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National Association of  
Temple Administrators  
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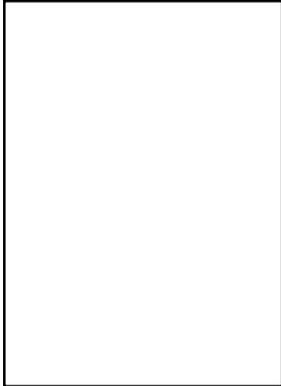
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# From the Editor



As we approach the High Holy Days, we find ourselves taking stock of the past year. For many of us, it was a challenging one, to say the least. Temple administrators found themselves facing the fallout from global events in very concrete and profound ways—and sometimes feeling helpless in response.

Although atonement may be foremost in our minds, I would like you to

consider another theme of this holiday season, one that is usually in the background. Rosh haShanah is the beginning of the year, but it is also traditionally considered to be the anniversary of the Creation. With all the optimism that a

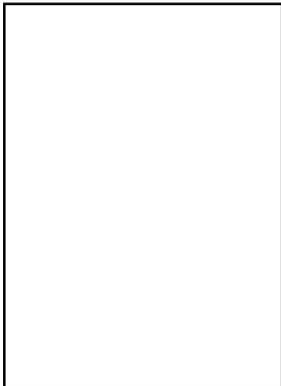
birthday brings (and a momentous one, at that), we put on new clothes, fill the menu with as many sweet foods as decency (or diet) will allow, and greet each other with good wishes for a happy year ahead.

We can't banish the fear of terrorism, or the terrors of war. We can't erase economic realities. But Jews are an eternally optimistic and forward-looking people, and we are up to the challenge of being God's partners in perfecting the world. As synagogue leaders, we have myriad opportunities to use our knowledge, creativity, and empathy to face any difficulty we encounter.

The New Year gives us an opportunity to think about solving problems from a different vantage point—to start fresh, if you will. I hope this will give you new ways to look at some not-so-new issues. A fresh perspective can do wonders for your outlook.

# President's Message

The title of this edition of reflects the current climate, in which many of us find our congregations. For many months, the uncertainties of the world have weaved their way into our day-to-day operations. This has presented a challenge for administrators in many areas.



Security measures have had to be upgraded and have added a strain to budgets already groaning to meet the needs of our ever-changing populations. The need for additional security, however, goes beyond that of the merely financial. The culture in which many of us have lived has undergone transi-

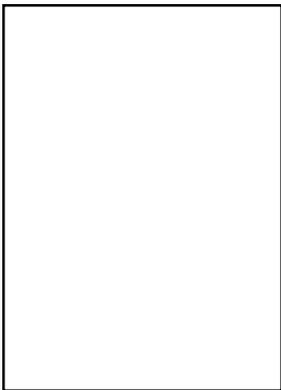
tion as well. The need to be welcoming has had to be balanced with the need to provide safety. Many administrators have struggled with the challenge of helping members adjust to this change in culture.

As administrators, we know that any change will be

seen as a positive by some and a negative by others. Making tough choices in difficult times has the same effect. Some members welcome the choices made, while others have more difficulty. If financial problems mean reducing staff, congregants will be uncomfortable if their favorite staff member leaves. If cutbacks are in order, some will feel their special program should not be the one cut. It is often difficult, as administrators, to help our membership see the need and understand the thinking behind these necessary decisions.

Throughout these pages, you will learn different approaches to difficult times and the changes they require. From meeting congregational needs while balancing the need to cut staff to providing appropriate security while functioning in a city besieged by a terrorist, this issue of the gives meaningful answers to the many transitions we face as temple administrators.

# Synagogue Security: Prudence or Paranoia?



Since September 11, 2001, security is the hot button on our national keypad. Every newscast and each morning's newspaper brings front-page headlines of some issue centered on security. We even have a new cabinet level post for homeland security.

The security of our institutions has been a priority for synagogue managers for decades. We have been charged with the

security of all of our assets: the funds of the congregation, the building contents, the buildings and property themselves, and of course, most importantly, the protection of the myriad human lives that pass through our portals each day.

