is bigger than what you can handle and to say, you know, I think this is something the bishop needs to be aware of, you know, I encourage you to

meet with the bishop or to give them resources, I had names and members of LDS. Professional counselors and support groups. And so to have that resource information a bit available. When that was needed, and then something. That I wasn't aware of. And I don't even know if it was available when I was serving. But the church website has some awesome resources. I don't know if it was there when I was serving if it was. I didn't know about it. Yeah. But so if you just go to the church website and type in counseling resources and then also the general hand section or chapter 31, as good ideas and suggestions. So I would pass that on because I didn't know about it and I did. Yeah, it's right there, but sometimes we miss those obvious resources, deaf leaders. Awesome. So let's just talking more generally as far as your approach to the very study, this concept of you put down an outline here as far as ask God, what is most needed now? Any example or experience coming to mind? Yes, actually.

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It was the second day after I was calm. So as I said, this was not the kind I had ever hoped or wanted to have. And so I was feeling extremely extremely overwhelmed and not even knowing where to begin and just absolutely overwhelmed. And so I had gone to pick up my son from school, and so I had gone early to sit in that long, you know, pick up line of parents to pick up their kids from school in a pickup line. You know what I mean? Yeah. But school wasn't even out yet. So is there early? And I'm just sitting there in the car and just having this little conversation with him, my father, just telling him, you know, I don't even know if I can do this. I don't even know where to start. And the thought came to me to call a particular sister. And I thought, okay, I can do that. And I knew she had had surgery that week before, and so I called her to check on her to see how she was doing, what she needed, or wanted, and that she was loved. And then when I hung up, then the spirit taught me and said, you don't have to do everything, ask me what is needed now, and I will help you know. And right then, what was needed was to call that sister. And so I would, so that's what I did. I would constantly ask, okay, can we what is most needed now? What is most needed today? And often it was an individual. A person to contact. Yeah. And so I just learned, yes, ask my father. What is most needed now? And he'll help you. It's his work. And he'll help you know. Yeah. Wow, I love that. You know what? He often hear about this concept of staying present. Even meditation practices, that's sort of the goal is to just get your mind present. And I love that in this effort of these callings, because you think, wow, 5 years is a long time, or how is this upcoming activity going to go, but to just take a moment on a daily basis and just get present with your calling and say, well, what about right now? And over time, I bet that's going to be the work you do sort of in that moment would be more valuable than really anything else you do. Right. Yeah, that's powerful. All right, being willing to let God take you on detours. Did you go on a few details? Detours, Sharon Kay? Yes. And so it's good to have plans. We need to have plans. But we also need to recognize that maybe God has a different planet and allow ourselves to go on a detour with him. And I remember one situation I

had had a sister come to mind that I should contact and check in on. And I thought, okay, I'll do that on Sunday. I'll find her at church after church and I'll check in on her. So that's what I did. I found her, and she was busy talking to someone. And so I was just kind of waiting for her to finish. And as I was standing there in the hall waiting, someone else came up to me and started talking to me. And it couldn't have been more than really, like, less than two minutes. Maybe a minute. And I turned back around and this other sister's gone. And I asked, I said, well, we're a sister Santa. And someone said, oh, she just left she went home. I'm thinking, you gotta be kidding. How did that happen? So I went home and when I got home, I had the very strong impression to call her. So I picked up the phone and I called her and I said, you know, I've been thinking about you. You've been on my mind. I just want to check and see how you're doing. And she started to cry. And she said, I'm not doing very well. In fact, I came home from church and I was feeling really low, and I was just praying and saying, heavenly father, I just need to know that I'm loved. And then the phone rang. And it was me. Oh, well, those are awesome moments. Yeah. And we had a really, really good visit. And she shared a lot and it was a really good visit. And then I thought, you know what? If it had gone according to my plan, I would have talked to her at church, and we would not have had that kind of visit, because her little kids would have been there and they've been wanting to go home. And so I had a good plan.

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But God had a better plan. And he took me on a little detour so that we could meet her needs the way she needed them at. And we found that a lot in our presence in meeting as we would make changes and assignments and kind of talk through what would work well before we present it to the elders chronic bishop. Sometimes we just have a stupor of thought as to who should be someone's administering sister and I remember when it was like a couple meetings we had a stupor of thought. And finally, on another, like the third try, all of a sudden, a sister's name came to mind. All of us said it at the same time. And the reason was, she had just moved in the ward. She had been in the ward before. She had actually lived in the ward previously a few years before so we knew her, but this sister we were trying to find a ministering sister for had some special needs and special circumstances. And we just had to wait for God's timing. You know, we had a good plan. Go ahead and wait on his timing. And he kind of took us around a little different ways to finally, it was right and then it all works. So God has the perfect plans. Yeah. And sometimes we just got to go on the detours or wait, wait on his timing. Yeah, I love how you frame that concept because in leadership, we talk about setting vision and there's sort of this vision of a leader pointing direction and we're all moving that direction. But to letting sort of God know and being willing to be open to those detours. Like, yeah, we have a general direction we're going, but hey, if you need to interrupt this meeting or whatever it is, we're willing to do that. And I think that that's something we can practice more and more just being a little more aware of those detours that God's nudging us towards. Right. Yeah, that's awesome. I

