

National Association for Temple Administration
F.T.A. Thesis

**“Hiring the Right Employees by Integrating
the Hiring Process with the Temple’s
Mission and Value Statements”**

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Thesis Statement and Introduction

One of a temple executive director's most important jobs is exercising leadership by implementing a culture consistent with two of the temple's most important documents, the Mission and Values Statements (together referred to as the Vision Statements). Part of that challenge is making sure that each time a member or guest connects with the temple, he or she receives service consistent with the Vision Statements.

Guests should receive the same service as members because guests are either potential members or friends of members with the ability to reflect on the temple to members. Guests can either positively or negatively reinforce the member's affiliation decision.

Leadership employees likely to interact with members and guests include clergy, the executive director, the religious school director, or the preschool director. Leadership employees, by definition, are expected to understand and model the temple's Vision Statements. But overwhelmingly, the greatest amount of temple interaction is with office staff. The majority of staff interaction is by phone, with e-mail and personal contact being equally important. Office staff must be required to deliver service consistent with the temple's Vision Statements.

First, before we can expect office staff to deliver Vision Statement service, the temple must actually have the Vision Statements. If the Vision Statements do not exist, the board and clergy must develop and adopt them.

However, if the Mission and Value Statements are in place and reflect the current desired culture, one obvious strategy to ensure that the office staff meet the Vision Statements' requirements is to hold a

workshop and train them. However, a much better strategy is to hire employees who model the Mission and Values Statements in their everyday lives.

Congregants' and guests' service expectations must be defined from their point of view, since it is only their view that counts. In the corporate world, extraordinary customer satisfaction is one element that stakeholders recognize and reward with return business. Exceptional customer satisfaction distinguishes a business from its competitors. The same is true of synagogue members, who must make the decision to renew their financial commitment to the synagogue each year.

How does the temple engage members in ways that reinforce their decision to be a temple member? How is extraordinary customer satisfaction achieved? It is attained by hiring the right employees. Here are a few illustrations.

Consider this Disney Company statement about attaining customer satisfaction: "Customer satisfaction is directly related to positive interaction with your employees. Period. In today's competitive market your advantage comes from your customer's belief that your employees want to meet and exceed their expectations. Providing world-class service is the key to increasing your profit."

Consider this story from a Southwest Airlines manager: "There's probably nothing worse than being in the middle of a trip and coming down with food poisoning. But that's just what happened when one of our customers, Katherine, was flying home from college to Pittsburgh. Sam, our foreman of Ground Support Equipment in Philadelphia, was onboard the flight; and even though he was off duty, he helped flight attendants tend to Katherine. When the flight arrived in Pittsburgh, Sam's assistance didn't stop at the airplane door. He helped Katherine to

baggage claim, claimed her baggage, and delivered her to her father in the passenger pick-up area. Katherine's parents were extremely grateful, and her mom writes, 'Each of us understands and appreciates the extra care and concern he performed for our daughter.'

In this thesis I want to explore why Southwest's Sam would be motivated to act when not on duty, why his assistance didn't end when leaving the airplane, why he was concerned for Katherine, and why he saw her to her father.

In *The Audacity of Hope*, President Barack Obama wrote, "I value good manners...The same goes for competence. Nothing brightens my day more than dealing with somebody, anybody, who takes pride in their work or goes the extra mile...the person on the other end of the phone who actually seems to want to solve your problem."

A synagogue is a fragile member community. Congregant and guest satisfaction is essential to maintaining and increasing membership and spreading a positive word about the temple. A congregant and guest satisfaction culture reduces the amount of negative parking lot and other informal social group conversation.

It is very possible to implement the same levels of Disney and Southwest Airline customer satisfaction through positive selection and interaction with synagogue employees.

This thesis will show the importance of selecting and hiring employees by integrating the hiring process with the temple's two Vision Statements. If the temple desires an extraordinary customer satisfaction culture, it should be clearly and emphatically included in its Vision Statements. Everything starts with these statements: the selection of employees, the way employees are treated, and the way that temple

leadership reflects on the Vision Statements prior to making important decisions.

Hiring the right employees by integrating the temple's Vision Statements in the hiring process will help overcome many of the roadblocks that create barriers to members and guest satisfaction, including:

- Inconsistent leadership
- Multiple synagogue departments, each with its own culture and history
- Long hours
- Overlapping job requirements
- Low employee pay combined with limited raises and benefits due to budget constraints
- Demanding membership
- Office confusion
- Multiple voices, instead of a unified voice, from the “three-legged stool” (executive director, clergy, and board)
- Turnover
- Separate and inconsistent objectives in each synagogue department

Defining the Temple's Desired Culture

An Exaggerated Situation

It is 8:30 on a Monday morning at Temple XYZ, a Reform, URJ-affiliated congregation of 450 members in the Midwest. The clergy have the day off. The executive director is at a breakfast meeting with the chair of the Finance Committee. The temple's office manager arrives for work. Her name is Barbara. Preparing to open the office at 9:00, she

unlocks the file cabinets and turns on her computer. The phone is ringing every minute, and the calls roll over to the night line.

On her desk is a note from the associate rabbi. He needs 17 copies of a text copied and put in notebooks for his adult education class that night. There is no note apologizing for the late notice.

Barbara listens to the voicemail in the phone system's general voicemail box. There are twelve messages received over the weekend. Many of the callers express surprise that no one was in the office over the weekend to receive their call. Most of them want an appointment with one of the clergy. In this temple the clergy keep their own calendar. Barbara has noted which rabbi each caller wants to see and is prepared to forward that information.

The bookkeeper arrives. The receptionist arrives. The receptionist immediately sees that someone sat at her desk over the weekend and shuffled the papers she was working with. This prompts a discussion among the three employees about how members don't respect office workstations. The receptionist says she will spend an hour putting her documents back in order so that her membership information data entry will be correct.

It is almost 9:00. Barbara takes the phone off of night line. The phone continues to ring, and the receptionist begins answering phone calls. People begin arriving 30 minutes early for the 9:30 meeting in Room 2. Temple XYZ is a secure building, and congregants and guests must ring a doorbell for admittance. However, people usually ring the bell a number of times when only once is necessary. The doorbell rings and rings.

Four people enter. Three go to Room 2. The fourth person is carrying two brown paper shopping bags. This person goes to the office and says that he wants to donate paperback books to the temple library collection. Barbara says, "That's not my job. You need to talk to the library volunteer."

Someone returns from Room 2 asking about turning up the heat and wants help making copies. The phone continues ringing. The president of Sisterhood is calling to ask about linens for the lunch later that day. The doorbell rings again. There are three people waiting to enter. They all come to the office. One of them is a homeless person asking to see a rabbi and asking for money. The other two people are a young couple who are thinking about moving to town and are potential new members. The next phone call is from a guest who attended the prior Saturday's bat mitzvah. The guest lost an earring and thinks it might have happened in the sanctuary. The guest wants someone from the office to look for the earring right away.

The board president arrives for a meeting that was never put on the calendar. The president wants to know why it wasn't on the calendar. She wants pitchers of water for the meeting guests right away.

A member arrives with her membership dues statement and says that she called the office with her credit card number and that she shouldn't have received the statement because the amount was paid. Barbara looks her in the eye and the potential new members hear her coolly say, "It wasn't paid. I would have known if it were paid. You still owe the amount on the statement." Both the current and the potential members' mouths drop open. The receptionist and the bookkeeper are listening.

The doorbell rings again. Barbara slaps at the button to open the door. "I hear you, you only have to ring once," she says to no one in particular. Seven people are standing in line waiting to get help and the phone is ringing. The potential members leave. The homeless person holds his ground. It's 9:15.

The above scenario is exaggerated to make two points.

First, despite everyone's best efforts, temple activity is unpredictable. Every day is different. No one knows what they will encounter on any given day. There are times when the uncoordinated, moment-to-moment swings from financial to facility to membership to security to technology issues, the volume of incoming communication from multiple sources, volunteers with very big egos, and members with high expectations are a way of life.

These days challenge Barbara and the staff. If there are too many of these days the result will be employee anger, congregant outrage, inefficient performance, expensive employee turnover, financial weakening, and a culture that is not welcoming or inviting for new members. Once a reputation is created, it takes tremendous hard work to overcome it.

But the second point is that maybe we should give Barbara a break. Not everyone is capable of handling the assault described above. Not everyone can keep the vision of Abraham and Sarah's tent in their mind when coping with the demands of the moment. Not everyone has the natural demeanor, training, patience, or tact. Not everyone is equipped to see what is happening, multitask, and perform with a welcoming vision. Not everyone is capable of weighing their behavior today against the impact of that behavior in the near term.

Let's give Barbara a break. Maybe she is doing the best that she can. Maybe she isn't the best person for the job. Maybe her skills and qualifications are inconsistent with the job's demands and the temple's mission.

Abraham and Sarah's Tent

Openness and welcoming the stranger are strong values within our Jewish tradition. Before the Torah commanded us to love the stranger, our forbears Abraham and Sarah practiced that dictum. In Genesis, Chapter 18, we are told that after Abraham's self-inflicted circumcision "the Lord appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre, he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot." Strikingly, Abraham then seems to leave G-d's presence to greet three strangers.

Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, he said, "My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let a little water be brought, bathe your feet and recline under the tree. And let me fetch you a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves, then go on--see that you have come your servant's way."

Jewish tradition teaches us the many ways to read closely and to interpret the text. This text could be saying that welcoming the stranger is so important that Abraham left the presence of G-d to greet them. Or the passage could be saying that the three strangers were the image of G-d, in which case all humans are in the image of G-d and deserve the respect and service we would give to G-d. When we welcome a guest, we are welcoming the image of G-d.

Many midrashim teach that Abraham's tent was open on all four sides so that he could welcome strangers coming from all directions. These directions might be geographic directions, or they could be psychological directions.

The brief story of Abraham welcoming the strangers at his tent is the essence of the congregant and guest satisfaction vision. Welcoming and valuing everyone is the attitude required in order to provide the highest level of customer satisfaction.

Our synagogue buildings are tents. Our minds need to be open in all directions. Our employees need to understand and share this vision. When employees lose this vision, the synagogue becomes more fragile.

Adopting a Welcoming Vision

Each temple must formally adopt a welcoming vision. The board and the clergy must stand behind a vision of sacred community. In "The Spirituality of Welcoming," Ron Wolfson writes that "This new vision of the twenty-first century synagogue can be stated in a simple sentence: The synagogue is the spiritual center of people's lives. It is a *kehillah kedoshah*, a 'sacred community,' where relationships are paramount, where worship is engaging, where everyone is learning, where repair of the world is a moral imperative, where healing is offered, and where personal and institutional transformations are embraced." Even though I am sure that Ron Wolfson is including it in his statement, I would add the synagogue is also a place where people are accepted as having infinite value and being created in the image of G-d.

This vision should be visible at the temple's main entrance, in the lobby, at the entrance to the office, on the executive director's door, in

the clergy's offices, on the playground, and anywhere else that it is feasible.

Congregants and guests must know what to expect when they enter the temple's tent. All temple employees must be Abraham and Sarah. Treatises on temple management, including Ron Wolfson's quote above, almost always talk about temple culture in reference to the clergy, board, volunteers, and officers. However, one of the most overlooked and underappreciated temple assets is the staff. The irony is that the staff has more day-to-day interaction with congregants and guests than anyone else.

Employees, who are Abraham and Sarah waiting for the strangers to appear, must embrace the vision as a driving force.

In his book *Re-Thinking Synagogues*, Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman writes, "...synagogues, we said, must be places whence healing flows, not because synagogues are for people who are sick, but because healing entails wholeness, the will to live, and engagement in relationships that are not toxic." He continues, "We combined healing and ambience to create an entire curriculum on developing a synagogue of honor, welcome, acceptance, and trust—the characteristics that promote healing as wholeness." The wholeness component of synagogues should extend as much to its employees as to its congregants and guests. Again, the employees' experiences will contribute to the sacred service they provide to each other as well as to congregants and guests.

Establishing the Values and the Culture

As will be repeated over and over in the balance of this paper, one of the most essential steps in creating a culture of extraordinary and

uniform customer satisfaction is finding employees whose passion and character are consistent with the temple's mission and values. By definition, this requires that the temple have a Mission Statement that includes a customer satisfaction statement and, further, has another document that defines its values. Many temples have a Mission Statement. However, almost every Temple Mission Statement I read fails to include a statement about either customer satisfaction or member and guest relationships. In addition to the Mission Statement, the temple should have a set of Value Statements that speak to the relationship of temple employees to members and guests with regard to service, attitude, behavior, passion, character, and integrity.

Here is a Temple Mission Statement that I feel is fairly representative of many. "Temple (Name) seeks to be a community of awakening and discovery where the joy of Jewish living is made accessible and relevant to contemporary life." This temple continues to describe the traditional three houses: beit tefillah, a house of worship; beit midrash, a house of study; and beit kneset, a house of community.

This Mission Statement is good. It speaks to community, joy, access, relevancy, and discovery. The traditional three houses speak to a means of meeting the mission.

But what would an employee candidate, especially if they are not Jewish, take from these statements? Do these statements communicate the essence of what we want to tell an employee about our temple? I do not believe so.

I am recommending that an additional statement, a Value Statement, be created that is applicable to employees, members, and guests. This Value Statement would create clear employee expectations.

In *Hardwiring Excellence*, Quint Studer postulates that the journey to becoming a welcoming organization capable of growth is a commitment to excellence. He defines excellence as “when employees feel valued” and (in the case of temples) members and guests “are getting great care and feel the service and quality they receive is extraordinary.” In his book, which uses hospitals as the background for excellence, he speaks about five pillars of excellence: people, service, quality, finance, and growth. Of course, all are interrelated. But it is important to note that he places people as the first pillar and service as the second pillar.

Studer writes that where people (the right people!) and service flourish, quality, finance, and growth will follow. He subscribes to the idea of throwing out the thought that new programs and campaigns will solve problems. Instead he proposes focusing on the essentials of having the right people giving extraordinary service. All else will then have the possibility of following.

The organization needs to define its mission and its values. The Mission and Value Statements should be visible on Web sites and in work areas. There are companies that challenge visitors to walk up to any random employee and ask them to recite the Mission Statement. The random employee is always happy to comply.

The concept is to treat employees the same way that we wish the employees to treat members and guests. However, as will be defined below, we must first start with the right employees. The right employee will intuitively agree with both the Mission and Value Statements as a way of life. The temple should seek employees whose own belief systems and lives are consistent with the temple’s Vision Statements.

In any organization, formal and informal values, philosophies, and norms interact and overlap to create the fabric we call “culture.” Values are deep-seated beliefs about the world and how it operates. They are the emotional rules that govern behavior and attitudes. Values determine choices, including those we make in an organizational context.

Here is an interesting way to look internally at your own values. Look at your checkbook and your calendar. How you spend your time and your money tells a lot about what you value. The same is true for organizations. Employees, consciously or not, learn about an organization’s values by watching how the company and its leadership spend the organization’s money and time.

Consider the following various elements of a potential Value Statement. All or some of the following apply to every organization. To the extent any of the following are adopted, they should be scrupulously adjusted to the specific culture of the adapting temple. These values are clear enough to communicate an expectation to an employee and should provide the foundation for interview questions.

- Family: When you treat employees, members, and guests like family you foster the kind of intimacy and informality that build strong relationships and make work more fun. We tend to support, defend, accept, and love people more easily when they are part of our family.
- Human value: All human beings are created in the image of G-d and are of equal and infinite value.
- Low costs: Employees continuously look for ways to save money without sacrificing service.

- Fun: Employees are encouraged to take their jobs and their relationships to members and guests seriously, but not themselves. The temple is serious about creating an environment where play, humor, creativity, and laughter flourish.
- Love: Employees are encouraged to conduct business in a loving manner. Employees are expected to care about people and act in ways that affirm their dignity and worth.
- Hard work: Because temples run very lean, work is fast and intense. Those who shy away from hard work do not fit the temple's culture.
- Individuality: The emphasis on fun allows employees to be themselves. Employees are encouraged to think like mavericks. The temple is not looking for clones. Rather, the temple is seeking diversity of thought. When employees are free to be themselves, they are more prone to express their true gifts and talents.
- Ownership: Although a temple is not owned by shareholders, employees who think like owners will take better care of the members and guests they have earned the right to serve.
- Service: The temple wants employees to provide extraordinary service that makes a first and lasting impression, service that is kind, loving, and fun. Treating members and guests with respect and dignity is the key to providing a unique brand of what Southwest Airlines calls "Positively Outrageous Service." The temple instills in every employee the idea that happy, satisfied members and guests will return again and again and thus create a growing environment and job security.

- Egalitarianism: Employees should treat every member and guest equally, regardless of their status within the community or the amount of money they contribute. Employees are expected to treat everyone with the same level of extraordinary service at all times.
- Common sense and good judgment: Temple employees are trusted and encouraged to use their instincts and good judgment on the job. The temple wants employees who think “service” before they think rules.
- Simplicity: Employees are encouraged to operate informally with each other, members, and guests. Informality generates speed, increases the flow of information, and breaks down barriers that prevent people from engaging each other.
- Listening: Listening is powerful because it shows a genuine desire to understand the unique needs and feelings of others.
- Altruism: Employees who are people-oriented will give of their time and will develop long-lasting relationships with the people they serve. Temple employees give unconditionally because there is tremendous joy and satisfaction from helping others. People are the only memory members and guests will have of the temple.

Each temple should review its Mission and Value statements. If they do not exist, take the time to create them. It is not fair to hire new employees or to continue to evaluate current employees without communicating cultural expectations via these two documents. This statement applies to all employees, from clergy to part-time custodians. There must be consistency throughout the organization.

There will be times when a situation puts two or more values in conflict with one another. Acknowledging and discussing the conflicting values in team meetings are important tasks to ensure that employees do not feel in conflict. Sometimes employees need to talk to each other and temple leadership to understand the application of certain values depending upon specific situations.

Who Are the Right Employees?

“I hung on to some people longer than I should have. Character, I learned, is far more important than technical knowledge. You want people who fit in with the culture of the company.” –Margot Fraser, founder of Birkenstock

“There are going to be times when we can’t wait for somebody. Now, you’re either on the bus or off the bus.” –Ken Kesey from *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, by Tom Wolfe

The Bus, or First Who...Then What

Herb Kelleher, the founder of Southwest Airlines, says about Southwest Airlines employees, “We want people who can do things well with laughter and grace.” The professionals that customers encounter at Southwest Airlines are remarkably uninhibited and empathetic individuals, who believe that the business of business is to make a profit by serving people and making life more fun. While a temple is not profit-driven, it still must employ individuals who seek to serve people within the existing financial framework.

A job opening is a rare opportunity to hire the next right person for the temple. A job opening is a chance to build a greater possibility for the temple. Seek the right employee. The right employee embodies the combination of job qualifications with expressed and proven passionate agreement with the Value Statement. If possible, hire ahead of the curve. In other words, seek out employees capable of lifting the temple to the next desired level.

In his research book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins writes that executives who ignited transformations from good to great did not first figure out where to drive the bus and then get people to take it there. No, they *first* put the right people on the bus (and put the wrong people off the bus) and *then* figured out where to drive it. They were essentially saying, “I don’t really know where we should take this bus. But I know this much: if we get the right people on the bus, the right people in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus, then we’ll figure out how to take it somewhere great.”

First, if you begin with the “who” rather than the “what,” you can more easily adapt to a changing world. If people join the bus primarily because of where it is going, what happens if you get ten miles down the road and need to change directions? You’ve got a problem. But if people are on the bus because of who else is on the bus, then it’s much easier to change direction.

Second, if you have the right people on the bus, the problem of how to motivate and manage people largely goes away. The right people don’t need to be tightly managed or fired up; they will be self-motivated by their inner drive to produce the best results and be part of creating something great.

Third, if you have the wrong people, it doesn't matter whether you discover the right direction, you *still* won't have a great organization. Great vision without great people is irrelevant.

To be clear, the main point in creating exceptional customer satisfaction within the temple employee culture is first to have the right employees on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) before you figure out where to drive it. Hiring employees whose values and beliefs are consistent with the temple's values will build excellence for its own sake. The right people will do the right things and deliver the best results they're capable of.

"First who" is a very simple idea to grasp and a very difficult idea to execute. It is easy to talk about paying attention to people decisions, but how many of us have the discipline to hold off developing a strategy to get the right people in place?

In contrast to the "good to great" companies that embraced the idea of the right people in the right seats on the bus before deciding where to drive the bus, there is the concept of a "genius with a thousand helpers." In this model the organization is a platform for the talents of an extraordinary individual. In these cases the towering genius, the primary driving force behind an organization's success, is a great asset—as long as the genius sticks around. The geniuses seldom build great management teams, for the simple reason that they don't need one (they are geniuses after all) and often don't want one. No, the genius just needs an army of good soldiers who can help implement the great ideas. However, when the genius leaves, the helpers are often lost. Or, worse, they try to mimic their genius predecessor.

Who Are the Right Employees?

Nucor Corporation executives rejected the old adage that people are your most important asset. Rather, they believe that the *right* people are your most important asset. The wrong people are your greatest liability.

According to Collins in *Good to Great*, great companies put a greater weight on character attributes than on specific educational background, practical skills, specialized knowledge, or work experience. Not that specific knowledge or skills are unimportant, but they viewed these traits as more teachable (or at least learnable), whereas they believed dimensions like character, work ethic, basic intelligence, dedication to fulfilling commitments, and values are more ingrained.

As Dave Nassel of Pitney Bowes puts it, "...The Marine Corps recruits people who share the Corps' values, then provides them with the training required to accomplish the organization's mission....We (the Marine Corps) don't look at experience. We want to know: Who are they? Why are they? We find out who they are by asking them why they made decisions in their life. The answer to these questions gives us insight into their core values."

In his book *Business Mensch*, Noah Alper, the founder of Noah's Bagels, writes, "If you act like a mensch, it makes every day better, every moment worth living. And here's a secret: it's good for business....In other words, in business being a mensch starts with personal integrity, then it moves to the way you treat your coworkers and employees, and finally it emanates externally to your relationships with customers, suppliers, competitors, and the community." In the glossary of his book, Alper defines mensch as "Yiddish for 'human being,' often used to mean a decent, upstanding person."

Noah Alper describes two “tests” that potential employees had to pass. Granted these tests are informal and hard to quantify, but they are indicators of the approach that Noah’s Bagels took in hiring staff at all levels. The first was the “airplane” test: would you want to sit next to this person for an entire transcontinental flight? The second was the “higher thing” test: did the candidate get what Noah’s was all about? Did it clearly resonate with him/her? Were they on board with the mission? Like attracts like. People join because they like the culture they find there. People who do not like the culture go elsewhere.

Southwest Airlines, as described in *Nuts!* by Kevin and Jackie Freiberg, hires for attitude. Their group hiring strategies may not be applicable to temples where employees tend to be hired one at a time. But the Southwest hiring strategies illustrate a “first who” philosophy. Southwest Airlines strives to hire for attitude and the right spirit and then train for skills. Consider this example:

“The interviewing team asks a group of potential employees to prepare a five-minute presentation about themselves and gives them plenty of time to prepare. As the presentations are delivered, the interviewers don’t watch just the speakers; they watch the audience to see which applicants are using this time to work on their presentations and which are enthusiastically cheering on and supporting their potential coworkers. Unselfish people who support their teammates are the ones who catch Southwest’s eye, not the applicants who are tempted to polish their own presentations while others are speaking.”

Beware of candidates with low self-esteem. Low self-esteem translates to employees who may be defensive, may not have the confidence to speak their mind, may not learn to trust their fellow employees, and may not do well in a fast-paced, intensive work

environment. Candidates with low self-esteem may blame others and not be willing to take responsibility.

Interviewing New Candidates for Open Positions

Take the time to conduct a brief telephone interview with job candidates. The way you hear the candidates speak on the phone is the same way that members and guests will hear them on the phone if they become a temple employee. Is the energy and enthusiasm you desire present? Is this the voice you want to represent your temple?

Train successful current employees to participate in face-to-face interviews. Make sure they know about illegal interviewing practices. Role play with these employees to provide them interviewing-technique feedback.

Assuming the candidate has passed the telephone voice test, invite him/her in for a face-to-face interview. The face-to-face interview process is a time for the temple to get to know candidates as well as for candidates to be exposed to the temple's culture. I recommend scheduling at least a three-hour time period for the interviews. Have the candidate meet at least three existing employees who well-represent the temple's culture. Tell the candidate how much time to plan for the interview. Hand the candidate a schedule of who they will meet when they arrive. Existing employees who perform well, know how to conduct a simple interview, and demonstrate the temple culture are the best interviewers. Like the Alper's airplane test, other employees will know who they will be willing to work with. They will know who should be on the bus.

Do not require each interviewing employee to ask the same questions. Consistent with the temple's values, allow employees to relate to the candidate in their own way, subject to complying with legal interviewing requirements.

While some questions will have to be specific about qualifications for the posted job opening, here are some sample life-experience questions to help determine a potential employee's core values. These questions, and others like them, will also help disclose any low self-esteem issues. Interviewers should take notes during the interview to help them discuss the candidates later in the day.

- Give an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in meeting it.
- Describe a time when you felt it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.
- (In an interview where the candidate graduated from college) Tell me about your college search and how you selected your college.
- Tell me about a success in your life, an accomplishment of which you are very proud.
- Tell me about something in your life that you would do over again if you had the chance. What would you change and why?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others in a desired direction.
- Are you fulfilling your own personal mission?

After the candidate has departed, everyone who has participated in the interview should gather to discuss the candidate. This meeting should take place the same day if possible, so that everyone's memories of the candidate are fresh. Notes from the interview will come in handy at this meeting. A free-wheeling, open discussion about the candidate should ensue. No one person, regardless of the position, should influence another employee. It is vital, as part of the temple culture, that employees have the right and the confidence to share their honest opinions about the candidate. The group should engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion.

Ultimately, based on feedback from the group, the hiring manager will make a decision and extend an offer to a candidate. The hiring manager would be smart to listen to other employees and narrow the choices for the position to those candidates that both he/she and the other employees favor. Unless the hiring manager can justify it in an extraordinary way, he/she should select a person to hire from the pool of candidates that other employee interviewers favored.

If the hiring manager extends an offer to a person that other employees didn't pick as a person they would be willing to work with, the hiring manager risks disenfranchising the employees and the interviewing process. The hiring manager shouldn't hire someone who flunked the airplane test.

Sometimes, despite the amount of work, the right employee does not emerge. When in doubt, don't hire. Keep looking. It is worth the extra time to find the right person for the bus. Compromising because of an immediate need may start a negative domino effect that will result in employee issues. Those who build great organizations understand that the ultimate throttle on growth (of either revenues or membership or both)

is not markets, technology, competition, or products. It is one thing above all others: the ability to get and keep enough of the right people.

Interviewing Inherited Employees in Current Positions

Temple executive directors hired into new positions inherit their temple's existing mission, values, and culture. The new executive director also inherits existing employees.

At one extreme, the new executive director is hired because another executive director, who has done an exceptional job, has retired. The inherited staff is excellent and works well within the defined mission, values, and culture. In this situation the executive director needs to study and learn to support the existing status quo.

At the other extreme, the executive director is hired because the prior executive director resigned or was fired. Often the temple has experienced a cultural shift resulting in discord. Sometimes the Mission Statement is so old that none of the current employees remembers when it was adopted. There may be polarization within the congregants. There probably isn't a Value Statement, and the culture is political. In addition, financial data is often not reliable.

Often the new executive director finds a combination of the two extremes. The newly hired executive director will spend months researching, observing, understanding, untangling, and refashioning the cultural variables to establish missions and values that are right for the temple. Part of that effort includes working with inherited employees.

Inherited temple employees seem to fall into two categories. One category is the grizzled veteran who has been employed in a key

position for ten years or more, has institutional memory, has survived various board and/or clergy regimes, knows where everything is stored, and knows what and when things need to be done. This type of employee is viewed by others as essential and nonreplaceable. The second category is the employee who has been employed for less than five years, hasn't experienced any regime issues (let alone survive them), is poorly trained, and is still unsure of the environment. These employees may be excellent, or they may in be survival mode.