## Protecting Contents

Clearly, synagogues do not need to reinvent the wheel in order to protect the contents of our buildings or the funds we use to operate. The for-profit world has perfected tools that we can easily emulate for this purpose. We need to protect ourselves from theft, from damage or destruction, and from misuse or misappropriation. That old adage that "good fences make good neighbors" works for us as well. There are new high-tech locking systems that are very expensive to install—and totally worthless without a well-planned, efficiently supervised program for knowing and controlling just who has or needs the key to what. Included in that program must be a policy of dealing with lost keys, terminated employees' keys, and replication. Without the proper controls in place, institutions will find themselves constantly replacing lost or stolen contents or periodically rekeying the entire institution at considerable cost.

Contents need to be inventoried and ID-tagged or engraved, with those inventories being kept on database

software systems. Many insurance companies will ask that videotapes be made of all of the contents, not only to visualize items but to verify their condition. This includes our most sacred jewels, the *Torahs*, which can be protected by the Torah Registry. Torahs are also protected in many synagogues by motion detectors on the *shema*. The lighting plan of the facilities should be carefully reviewed—again—with an eye toward protection as well as safety.

## Protecting Funds

As much time and money as we spend protecting the things our institutions own, we must also be extremely protective of our liquid assets—our funds. Every congregation, no matter what size, needs to engage outside auditors to perform, at minimum, a financial review. If at all feasible, the congregation should have the independent CPAs perform a full audit, along with a management letter. These are public funds we administer; they must be safeguarded, for the protection of the institution and for our own peace of mind.

The management letter is as important as the audit itself. This document will review systems and procedures and highlight those that can inadvertently aid in wrongdoing. The auditors will check to see if the right personnel are performing the right functions and will talk to you about your hiring procedures, background checks, check signatures, and much more. They will review procurement procedures, paper flow, and levels of authority. They may even check to see if you have control systems for long-distance telephone charges. The independent audit verifies your assets, but the management letter is a very important step in their protection.

One of our most important assets is our membership database. More and more auditors are looking at our "Best Practices Policy" for securing our information from unscrupulous hackers. With HIPPA now in place, we can look for more federal regulation of members' information. Social Security, credit card, and bank account numbers be secured.

### Protecting Buildings and Property

In protecting the physical assets of the synagogue, we have at our disposal some very powerful and readily available resources. The local police departments are very willing to help us help them protect us. They will do a site survey and make suggestions for better physical barriers, better lighting, locking systems, intrusion-detection systems, cameras tied to our computer networks (so that each desktop can be a security monitor), and a host of systems that we may never have imagined. If you have an Israeli embassy or consulate in your city, they may be your

## NATA-SCHMOOZE @shamash.org

... a familiar e-mail address for those of us who subscribe to it. On it, we find a place to ask questions and the answers to our questions. It's a place to turn for support and guidance, to learn from and share with one another.

This e-mail discussion group is limited to regular, senior, and courtesy members of NATA who are currently serving as temple administrators in temples or synagogues on a full- or part-time basis.

Subscriber information can be found at:

<http://rj.org/nata/schmooze.html>

For more information about NATA-SCHMOOZE, contact: Eli Montague, FTA, at [emontague@ti-stl.org](mailto:emontague@ti-stl.org).

best resource, and I have found that they are very willing to offer you their expertise. The Anti-Defamation League is another willing and available source of help and training. Your local fire department will help you with evacuation and lockdown plans. Develop relationships with these experts; make them a part of your community.

### Protecting Human Life

There is no end to the list of security consultants who can be engaged. In Los Angeles (as elsewhere, I am certain), a number of firms are owned by former security specialists, police officers, CIA or FBI agents, and Israeli army and intelligence officers. Many years ago, we employed our own guards. For more than a decade, we have engaged contractors who employ and train our guards. They are owned and operated by current and former LAPD officers and have excellent contacts with the police department and the FBI. We are located in the Santa Monica mountains, not on Wilshire Boulevard or in Manhattan, and therefore we have a perceived safety.

A colleague is fond of telling the story about a congregant who came early on the Yom Kippur after 9/11 to check on the security at his synagogue and wanted to know what the administrator had done to protect the congregation from a plane flying into the building. At Stephen S. Wise Temple, we have windshield decals; we have barriers, cameras, PA systems, guards in uniforms, a single private road into our property, and security expenditures equal to the total budget of a 500-member congregation. But we will have no shoulder-launched missiles from the rooftops, and the only armed guards will be off-duty or former police officers. We must do what is possible and not be paranoid! We must make our congregants feel safe, and they will pay additional assessments for security faster than for any building fund.

We must be smart in training and retraining our employees. They must have procedures for handling a telephone bomb threat (noting a caller's accent, listening for background noise, and so forth). We must have regular fire/lockdown/evacuation drills. We must train anyone who

handles or opens our mail on what to be suspicious of and what not. All employees can be watchful of strangers on our property. A simple “May I help you?” can be viewed as a kindness, but it can also be a deterrent. Although our synagogue was unsuccessful in our first attempt at using employee identification badges, they are standard in the for-profit world and most non-profit institutions. I don’t know of any synagogues that employ this procedure, but we should seriously consider it. There are card systems that open doors, identify the employee, record attendance, allow for immediate remote lockdown, and, if you want, work parking barriers.

Just one more story. We are all aware that our pre-school parents seem to be the most concerned of our members about security for children. In Los Angeles, this

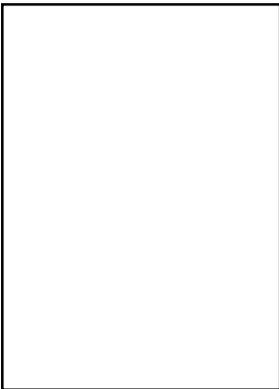
actually began after the Northridge earthquake in 1994. Anyhow, one day one of our Nursery School Moms, who happens to be a very bright, high-profile attorney, was extremely agitated because small planes and helicopters fly over our nursery school site all day and night. We’re situated in the mountain pass along the 405 freeway that separates the Westside of LA from the San Fernando Valley. The pilots use the freeway as a landmark for visual flight rules. She insisted that I contact the FAA to make the Sepulveda Pass and all 10 schools on this mountain a no-fly zone! She had some legal experience with the agency and was certain, in light of the security climate in America, that they would cooperate.

I called. They laughed—but understood.  
Prudence, paranoia!

## NATA Board Meeting, March 2003



# When Terror Strikes: The Sniper Incident



On September 11, 2001, all Americans learned that we live in a dangerous and frightening world. The specter of terrorism creates fear, and the media makes every neighborhood event into a national tragedy, complete with pictures of tearful relatives and grim-faced police spokespersons. The stress level rises with each televised incident.

The tension in Washington, D.C., remains as high as anywhere in America. As Jews living in the nation's capital, we find it ironic that our temple has become a place where fear is an unwelcome guest.

In the fall of 2002, our community was rocked by a nationally publicized series of murders allegedly committed by a man and a boy. Apparently expert marksmen, they sniped from hidden locations and mocked police efforts to apprehend them. For the better part of a month, what came to be known as "the Washington Sniper" episode had a palpable impact on everyone in our community and in our congregation. The seemingly random deaths of innocent people spread concern, fear, and panic.

It started for us with news reports one morning: Several seemingly random killings had taken place overnight in an area within 10 minutes' driving time from the temple. The reports indicated that county schools were going to "Code Blue," meaning that all students were restricted to the inside of their buildings.

Upon my arrival at the temple, as nursery school students were unloaded from their cars by mothers, fathers, and nannies, I consulted with our school director, and we agreed that we would initiate our own version of "Code Blue." The kids would stay inside, and the blinds would be drawn on all windows. We agreed that we would follow the same policy as did the public schools: keep the schools open but restrict student activities. Nervous teachers,

many with children of their own at other schools, were offered the chance to contact their kids' schools to reassure both children and parents.

We contacted the local police precinct and asked for increased vigilance and presence. Our own security detail, which since 9/11 had been on duty whenever the building was open, was beefed up with additional manpower and higher visibility. We double-checked our largely ignored policy of making sure that all exterior doors were locked at all times.

On the second day of the "incident," we learned more tragic news: One of the victims was Laurie Rivera, who was the nanny of two nursery school students and who had worked previously as a nanny for another congregational family. She had dropped off the kids at the temple and stopped for gas at a nearby station, where she was struck and slain in the family minivan. Television shots later that day displayed the empty car seats of our students, securely in place. Laurie left behind a husband and two small children of her own—and a nursery and congregational community in a state of shock.

Dealing with the stress and shock of our staff was an immediate concern, both because of their personal needs and because of their need to impart an attitude of calm to our students and congregants. Our rabbis utilized their pastoral skills effectively, and their efforts were supplemented by the advice and assistance from the local Jewish social services agency. Most importantly, we made sure that staff and congregants were kept aware of what was taking place. Both written communications and personal contact were needed. I found that my visible presence at the doors, or near the carpool lane, or just walking through the halls, was somehow reassuring to staff and students.

That day (and for several weeks afterwards), our local police were present—in squad cars with flashing lights—during pick-up and drop-off of students, both for the nursery school and for our religious school. Daily telephone messages began, informing our parents and the congregation that "Code Blue" was in effect—and that we were prepared for "Code Red" as well (if a lockdown or

evacuation was required). Where we lacked window shades, colorful murals on butcher paper were placed to cover otherwise exposed stairwells and hallways.

For almost four weeks, the situation remained unchanged. Each additional death brought more rumors, and each day brought more demands from our members: What was the temple doing to guarantee the safety of their children? Our reply: "Everything we can do." Stress levels became higher as each day passed without an arrest. To the teachers' credit, the nursery school children seemed to remain blissfully unaware of the situation. Their bicycles were brought in from the playground to the social hall, where moon bounces and indoor soccer became welcome diversions. Religious school teachers were provided with guidance on how to respond, in age-appropriate ways, to the inevitable questions from their students about the incident.

The announcement of the capture of the snipers was met with incredible relief.

Having lived through a terrible period of time, we saw the need to analyze the experience. A new security commit-

tee was formed, new procedures were written up, and we added a new sense of urgency to the need to prepare for awful possibilities. What will we do if a "dirty bomb" is set off near the White House, which is three miles from us? What if the federal government declares an evacuation of all or part of Washington because of a biological threat? Can our teachers be expected to remain here with our students while their own children are in harm's way somewhere else? What kind of emergency rations and supplies need to be on hand? These questions continue to be reviewed and debated. We have, however, come to some conclusions that are applicable wherever a congregation might be located:

We need to focus our efforts on protecting our students, congregation, and staff from dangers that we can actually deal with, and we need to be honest with our members about what we can and cannot do. We must acknowledge that we cannot stop a determined terrorist attack or suicide bomber, but that we can make our congregation less open to random acts of violence by increasing the visibility of our security.

We must have comprehensive emergency preparedness plans. Off-the-cuff decision-making may be necessary, but planning for potential situations is far better when possible. We need to develop a variety of scenarios, and what we will do in each case, be it snipers, terrorist actions downtown, fire, loss of electricity or water, or others. Specific plans for evacuations, lockdowns, and other emergency responses must be in place—and they must be communicated repeatedly to staff and congregants. Practice and regular drills are not a luxury; they are essential.

Emergency communication procedures must be in place. Telephone trees, email, radio and TV station notices, and voice-mail announcements must be coordinated. It is also essential to establish two-way communications between every classroom and our school and administrative offices. Back-up cell phones need to be available in case of power failures. Perhaps most important, members need to know what will happen even if we cannot commu-

## Save These Dates!

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nicate with them at all.

Our local police precinct must know our schedule and needs, and we must create a personal relationship with shift commanders and local police on our beat. (All officers know they can always get a cup of coffee here!)

The clergy need to take an active role in explaining to our congregants what we are doing to enhance their safety, and what the congregants can do to help. Prayer, memorial services, and expressions of condemnation in sermons are helpful, but an active and involved clergy is a critical asset for conveying to the congregation the seriousness with which we view security matters.

We must constantly review security arrangements. Do we have sufficient security guards? Are they properly trained? Is our communications gear effective and sufficient? Do we need new fencing or exterior lighting on the property? How should we monitor access to the building during business hours, or during religious services? How can we involve more members in an ongoing effort to enhance our sense of security?

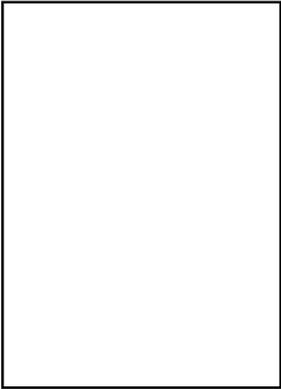
We must also recognize that fear is contagious, and that the bombardment of our members with televised images of incidents around the world reinforces their concerns. However, we should be mindful of what Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav wrote:

. The entire world is but a narrow bridge, but the most important thing is not to be afraid

## **NATA Members with FTA Designations**

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Serane Blatt  
Steven Bram  
Janet Bronitsky  
Gary S. Cohn  
Sonya Dinnsen  
William Ferstenfeld  
Norman Fogel  
Sandra Galfond  
Mandell Greene  
Jeffrey Herzog  
Elizabeth Hirsch  
Thomas Jablonski  
Fern Kamen  
Edward Kaplan  
Terry Kraus  
Gail Kroop  
Alice Miller  
Eli Montague  
Loree Resnik  
Janice Rosenblatt  
Marc Swatez  
Terry Taubman  
Mark Weisstuch**

# Staffing: Doing More with Less



Before I came to the wonderful world of temple administration, I worked for one of the largest staffing companies in North America. And before that, I spent several years working with one of the premier worldwide benefits consulting firms. In my career, I have spent a lot of time listening to clients tell me that they need to do more work with less staff. It didn't occur to me that as a temple

administrator in a tough economy, I'd be faced with many of the same challenges as my former clients.

One of the first challenges I faced when I joined Temple Kol Ami was a slightly overstuffed front office. For the better part of the week, two secretaries and a receptionist, all part-time and each working not more than 28 hours, didn't have enough work to do to keep themselves busy. My working style was different from what they had been used to, and many of the small tasks, like typing letters, flowed from my keyboard more easily than giving them something to type. I did a lot of my own work, so the secretarial staff had a little less to do.

The temple was also in a tight budget year, so if cuts could be made, I needed to find them. Rather than cutting staff, which wasn't something I wanted to do anyway, I asked for volunteers to cut hours. As long as there were people to answer phones, open the door, answer questions, and get the work done, it would save thousands of dollars if we could reorganize schedules. One secretary cut back to three days a week (working 22.5 hours), another secretary decided to work four 6-hour days, and the receptionist starting coming in 30 minutes later in the morning. I had three truly part-time employees working in a full-time temple office. It worked well. The work was getting done, letters were going out, and lunches and days off were covered.

The new schedule gave us the hours of coverage we needed and allowed us the flexibility to adapt schedules

and responsibilities. It also encouraged more job satisfaction because, as noted in the 2001 Employee Review by Randstad North America, "Employees who feel they have some flexibility in when, where, or how they work are more satisfied with their jobs." Job satisfaction of the people working with me is important; I don't want employees coming to work every day hating their jobs. That would come through in everything they do, from answering the phone to sending out mailings.

Our use of three part-time employees to cover the front office was working very well until one employee decided to retire and another employee decided to move out of the area. After much discussion and deliberation, I decided that as long as major changes were going to happen in the front office, I would replace the departing part-time employees with one full-time employee. I decided that consistency of who is answering the telephones and answering questions would be important if we were going to get past the retirement of a long-time and well-liked employee. For many weeks, members would call and ask for her. I felt it was necessary to replace her with someone who would be in the office every day and who would get to know the congregants.

The only way our new arrangement would work was to create a team out of the front-office secretaries, the bookkeeper, and the rabbis' secretary. Teams that work together can outperform groups that are merely together working. Building teamwork is probably the first step to working more efficiently and effectively when times are tougher and more challenging. By reorganizing some of the responsibilities, and sharing the workload, our new and improved office staff of two is doing the work of three people. They feel responsible for what's happening in the office, and they share the enthusiasm to get things done in a timely manner.