know you mentioned a little bit about this already, but as far as give how you are able, God makes up the difference. Is there any more to fill in there? Yeah, this was actually a lesson I learned many years ago and has helped me through all my colleagues and circumstances. And so this was when my children were very little. And I had been sick for an extended period of time. In fact, I had been bedridden for months, many months. And then I was finally gaining some strength but still I could barely make it through a day. I mean, I could barely take care of myself, my children, and to grow the grocery store was a major event. It would take me a couple days to recover and I remember one day I was in the grocery store, just trying to make it through. Buy a few things. And I was feeling pretty bad about myself. And I'm thinking, you know, I can't do anything. I'm not being a good mother. I can't do my calling. I can't give service. I can't do anything. And when I said those words to myself, I can't do anything. The spirit said, you can smile. I thought, okay, I can smile. And so as I walk through the grocery store, I smile. And I don't know if that made a difference for anyone, maybe it did. I don't know, but as I got in the car, I felt like can my father was so pleased and saying good job. You did what you could and I will make it more. I will make a little effort more. Good job. I'm so proud of you. And so I just tried to remember that, especially when I had big coins to just do what I can. And how many father is so happy and so pleased at our efforts and he will make more of our efforts. He will magnify because he is a God of abundance, and that's what he does. Nice. Wow, that's inspiring. I love that. And so encouraging. And I can make a bank of many moments in my leadership journey where God just took me aside and put his arm around me and just say, you're doing great. Don't be so hard on yourself. You can do your effort is good enough for me. That's awesome. One concept that we were hoping to have time for and we're going to take time. This concept of strengthening those that you have stewardship over and maybe this spills over to your time is primary president and state primary president. But break down that principle for us. Well, it's something that I learned when I was a young primary present. I was 23. I had never been in a primary presence before.

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I really, my leadership had been, you know, I've been Laurel class president when I was 16. And so I was very young, inexperienced, didn't know what I was doing. And it was a huge primer. We had like 220 kids in this primary. And as military wars, it was literally families moving in and out weekly. And I didn't even know enough to know that someone should orient me in my calling. And I never got any orientation from anybody. You're the first one ever sharing gay. But, but the outgoing president told me one thing that really has helped me in all my different cons. It has application for my other colleagues. And what she told me was take care of the teachers and they'll take care of the children. And so that was the focus to take care of those right under my stewardship, the teachers, the one on one, like what we've talked about, what do you need? What do you want, how can I support you? Taking care of them. And then they will take care of

the children. And in my relief society calling. Our presidency felt that it was important to strengthen the women. Strengthen the mothers and the women in the war because then they will strengthen the families. And so just if we will strengthen those that we have, stewardship over, they then will be able to strengthen those within their circle of influence. So that was just an important thing that I learned. I love that. This is a strong leadership principle for sure. Well, sharing. Okay, this has been awesome. As we wrap up, I'm just curious, sometimes that's more practical questions here at the end. As a presidency and really society or maybe even some of your other leadership callings, was there any app or system or thing you did or Tuesday night, ice cream nights with the ladies. I mean, whatever it is, is there anything that really worked and maybe is more unique than anything else. Anything come to mind. Well, I just, you know, just sisters kind of on their own sometimes with once it's to wanted to have a come follow me, study group and just to write decisions. So encouraging sisters like the presidency doesn't have to do everything, right? Yeah. And so encourage encourage that unity and that sisterhood and let other sisters step in to roles to help bring that about to that we don't have to do it as the leaders. We can we can encourage and we can support. And we don't have to do it all. Yeah. I love that. Love that. The Sharon Kay, the last question I have for you is as you reflect on your time as release society president and some of your other leadership roles. How is being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ? Well, every time I've had a leadership calling, which I will have to say would not be my choice of calling the seems to be the ones I've also had, but every time I've had the leadership calling, I have been very keenly aware of my inadequacies, my weaknesses, my limitations, and that I am simply an instrument God's hand. I'm just a pan in his hand, and he's doing the work, and so the best thing I can do is to become more like the savior and follow him better and more fully and then he will use me, how he will. To do his work. And it's a sacred, it's a sacred thing to be able to do his work. And that concludes this how I lead interview. I hope you enjoyed it and I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email on social media in a text, wherever it makes the most sense and share it with somebody who could relate to this experience. And this is how we, how we develop as leaders, just hearing what the other guy's doing, trying some things out, testing, adjusting, for your area, and that's where great leadership is discovered, right? So we would love to have you share this with somebody in this calling or a related calling, and that would be great. And also, if you know of somebody, any type of leader who would be a fantastic guest on how I lead segment reach out to us, go to leading saints dot org slash contact, maybe send this individual an email, letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for this interview. We'll reach out to them and see if we can line them up. So again, go to leading saints dot org slash contact and there you can submit all the information and let us know. And maybe they will be on a feature how I lead segment on the leading saints podcast.

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And remember to review the mentally healthy saints library, click the link in the show notes or go to leading.saints.org/slash14. It came as a result of a position of leadership, which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and when the declaration was made, concerning the all and only true living church upon the face of the earth. We were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we can not shrink nor run away. And to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability