

Why Should I Listen To You Anyway?

**What you Need to Know About the
Spiritual Development Industry & Your Place In It**

by

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Spiritual Development has become a part of our mass consumption culture. **The benefit to this is accessibility and visibility.** There are thousands of teachers to choose from, countless books you can read, and ever-so-many courses you can take. **The challenge is that the industry is self-regulated, super-saturated, and stuffed full of as much junk as genius.**

Most people will spend more time researching a new car purchase, interviewing potential babysitters, trying out different hairdressers, or weighing their options at the local gym than they ever will invest in investigating their spiritual teachers.

One of the most common sources of spiritual stress (a feeling of disappointment, frustration, or doubt about your spiritual progress) is a lack of awareness or knowledge about the industry and its leaders.

Spiritual stress is inevitable when you feel as if:

- You wasted your time with a particular path or teacher.
- You have been bamboozled with false promises, high-pressure sales tactics, or prices that seem too high.
- You were set up for disappointment because of what you didn't know going in. And you end up wishing you "could have known that before!" or, even worse, you "should have known better!"
- You are disillusioned by the experience.
- You can't speak clearly and confidently about your spirituality and the choices you make - even after a lot of study.
- You are sort of embarrassed to mention where or with whom you study because you don't like the way they market themselves or you don't feel they have a strong professional ethic.
- You can't get your questions answered about the benefits of a particular program or the value of studying with a particular teacher.
- The books you read are great but you can't figure out how to apply the information and insights.

YOU CAN AVOID (OR CORRECT) THESE PROBLEMS BY EDUCATING YOURSELF ON THE INDUSTRY AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO BECOME A STRONG, EMPOWERED & SMART PARTICIPANT.

This document contains what I consider to be the 7 most important facts about the spiritual development industry. These industry facts *directly* impact your learning and growth experience and therefore your degree of spiritual stress.

Each fact contains a thorough description of its

implications as well as examples of how it plays out in the industry. At the end of each section there is a TIP that you can use to create a more empowered – and less stressful, experience of your spiritual exploration.

I frequently encourage you to contact me if you have a story, question, or concern about a specific leader or what they are doing within the industry. You can do so by sending an email to either:

info@spiritualstressbusters.com or
info@lovethreshold.com

- please put "**industry feedback**" in the subject heading so that either I, or my administrative staff, can flag the content and it can be handled more efficiently.

Industry Fact #1: Spiritual Leaders Often Use a Marketing Funnel – and They Don’t Always Use It Well

(This is a long one, but it’s *really* important!)

Ok! If your potential spiritual leader is taking their business seriously, chances are they have studied at least some marketing. Most information-based entrepreneurs (info-preneurs, as we are called) work according to what the industry refers to as “The Funnel.

The funnel is based in the notion that as the investment for the customer increases, the number of customers who will participate decreases. Investment is a combination of financial cost, time commitment, and the intensity or depth of the material.

So for each level of investment, we have fewer customers, but each customer is investing increasingly more for their product or programming at that new level.

This gives the info-preneurs our largest customer base at the lowest investment level (hopefully returning to make more purchases over time) and an increasingly smaller pool of really dedicated, high investing customers as they trickle down the funnel.

What does this mean for you?

Two really important things:

First, it means that you can expect a certain amount of up-selling (encouraging you to buy at the next level of investment) and down-selling (encouraging you to buy at the lower level, if the higher level sell didn’t work.)

The up-selling and down-selling is called “marketing momentum” and it’s a natural part of the process. This doesn’t automatically make your spiritual leader a money-grubbing sales person.

In many ways it’s a good sign. It means they are taking their business seriously, investing time and money in their own self-improvement (very few of us know how to do this instinctively), and is, therefore, far more likely to deliver on their promises and value good customer service.