The new executive director needs to engage the staff and determine whether the right employees are on the bus and whether they are in the right seats. This will take time. At the same time that the executive director is reviewing the Mission Statement and creating a Value Statement with the board and the clergy, he/she must be working with and observing existing employees.

Eventually, using a combination of observation and interviewing strategies, the executive director must decide whether to retain some or all existing employees. In what will likely be one of the most difficult decisions an executive director could ever make, he/she will have to decide what to do when there are long-term existing employees who are the wrong people to be on the bus. It is important that the board and clergy acknowledge this situation and empower the executive director to make employee-related decisions.

How do you know? Collins writes about how to know when existing employees are not the right employees. After working with existing employees for a period of time, he offers two simple questions to ask and answer. First, if it was a hiring decision (rather than a "should this person get off the bus?" decision), would you hire this person again? Second, if the person came to tell you that he/she is leaving to pursue

another opportunity, would you feel disappointed or secretly relieved? These are both excellent indicators.

Another good indicator is whether the executive director feels the need to tightly manage a person. The moment you feel this need, you've made a hiring mistake (if it is a new hire) or it's time to separate from an existing employee.

Letting the wrong people hang around is unfair to all the right people, as they inevitably find themselves compensating for the inadequacies of the wrong people. Worse, it can drive away the right people.

Waiting too long before acting is equally unfair to the people who need to get off the bus. For every day the executive director allows the wrong person to hold a seat on the bus when the executive director knows that the person will not make it in the end, the executive director is stealing a portion of that employee's life.

It may take time to know for certain whether someone is simply in the wrong seat or whether he/she needs to get off the bus altogether. Nonetheless, when it is clear to the executive director that it is time to make a personnel change, it is time to act. Delay is never healthy for the organization. The sooner the decision is made, the sooner the right employee can be hired. This is an incredibly sensitive action. The sooner it happens, the better for everyone.

While it is a good practice to separate the wrong employee from the organization, it is vital that the separation be done in a manner that is consistent with legal labor practices. It is important to know whether the employee in question has a contract, is an at-will employee, or has some other form of employment relationship. It is highly recommended

that all employee separations first be reviewed for legality by the temple's legal representative and/or human resources committee. Do not terminate the wrong employee and accidentally create an indefensible labor issue that could cost the temple thousands of dollars.

However, there is a cultural problem in many temples. Especially with regard to existing employees who have received either no evaluations or acceptable evaluations, the idea of replacing them is, in Star Wars language, like going to the Dark Side. Does the executive director want to risk being viewed as Darth Vader?

The new executive director should work hard to earn the support of both the clergy and the board for any personnel decisions that result in current employees losing their jobs. Often the clergy, board, and other staff will shy away from any involvement in an employee termination. The existing employee may have worked at the temple for years. However, I would guess that if clergy, board, and staff were to be honest, they would acknowledge that the employee in question has issues. They are probably reluctant to admit to the need for separation because in a spiritual community no one wants to be Darth Vader.

The wrong employee has existing friendships and connections to congregants. Separating an existing employee is a risky decision for the executive director. But one of the key components of leadership is courage—in this case, the courage to act for the betterment of the temple and to replace tolerated existing employees with new hires who are right for the bus. Involving remaining employees who are trained interviewers in the replacement process will overcome most objections.

The separation requires a severance package that is consistent with the temple's values. Each and every employee must always be treated with integrity and respect. This includes an employee about to be

removed from the bus. Observers should judge the executive director's strategy in terminating the employee relative to the temple's mission and values. In addition to proper legal employment practices, the executive director should be sure that the employee is treated with respect and human dignity.

The priority is always to honor the temple's mission and values. Tough decisions demand courageous leaders. An executive director who believes in "first who" must have the courage to make the correct employee decisions. Terminating a long-term employee will send a message.

The temple employees are a family (see Value No. 1 above). After the separation it is important that the executive director spend time with the family. Remaining employees should be encouraged to talk about their feelings and write down their memories of the departed person. Taking the time to acknowledge what has happened is important to give remaining employees an outlet for their feelings.

Following the establishment of a refined mission and the creation of the temple's Values Statement, the temple now has the right people in the right seats on the bus. The wrong people are off the bus. The organization has mourned and celebrated the changes. It is time to move forward.

Focus on Employee Satisfaction

We now have the right employees on the bus. How do we work with them and how do we keep them? How do we satisfy them in a way

that translates into their creating an extraordinary customer satisfaction culture that is transmitted to congregants and guests?

To paraphrase the Hillel story about reciting the Torah while standing on one foot, the essence of employee and customer satisfaction is to treat your employees the way you want them to treat your congregants and guests. Never forget that we are always re-recruiting existing right employees every day. Customers (congregants and guests) come second, but still get great service.

Can it be true? Is it possible that the customer is not always right? Employees, not customers, come first. So readers learned when Reader's Digest ran this excerpt from Tom Peters in its July 1995 "Personal Glimpses" feature:

"While Southwest Airlines CEO Herb Kelleher gives customers a terrific deal on an airplane seat, he makes it clear that his employees come first—even if it means dismissing customers. But aren't customers always right? "No, they are not," Kelleher snaps. "And I think that's one of the biggest betrayals of employees a boss can possibly commit. The customer is sometimes wrong. We don't carry those sorts of customers. We write to them and say, 'Fly somebody else. Don't abuse our people.'"

Southwest employees go out of their way to accommodate customers with legendary courtesy and good cheer, but the company has been known to encourage some of its not-so-pleasant customers to choose other carriers.

Clearly, the number of times a congregant will be asked to find a different congregation is minute. But the point is that integrity and treatment of employees should not be sacrificed. The way we treat our employees is the way they will treat our congregants and guests.

“Many organizations will fail in their quest for total quality service,” says Karl Albrecht, author of *The Only Thing That Matters*, “not because their leaders don’t understand the conceptual or technical requirements for achieving it, but because they don’t realize that *the heart of the service journey is spiritual rather than mechanical*. They will bureaucratize the whole thing and make it look like every other program.”

Long-term customer satisfaction comes from service delivered from the heart, from choosing service over self-interest. When employees feel they are being treated humanely, when *they* receive extraordinary service, they will provide the same kind of customer satisfaction. Treat your employees with care and concern if that is the way you want them to treat each other as well as congregants and guests.

The following are some tips for managing for employee satisfaction.

Employees want to believe that the organization has the right purpose. They want to know that their job is worthwhile. They want to make a difference. Continued positive communication to underscore these beliefs is essential. Continually engaging employees in dialogue is essential. Listening is essential. Catching them doing something right, or positive, is essential.

First, the executive director should make rounds for positive outcomes every day. Take the time early in each day to walk around the temple and greet every employee. Start with a simple personal question like, “Sue, do your children like their school?” Then ask a couple of specific questions like, “Tell me what is working today,” or “Are there any other employees I should be recognizing?”

When the executive director consistently asks, “What is working today?” the employee will switch her focus from the negative to the positive. As managers we are trained to look for what is wrong. But we also need to train ourselves to look for what is right. Sue might tell me what a great job the bookkeeper did in helping to correct a congregant’s billing statement. This is a double win. Not only does Sue focus on the positive, but when I make my rounds to the bookkeeper, I can tell her specifically that Sue told me what a great job she did to correct the congregant’s billing statement.

The bookkeeper will tell me something positive about another employee. Recognized positive behavior gets repeated from person to person. Recognized positive behavior will be repeated in daily practice. Success builds success. The executive director can do the same thing with congregants and guests, but rounding for positive outcomes with employees is more important.

Second, do an exceptional job of welcoming new employees. A new employee will always compare the first few weeks on the new job with the last week at the old job. What usually happens to an employee on the last week of a job? He gets a party. Perhaps there was a potluck lunch. Maybe there was a cake with his name on it. What usually happens to an employee in the first week at a new job? He is introduced around and then left to his desk where nobody knows him. Last week he got a cake. This week he is sitting and feeling lonely. Here is a simple idea. Honor new employees. Have a potluck lunch and get a cake. Make them feel welcome.

Third, interview all new employees after thirty days. Ask questions like, “Now that you’ve been here for a month, how do we compare to what we said you should expect?” or “What are we doing well?” or “At your previous job, what are some things you saw already in place that

you feel could make us better?” Ask “Is there anything here that you are uncomfortable with? Anything that might cause you to want to leave?” Be sure to listen well and take notes.

Those are key questions to ask after thirty days. Then meet again after ninety days and ask the same questions. Meeting with a new employee at thirty and ninety days will encourage future communication as well as provide feedback that will help to improve the workplace and enhance retention.

A leader can close the thirty- and ninety-day meetings by saying, “We realize having the right people is the key to having the best place to work and providing the best service to our members and guests.”

In addition, set up a calendar to meet with every employee for thirty minutes each quarter. These “check-in” meetings will also encourage positive communication and develop relationships and trust. Honoring each employee with private time sends a signal about his or her value in the organization.

Fourth, remember that intellectual capital exists within employees. Employees have great ideas. It is the job of leadership to harvest that resource. Implement a “bright ideas” program. This is not a suggestion box. The temple is seeking more than suggestions. The temple is seeking intellectual capital that is directly related to improving operation efficiency or communication. Bright ideas must be practical and relatively affordable.

The temple should recognize employees for ideas and innovation in three phases: upon the receipt of the idea; upon the implementation of the idea; and when a number of employees’ ideas have been

implemented. Recognition can be a coffee mug, a small cash bonus, a certificate at a communications meeting, or all three.

Fifth, the executive director should have her/his own employee staff meetings each week. The guidelines for the meeting should encourage trust that employees of good intentions can work through difficult issues together. Employees will respect each other's right to have different points of view. Everyone should speak clearly, and authentically, in ways that encourage feedback. Finally, throughout the meeting, the goal should be to find shared meaning through engaged listening.

In these meetings employees should be free to discuss their current challenges while all others listen. The meeting cannot end until each employee has had a chance to discuss her/his own challenges and current projects. Each employee should listen and learn. It is vital that employees understand each other's roles and responsibilities and how they interrelate. The executive director should specifically ask about congregant service and communication issues. Employees that understand and respect each other's workloads build strong teams.

Once a quarter have a communication meeting of all employees, including clergy and education professionals. Talk about the current issues at the temple. Honor employees for their successes in the prior quarter in front of everyone. Be sure to create a file folder to keep positive remarks from congregants and guests about the employees. Read them aloud. Honor the positive within this greater family environment. Save any personal negatives for private conversations. Be honest and address issues fairly. The more honest information that is communicated to employees, the greater amount of trust that will develop.

Finally, as is written in Ken Blanchard's *The One Minute Manager*, catch your employees doing something right. Use the one-minute praise. Then praise them again as they get better and better at their tasks. This is especially important for new employees. Praise them for every step in the right direction. Give positive feedback for incremental gains. Don't look to criticize.

Spend time focusing on creating the culture of an employee family community. Leadership needs to create the culture that temple employees are a family connected by a web of common beliefs, shared commitments, and collective memories. Value No. 1, family, should become a covenant that draws employees together in a bond continuously cemented in their minds by reminders of the importance of family and family history. In this case, family history is the history of the employee's interaction with other employees as well as temple congregants and guests.

Victories at work are rare and are the result of sacrifice and hard work. Celebrating victories is essential to valuing them and creating the memory. When something within an employee screams "Let's celebrate," a celebration should happen. By not understanding the value of celebration, we lack the passion for doing things right. The cost of not responding to the human desire for celebration is very high. Celebration enhances our humanity.