It’s the *way* the info-preneur up-sells and down-sells that counts. Watch for their ability to do it with maturity and grace. You don’t want to feel as if:

- You are being sold to every time you turn around.
- Their “free stuff” is more about teasing you into the next level than about their generosity and willingness to support you.
- Every chance to provide you with real value is also used as an opportunity to promote something else.
- You would hesitate to recommend it to others because of the non-stop email campaigns that flood your mailbox or high-pressure sales tactics that take place.

- The old bait-and-switch is in place – you sign up for one thing and suddenly you are being pushed into something else ... or even worse, you sign up for one thing and then find out you can’t receive full value unless you buy-in at a higher level.
- The constant addition of “value-added” material actually feels like they are working the script of an infomercial and could throw in a set of steak knives at any minute. (And if you act now you’ll also receive ... there are \$10 000 dollars worth of bonus materials included ... this workshop can cut through a tin can and still slice a tomato as thin as a piece of paper!!)

One very good marketing rule states that 80% of what you receive from your teacher should be solidly good value-added material, 20% can then be used for shameless self-promotion.

So please keep in mind that the selling is part of the process and will happen – it makes us better businesspeople and there is nothing wrong with it.

The important thing to remember is that some of us are dedicated to making it as authentic and generosity-based as possible, others are not so well intentioned, and still others are struggling to find their most natural approach to it.

The second really important thing you need to know about the funnel is how to spot the way it is being used. **For a conscious info-preneur the funnel it is a tool for understanding how to build better relationships with customers, not for getting more customers or making more sales.**

As I was writing my “Stress Points: The Top 10 Hidden Spiritual Misunderstandings That Keep You From Living in Peace” document I got some classic funnel advice from a fellow leader.

She suggested that I offer the first couple of misunderstandings for free and then require people purchase the document if they want to read the whole thing. (Using the funnel as a teaser to make more sales.) She then said (with real love and care for me), “Arria, I just want to make sure you are taking care of yourself. Are you making sure to use this document to build to a sale? (Using the funnel as an up-sell converter.)

Without missing a beat, I said, “No. Absolutely not! I am using this document to build relationships! My personal and professional goal is that every single item you find in the FREE Tools and Resources on the Spiritual Stress Busters site and in my Discovery Level on the Love Threshold website will:

- Help you become more informed and therefore stronger and more responsible as a consumer of spiritual development.
- Support you in your journey in terms of releasing spiritual stress and finding true joy as a spiritual seeker
- Provide you with solid value you can feel good about without needing to buy-in at the next level.

- Give you a real sense of who I am, what I have to offer, and that I truly care about your well-being.

... *regardless of whether or not you ever purchase one of my products or take a course with me.*

Ask yourself the following questions when investigating a potential teacher, program or product:

- **Do they have “free stuff” available?** This can be sample talks or free product, chapters from books, special reports, free events, video, radio interviews etc. It’s not always obvious, but if you poke around on websites, you can usually find it.

- **Do they have “free stuff” other than that one free item you can get by submitting your name and email on the home page?**

This is called the “opt in box” in the industry. It’s how we build our databases. If the topic remotely interests you, I encourage you to sign up (you can always unsubscribe later) but look around to see if there is more available. Have they gone the extra mile to let you know who they are and what they value?

- **Do you get the feeling that they are really giving to you?** Are they giving as a way of teasing you into a larger purchase? Are they only going as far as they have to gain your interest? Or, do you get the feeling they are “going the extra mile?” because that’s what you want. You want to feel like you are dealing with a truly generous person who is using good business principle as an excuse to pour value, support, and care out into the world and into your life.

- **Is the “free stuff” about you or about what they want to sell you?** This is a tricky thing in this industry and you need to be able to tell the difference. You’ll sense that it is about what they want to offer if it is soaked in promotion and up-selling, but also take a look at the content. Do you feel genuinely informed and stronger because of it? Did it speak to your personal journey? Do you recognize yourself in it? Those are the hallmarks of a you-focused item.

- **What is their marketing material for and what kind of business focus do they have?**

For example, some spiritual leaders focus on meeting people locally. This gives them a chance to build relationships in person. Their websites, therefore, may not have a relationship-building feel as you are already intended to know them before you find them on-line.

For example, I recognize that spiritual seekers are constantly cycling through stress in their quest to become more spiritually advanced. So I have created a line of free products and tools that address this issue. They are all about you and what might be helpful to you.

And there is a LOT of it. I pride myself on having higher quantities of “free stuff” as well as having a more diverse selection than most spiritual leaders. As far as I know I am the only one to have created a document like this one, for example.

I used to create programs and products that were about what I wanted to say to the world or the message that I have inside my soul to deliver. Is that bad? No!

Did that make me inauthentic or lacking in integrity? Absolutely not! But I am a better businessperson now. I am a stronger and more responsive leader.

I am far more aware of what frustrates you in this industry and my goal is to create an experience that frees you from those frustrations. Another good example is the Free Introductory Talk. Many leaders (including me) will use this format to introduce themselves, their work, and their other products to you. This is a popular model precisely because it is so good! Will you get the up-sell pitch to the full course? Yes! Will you get the down-sell pitch to other products in case you choose not to follow-up with the full course? Sometimes. Again, it’s the way this happens that is important.

I have bought into full courses simply because the leader managed to stuff an incredible amount of value into the free intro. I can think of one example where I knew instantly that I would regret it if I didn’t immediately purchase the larger course!

The leader was so good and she had done such an excellent job of empowering and inspiring me in less than 60 minutes that I became one of the first people to register for her program, inspired others to take the course, sent her a personal thank you card, and have now developed an on-going relationship with her.

Essentially, when you review a potential leader or teacher, you want to ask yourself two important questions:

1. **Am I being reached out to in a sincere way – do I get a sense of who this person is, why I should listen to them, and what they would have to offer me specifically?**
2. **Am I receiving genuinely good value when they reach out to me – or do they reach out with mostly teasers and bait-and-switch tactics?**

IMPORTANT NOTE: A lack of marketing finesse doesn’t necessarily mean a leader is out of alignment with conscious and generosity-based values. It could just mean that they don’t have enough marketing experience, business savvy, or they haven’t exposed themselves to really conscious and purpose-driven marketing material and teachers.

If you feel good about the teacher, but find their marketing habits questionable, I have two suggestions:

1. Contact them and share your feelings. You could even offer to send them this document and tell them I welcome the opportunity to discuss it, answer questions, and hook them up with fabulous marketing teachers who focus exclusively on working with conscious entrepreneurs. If they are in alignment, they will respond in a reasonable time and you will feel genuinely listened to.
2. Let me know about them. I may have already researched them or know them personally and could

give you some insight. If you approach them about it and have a less than spectacular experience, please let me know. It's part of my job as a leader to help people become stronger consumers of spiritual development. Your experience may help me help someone else. – And I may be able to make a connection with this leader that you can't. Perhaps together we can make a difference in how they run their business.

Tip #1: Look for spiritual leaders that are working hard to create and maintain a relationship with you by paying attention to your needs, going the extra mile to reach out to you, providing you with exceptional value, and using the marketing funnel responsibly instead of selfishly.

Industry Fact #2: Not All Spiritual Development Is Actually Spiritual

This should be obvious, but it really isn't. Several movements have been developing simultaneously for the past few decades. The spiritual development movement is actually older than all of them.

In the 1800s a philosophy known as the Transcendentalist Movement began to emerge in Europe and North America. In the early 1900s, spiritual leaders began teaching spirituality as being found within instead of sought through intermediaries and institutions.

Much of this wonderful exploration and blossoming happened in the years leading up to World War II. After the war there was a spiritual cooling period until the 1960s.

At this time the consciousness raising movements began again in full swing, but focused primarily on the cultural issues of equal rights, non-conformity, environmentalism, and peace.

Who knows what happened in the seventies! But in the eighties the personal development and motivational movements began to emerge. The authenticity that was birthed in the sixties met with the consumption and greed of the eighties.

Peak potential and success trainings sprung up all over the place. Those being informed by the powerful spiritual truths of the earlier part of the century lead to teachings of self-empowerment, creative and authentic living, and non-competition oriented philosophies.

During this time, deeply transformational movements were also putting roots down in the field of psychology. Transactional Analysis was shifting our perceptions and Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) was giving adults raised in the disconnection and dysfunction of earlier decades an outlet for learning new skills.

(Did anyone else learn about warm fuzzies and cold prickles when they were kids? Oh! I guess something *was* happening in the seventies!)

The Alcoholics Anonymous movement was changing the way we think about addicts and addiction. M. Scott Peck was telling us about *The Road Less Traveled*, wave after wave of people learned how to practice Transcendental Meditation, and really neat tools like Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Creative Visualization, and Kinesiology-based muscle testing were developed.

We learned about our inner-child, mars and venus, and non-violent communication. Now we watch talk shows about the healthy identification and acceptance of trans-gendered children and how parents can support them in their on-going development, while confronting and healing their own fears and judgment.

e your overlaps are, because sometimes the leaders aren't.

All of this is to say: there is a LOT going on in the field of consciousness raising – and I haven't even touched on the environmental, economic and social change aspects of the transformation.

To find the right leader, teacher or holistic practitioner isn't always an easy task.

Let's take a look at basic definitions for each of the disciplines or industries that tend to get confused within this field.

Personal Development

Any teaching or philosophy that deals with personal improvement, learning, healing, and transformation. Topics can include, but aren't necessarily limited to: personal motivation, success & achievement, psychological healing, improved communication, physical fitness, health & well-being, self-empowerment, and self-awareness.

Lifestyle Development

Any teachings or philosophy that targets the improvement of daily living, making balanced choices, and enhancing the quality of life experience. Topics can include, but aren't necessarily limited to: abundance & prosperity, Law of Attraction, manifestation, creative living & self-expression, life purpose and authentic living, stress reduction, healthy relationships, and holistic life change.

Inspirational Development

Any teachings or philosophy that focuses specifically on building an inspirational approach to life. Topics may include, but aren't necessarily limited to: personal and lifestyle development topics from a decidedly intuitive or visionary approach, enhancing intuition, mindfulness and compassion, change through acceptance and release, awareness of a guiding power, and skills that assist in all of the above.

(Inspirational teachings are often based in strong spiritual principle or are, in fact, spiritual teaching disguised as something a little more practical. However, some inspirational teachers have a very shallow understanding of these principles and will only be able to offer so much insight from a spiritual perspective.)

Spiritual Development

Any teaching or philosophy that focuses directly on developing, deepening, and integrating a relationship with the Creative Source (Spirit, God, Light, Source – many words are used.) Any and all personal, lifestyle, or inspirational topics can be introduced. However true spiritual development *always* focuses on awareness of and connection and communion with the creative power of the universe. It then encourages the seeker to integrate that presence into all moments and every aspect of life.

If you are not being taught to listen for the voice of your soul above all things, to see the magic and grace of Source regardless of appearances, and to live it fully without reservation or exception, then it's not spiritual development.

better or worse, many inspirational, lifestyle, and personal development leaders give the impression that they are spiritual leaders as well – some of them sincerely move from a deeply spiritual core. But, it is important for your own satisfaction that you understand the difference.

You need to be clear about what you are looking for. Then you can look at what you're your leaders are offering.

You can reduce or eliminate an incredible amount of spiritual stress by learning to rely on the right leaders for the insight and guidance you need. You can also keep yourself from getting disappointed by not expecting non-spiritual leaders to help you with spiritual issues.

This may sound bizarre, but even some leaders don't understand these distinctions. Many of us can help you with a wide range of issues and we will often try to meet your needs ourselves first. But, one of the hallmarks of a truly good leader or teacher is the willingness to refer you to someone else.

When an info-preneur or holistic practitioner is able to recognize their unique scope and move you on to someone else when they can't help you, it is a sign of deep integrity and service. However, there are many reasons why this might not happen. It is possible the leader is:

- Not familiar enough with the specific needs and characteristics of their unique community or authentic audience. (In which case, they need to develop their business skills.)
- Struggling with scarcity, competition, or territory issues that may be clouding their judgment. (In other words, they are scared to loose you as a client/student.)
- Confusing their sincere commitment to help you personally with the greater service of connecting you with the right professional for a specific issue. (Some leaders have trouble letting go when they start to feel like they can't help you.)
- Practicing under the illusion that their modality, teaching, or style is right for everyone and can help with everything. (This is generally very well intentioned, but shows a lack of appreciation for individuality and actually indicates they are more focused on their work than your needs.)

The key is to be able to identify the teachings that are best for you. In this way, you are much better equipped to seek out another teacher or leader when you need to.

Tip #2: Identify your spiritual direction, psychological needs, and lifestyle goals. Seek out teachers that are the right fit and be aware of wher

Industry Fact #3: Spiritual Leaders Are Not Usually In It For the Money

There is a long-standing distrust in the public consciousness about the integrity and motivation of spiritual leaders when it comes to money. That's because this culture is a wee bit screwed up when it comes to finances.

Money has been used (and continues to be used) to maintain dominance and control. Greed and a quest for power lie at the heart of so much of the world's imbalance, injustice, pain and suffering – not to mention personal confusion, struggle, and fear.

One of my new favourite money quotes comes from Tad Hargrave, a marketing expert for conscious entrepreneurs. (www.tadhargrave.com - There aren't enough words to tell you how much I recommend this guy!!!)

“Our economy is based on turning living things into dead things, people into numbers, mountaintops into pop cans, and trees into money. This culture thrives on control, and you can only control dead things.”

Historically, our religious institutions have been just as guilty of this approach as any other power structure in our society.

There is a great deal of cultural suspicion around money, which easily combines with a deep desire for our spiritual leaders to be pure, service-oriented, and motivated by higher impulses than earthly wealth.

Unfortunately some spiritual stress comes directly from the failings of the industry itself. We breed frustration and doubt in your mind because of our sloppy business habits. The reality is that:

- Many spiritual types don't know anything about running a successful business and therefore can lack professionalism
- These same leaders often carry resistance to learning how to be better businesspeople because they want to focus on what makes their soul sing, not on marketing, administration, and financial management
- Additionally many of us also carry suspicion of money and/or have our own money issues that can make us hesitant to deal with the financial aspects of our business with clarity and empowerment
- Resistance to the business side of things often translates into a failure to communicate the deep and practical value of our work to you. (Trying to convince some spiritual leaders that people can't just *sense* the worth of what they do can be a weird and challenging conversation.) We can lack clarity and

confidence, and appear less than trustworthy – asking for money for “woo-woo” things that don't make sense to you.

All this adds up to a public that is primed to question the motivation and intention of a spiritual leader who steps forward and commands a financial fee for their services and products.

Any time you get the feeling that a spiritual leader is too focused on their own financial gain please remember this document. Chances are they are:

- Feeling insecure about their personal financial situation and may be experiencing a lull in their business activity.
- Struggling with their business identity, skills, and marketing strategy.
- Not aware enough of the industry trends and how the business is shifting for us due to technology, mass availability, and the public's frustrations and needs.

That being said, there is corruption, greed, and a lack of integrity in every industry. Trust your instincts, but please begin with the understanding that most of us aren't in this business for the sake of getting rich off of anyone's pain or insecurity. If we were, we'd have chosen another industry.

The truth is that there are much easier ways to make money than running a spiritual development business. Again, always feel free to contact me about any leader you are uncertain of or with whom you have had a negative experience.

Tip #3: Understand that many spiritual leaders aren't good at the business side of things and this may cause you to be frustrated and/or suspicious. Never be afraid to ask for what you want and never settle for less than the best.

Industry Fact #4: We All Sincerely Believe Our Work Will Transform Your Life

How many times have you read the promotional information for a consciousness-raising workshop (be it personal, spiritual, lifestyle, or inspirational) and read a version of the following headline?

Don't miss this opportunity to transform your life – forever!

None of us are lying. We all genuinely believe it. Usually because *our* lives have been transformed. We are sharing our passion and purpose. We are teaching work that has touched and empowered us deeply.

Here's what you need to look out for:

- **Personal credibility:** Has the work *actually* changed our lives? Are we providing you with evidence from our own lives that this work has created major, sustainable, and beneficial change? I hate to say it but I have come across more than one spiritual leader who is (and always has been) financially limited, but teaching a spiritual course on prosperity consciousness. (More about this in Industry Fact #6) Most of the time they aren't doing this to be deceitful. They feel they are teaching what they need to learn and what they are passionate about. This just isn't good enough as far as I am concerned, and you deserve better from your leaders.
- **Subtle but important twists in the marketing claims:** Does it read, "After this course you *will* ..." versus "When you use these tools you *can* ... ?" The first statement conveys a magical-thinking approach that will transform you just for being in the room. The second makes it clear that you have to do the work to tap into new possibilities.
- **Value and content versus excitement:** Is the language geared to stir you up and get you caught in the feeling of the moment or is it talking about practical benefits and solid value? Don't get swept away by claims that aren't really attainable, it will breed unrealistic spiritual expectations. Ask yourself if the claim is realistic. If you could summarize the benefits of the program and clearly convey your reasons for registering to someone else this is a very good sign.
- **Support or success systems:** Is there evidence of what it will require of you to create transformation or does it all seem miraculous? Does the leader tell you how many hours a week it will take or what support they provide to assist you in integrating the lessons you learn? Are there guarantees or something similar to deal with your frustration or dissatisfaction in the event it occurs? Does it seem like it will take real work on your part and has the leader stepped up to make that a better more effective process?
- **Heavy use of empty or formulaic claims:** Does the list of benefits convey real meaning that is relevant to your current needs or are they interchangeable with just about all other programs? "Learn the power of getting clear" and "Identify your passion and purpose" are two common examples. They may be true and important but they are over-used in this industry and don't make the value or benefits clear.

Both because of the mass availability of spiritual development material and also because the consciousness of the world is expanding, leaders need to realize that telling you "this will transform your life" isn't enough anymore.

Leaders need to tell you exactly what you can expect, why it is so valuable, and what we are going to do to support you in creating sustained and meaningful change. And you need to command this from us.

Tip #4: Learn to read promotional material with a critical eye and ask your leaders to communicate with you in a way that conveys real meaning and attainable benefits.

Industry Fact #5: The Spiritual Development Industry Has More Than Its Faire Share of Flakes

Can I state it any plainer? It's just a fact of the business. This has two primary causes.

Cause #1: Lack of strong business sense

- Most spiritual types don't want to touch business planning, marketing strategy, and administration systems with a ten-foot pole. In fact, many of us went into business for ourselves thinking we can simply, "Do what we love and the money will follow.
- A huge percentage of spiritual leaders and healers wish they could just find someone to promote them and take care of the "business stuff" so they could do what they are "on this planet to do.
- Being so deeply driven by purpose has it's drawbacks. It's difficult to turn away from the passion for the sake of the practical. It can be confusing to discover that the public isn't just *inspired* to participate and tough to find professionals who teach business skill development that also appreciate where we are coming from.
- We also have all of the same challenges that every entrepreneur has – fatigue, stress, isolation, challenges staying afloat and remember, most businesses fail within five years or less. – Is it any wonder we are prone to avoidance?

Cause #2: Too many people *mistakenly* choose a career in spirituality

- It is a natural part of spiritual awakening that it often encourages people to share their passion, healing, and transformation.
- Many people (particularly people experiencing spiritual growth) feel unsatisfied and unfulfilled in their jobs and/or feel out-of-place in mainstream society and out-of-step with mainstream ideas of success, achievement, and cultural values.
- Almost everyone who is exploring spiritual development feels called by something larger than themselves, to give of who they are to the world, and to make a positive contribution.
- A large percentage of spiritual seekers therefore fall into the incorrect belief that they are meant to have a career in the spiritual development industry, become an author and speaker, teach classes, share their story etc.
- Very few of them seriously consider their natural skill set, get the proper business training or even pursue in-depth training or experience as a spiritual professional before going into business.
- They also fail to consider the question of authentic lifestyle – Are they really meant to be entrepreneurs? Would they be better off pursuing their passion in a more personal way and finding a better job? What is the most natural and powerful way to integrate their spiritual values into everyday life?

What this means for you:

- Spiritual professionals that aren't very professional – a lack of policies, structures, and administrative procedures.
- Language and communication that tends towards the "woo woo" side of things.

- Promotional and marketing material that doesn't resonate with credibility, clarity, and trustworthiness.
- Experiences that require you to step outside of your everyday life to participate – sometimes this can be refreshing, but meaningful spiritual teaching is about integration. If it feels "too weird" or is contained in a weekend course but you struggle to apply it into your everyday life, what good does it really do you?

Tip #5: Don't just jump into a spiritual program or course. Ask a lot of questions and get a sense of where the work is coming from, who the teacher is, and what you can expect.

Industry Fact #6: Spiritual Leaders Often Have a Difficult Time Being Transparent

As a spiritual seeker you must command this quality from your leaders. We are not perfect. Good leaders don't pretend to be. On the other hand, we should be better at whatever we are teaching than you are. It's a fine balance and it's not always easy for us to find and hold.

You want to look for leaders that:

- Maintain a reasonable amount of personal privacy, but share in a straightforward manner about their own ability to live spiritual principle and their life experience.
- Fully live what they are teaching and can demonstrate credibility in their field(s) of focus.
- Have done their own work, demonstrated sustained growth over time, and can clearly talk about their journey in a straightforward and practical way.
- Honestly talk about their own challenges and how they handle them.

I mentioned this in the personal credibility section of Fact #4 and said I would return to it. I once sat in a class on prosperity consciousness taught by a spiritual leader I knew well.

I was personally acquainted with the “behind the scenes” challenges of her business and how she was handling them at the time. The class was exploring a deeply spiritual approach to wealth, prosperity, and personal abundance.

At one point she was asked by a student to give an example of how she applies a particular principle. I listened in stunned silence as she unfolded the story of a recent challenge in her business.

She painted a picture of elegant faith and resilient dedication to the spiritual truths of unlimited abundance during a situation that could have been financially scary and stressful. She used it to illustrate the point that by holding true to principle faith will pay off in long run because the financial situation turned around within a day or two and “Everything worked out very well!

What I knew was that far from elegant and immediately resilient, she had freaked out (badly!) about the situation. There had been antagonistic and intimidating conflicts with more than one person who contested her strategy for dealing with the situation.

Her instincts had been to lapse back into the unhealthy financial coping mechanisms that had recently blown a major hole in her business. The organization was tens of thousands of dollars in debt to the landlord, was still facing possible and immediate eviction, and was struggling to keep the doors open and the leadership in place.

Decisions had been made to change the habits that created that situation and to try to stop the financial

hemorrhaging. Very clear strategies had been put in place and at the first sign of trouble, she wanted to ignore them for the sake of what she had done in the past and was none to happy when her team said, “No” to her.

She was forced into the action that brought stability to the situation and after a day or so, did eventually come to a peaceful resolution and acceptance of it. The final result was precisely what she described in the story, but her retelling of how it came about wasn't the least bit honest.

Do I have moments of weakness and buckle in my faith and application of what I know to be true? Yes, absolutely, but here's my point: I share those stories readily.