Celebration provides an opportunity to establish and strengthen trust and employee relationships. It brings people closer. People like to be associated with winners. There are lots of companies that achieve great things, but you'd never know it by talking to their employees. By taking the time to celebrate significant accomplishments (individual or team), employees are reminded that they are part of a winning organization. The self-esteem of the entire organization is lifted.

Celebrations give a sense of history. They are milestones. Take pictures. Create staff scrapbooks or photo albums. Celebrations help us remember the past. In remembering the past we develop a sense of history and are linked to the wisdom associated with it. Celebrated history becomes a remarkable legacy for the future.

There are also times when it is appropriate to honor a loss, a sadness, or change. A commemoration gives the employee family the chance to gather as a community to mourn. Sometimes there are losses associated with endings, job layoffs, or separations. Sometimes a loss is the passing of an employee or a beloved congregant. When marking a loss, it's best to ask the employee family how they want to remember the loss. Sadness, too, is part of history. It is as real as positive accomplishments and cannot be ignored. Employees should be encouraged to talk about their feelings. Temple employees should take the concept of family seriously, and that's what families do when something negative happens to another family member. They reconstruct memories and tell stories to help them mourn.

There is another benefit derived from the deliberate and overt expression of grief and mourning. It has a healing effect on the organization. Employee families should be a tight-knit group because, together, they celebrate the bad times as well as the good times.

Here are some Southwest Airlines guidelines for celebration as noted in the book *Nuts!* The celebration must be authentic. Celebrations should be from the heart. They should emerge out of genuine appreciation for people. If the celebration cannot be from the heart, do not celebrate.

The celebration must raise people's dignity and self-esteem. The motive behind celebrations is to build people up and honor the gifts, talents, and personalities they bring to the job.

The celebration must be done right. Take the time to make sure the celebration is well-coordinated and well-timed, that everyone knows about it, and that it is tasteful.

The celebration should be seen as an investment. Business people are often reluctant to engage in elaborate celebrations because of the cost. What Southwest has witnessed is that celebrations are an investment, not a cost. Again, make them a worthwhile investment or don't celebrate. Look for the least expensive way to do it right.

Remember that how we treat our employees is how they will ultimately treat each other, congregants, and guests. If temple leadership is going to talk about the temple as a family, behavior and activities must be consistent with and demonstrate a commitment to family members.

Conclusion: Educating the Staff

The essence of my thesis is that the way we engage and treat our employees is the way they will, in turn, treat other employees, congregants, and guests. If we treat them with the same care and love as family, they will treat others the same way. In order to attain extraordinary customer satisfaction, every employee must be the right employee and know their place on the bus, or their role within the temple. However, like many ideals, we must work backward in order to go forward.

Before implementing a strategy of loving kindness toward our employees, it is first necessary to have the right employees. Once the right employees are in the right seats on the bus, it is time to educate them with regard to what Dr. Ron Wolfson calls “radical hospitality.” Teach employees that the temple is the same, symbolically, as Abraham’s tent. Teach employees to make the temple as welcoming as Abraham’s tent, open on all sides. Smiling, making eye contact, words of welcome, exchanging stories, exceeding expectations, giving personal attention, and anticipating needs are all parts of Wolfson’s radical hospitality. If the temple’s values, employee selection, and the way it treats employees are as described above, it should be natural and easy for employees to learn and implement radical hospitality.

Congregants and guests spend more time with the temple staff than with each other. The temple cannot overlook the importance of training the employees to implement all aspects of radical hospitality. A potential new member walking through the temple’s door on a Wednesday morning will be asking, “Will I be welcome here?” The answer to that question will first come from the staff who greet them.

The “first who” concept states that not only should the temple always hire the right employees, but that hiring the right employees is of the highest priority. With the right employees, the organization can survive change and go different directions without having to change staffing.

The right employees are those employees that combine individual job-skill competency or potential with personal belief systems that are aligned with the Mission and Value Statements. Find employees who embrace heartfelt service and who care about people.

A thorough and careful interview process will match candidates with Mission and Value Statements. The right employees are found among both new hires and existing employees. The temple must endure, with dignity, the painful process of deciding whether any existing employees are not aligned with the Mission and Value Statements. If so, these existing employees must be replaced. Handling the potential replacement of existing employees with care and compassion will demonstrate the correct values to remaining employees.

Once the Mission and Value Statements and the right employees are in place, the temple is positioned to deliver its culture of extraordinary customer satisfaction. The one, very important, remaining element requires strategies that continuously honor and treat employees as family members. The vital components are honest, frequent, and open communication; involving and informing employees of issues and decisions; giving the employees the freedom to make decisions to put service before rules; constantly working with employees to re-recruit them; And documenting memories through celebration.

The Mission and Value Statements cannot be written and then put in a drawer, to be forgotten. It takes courage and hard work to keep these statements alive and in the forefront of all work and decision making. If the executive director has the latitude and the discipline to honor these two statements as a means of selecting employees and creating a culture of service with the right employees, a culture of extraordinary customer service will emerge.

Employees should be hired because inherent in their being is the belief that, as Dr. Ron Wolfson writes, "The spirituality of welcome is rooted in a core value of Judaism that is expressed in the very first chapter of the Bible:

And G-d said: 'Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness'...And G-d created humankind in G-d's image; male and female G-d created them. Genesis 1:26-28

This is a stunning statement. *Every human being is made in the image of G-d.* From this core value, we discover the ultimate purpose of a congregation. The task of a spiritual community is to help each human being made in the image of G-d recapture the knowledge of how to live a life filled with godliness, a life committed to becoming a partner with G-d in doing the ongoing work of creation and repair of the world.”

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