The leader I mentioned above missed a beautiful teaching moment – a sacred opportunity to meet her student's desire to grow with her own vulnerability and faltering faith.

Instead she chose to present a strong and invulnerable version of her story. Do I judge her for it? No. I know the pain she was in at the time and I understand why she made the choice she did. However, I do question the credibility of her teaching a prosperity class in the way she did and at that time.

She could have been brave and creative by leading the class through the material as a fellow seeker who is more familiar with the teachings, but extremely challenged by their application. But instead she chose to be “the teacher,” which meant that to be credible she needed to know more about applying it than the students.

She could have presented a brutally honest version of that story, or a story from another time in her life that more accurately depicted a strong application of the principle. But instead her walls were up and her students were cheated out of an authentic and meaningful demonstration of spiritual development.

The reality from our point of view is that some students expect us to be perfect. But ultimately, the choice to be transparent or not is entirely ours. Some leaders still don't appreciate the power of it. And others just aren't ready to be *real*.

Tip #6: Having you as a student or client is a privilege that needs to be earned. Insist that your favourite spiritual leaders earn your trust with their transparency and vulnerability combined with a humble authority that comes from really living the principles they teach.

Industry Fact #7: Spirituality is Not Really Meant to be Developed in Isolation

The spiritual, lifestyle, personal, and inspirational industries of the consciousness raising movement breed their own frustration by being separatist and sometimes even elitist.

Spiritual types so often rob themselves of the joy, balance, and encouragement of hanging out with non-spiritual types. I think we carry a fear of not being spiritual enough so we gravitate towards those that can reinforce our principles and faith.

So much spiritual stress develops because of the internal focus of the industry itself. Not enough leaders are encouraging you to connect and associate with members of the other industries within consciousness raising.

One of my greatest resources in developing the strength, integration, and peace I experience in my spiritual journey has been my passion for creating relationships with environmentalists, social change and social justice advocates, visionary entrepreneurs, and humanitarians. (I've also thrown in a liberal sprinkling of musicians and dancers, comedians, actors, and artists ... the creative types bring in a wonderful energy!)

Do I develop deep and lasting friendships with people who don't share my spiritual values? No. But there is more cross-over between sectors of consciousness raising than you probably imagine. Spiritual values can be shared, nurtured, and respected without being directly studied and specifically focused on.

And, more importantly, you can socialize with inspired, visionary, dedicated, and creative people without talking about spirituality all the time.

There are people out there who are incredibly conscious, doing amazing work and stimulating fantastic change – out there truly forging a new way of life for the planet, without being overly spiritual.

It's about taking a look at your overall lifestyle. Spiritual development does definitively require time for internal reflection and connecting with others. But it also requires dynamic integration and getting to know others who are living their expanded consciousness fully in a context of change, evolution, and growth.

Tip #7: Don't focus just on spiritual relationships and community – expand your horizons. Hang out with all sorts of people who are dedicated to a higher purpose and living their passions.

I hope you have enjoyed this brief overview of the spiritual development industry and found it helpful. Ultimately you are responsible for the amount of spiritual stress you experience. I can teach you a thousand techniques and empower you with a million pieces of information that can help you to reduce it, but if you don't take action, none of it will matter.

Please be aware that the experience of this industry and its leaders is up to you. You bring to your experience all of your baggage, doubts, suspicions, and expectations. But you can also bring information, awareness, and self-responsibility.

Don't be afraid to ask for what you want and expect the best. Simultaneously be aware that the spiritual development industry is only decades old. Until this century, it didn't even really exist. We are all learning together.

This, in the final analysis, may be the most empowering and helpful perspective of all. Let's learn and grow together, sharing our best and accepting our shortcomings. If you are feeling like I (or any other leader) have reached my limit in terms of my ability to support you, I encourage you to move on.

Every one of us as a unique relationship with the Creative Source. May your journey be blessed.

And so it is.