Now that we've been running the office with one full-time secretary and one part-time secretary for a few months, I am confident that the work is getting done and this is an efficient model of office staffing. When we do need an extra hand, I call upon some of our many members who have asked to volunteer.

Working with volunteers can be a tricky business. A

lot of confidential material passes through the front office of a temple. It is important to trust anyone you bring in to work in the office. I have a pool of volunteers who I call upon when I need to cover a busy time, like sending out High Holiday tickets, or even to cover a few days of a secretary's vacation. The volunteers are happy to stuff envelopes, stuff our Shabbat programs, answer phones, and even to do a little filing for the bookkeeper.

Although I've been here a relatively short period of time, I've been able to build upon the relationships with volunteers our office staff had developed. When our receptionist of 11 years announced her retirement, all I could think about was who was going to answer the phones on Wednesday when the four-day a week secretary was off. I called on a few of my many volunteers. One was able to cover one week, and another was able to cover the days I needed help the following week. We have a regular Friday volunteer who helps the bookkeeper file and stuffs programs. She kept to her regular Friday volunteer hours, and we were able to get through a month of transitional time. It worked, we survived, and nothing fell through the cracks.

By using volunteers to supplement your office staff, you engage your congregants in temple life, and that makes everyone feel good. It encourages a relationship between your office and the congregants and makes everyone feel more comfortable.

The maintenance staff has been as much a challenge as the office staff. In the past, no one was terribly concerned with the amount of overtime needed to keep the building running and clean. As times have become tougher, I was charged with keeping the building in good shape with fewer hours of maintenance staff. Again, rather than cutting staff, we cut hours and rearranged the way people worked. Rather than having three people on a Sunday with just religious school, perhaps we could get by with just two. We are now closing the buildings at 6:30 p.m. on Mondays, so no meetings take place. The maintenance person can finish cleaning and lock up by then. By cutting four hours of maintenance time every week, I was able to cut several thousand dollars out of the budget. I try to limit overtime and allow only pre-approved overtime. I imple-

mented a new system of cleaning products that save time and energy, and that allows the staff to be more efficient when cleaning. The idea of doing more with less in the realm of maintenance staff is not easy, but working smarter and more efficiently can cut back on unnecessary overtime, which saves money.

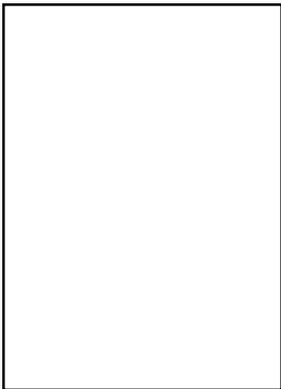
Working through difficult financial times is challenging. It's important to communicate with your staff the way you would like to be approached—openly, with respect and trust. It is also important to communicate with your board of directors. When I first told people we could not have meetings on Monday evenings, many chairpeople were upset until I explained that closing the building saves several thousand dollars. They all understood that I was doing what I felt I had to for the financial well-being of our congregation. Communication made the difference. We all hope that financial situations improve, but until then we have to learn to do more with less.

## NATA Placement Service

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# When the Budget Is Tight: Practical Advice from Members

## *What to Give When “Thank You” Isn’t Enough*



This year, more than ever, we are hearing about congregations that are tightening their belts and trying to work through the budget crisis creatively. Some leaders consider reducing program and building use while others consider downsizing staff. Others are contemplating the “no raise this year” policy. For those in the last category, it might be possible to find ways to show appreciation

while still being fiscally prudent.

The most important thing to do first is to really know your workplace: Is everyone being used efficiently, to your satisfaction and theirs? Then comes the strategic planning, along with some clever negotiating.

Some offers to propose in lieu of cold, hard cash are additional vacation time or personal days. How many you

offer depends on your assessment of the employee’s value and workload. There may be down times that you could suggest as appropriate for this compensation.

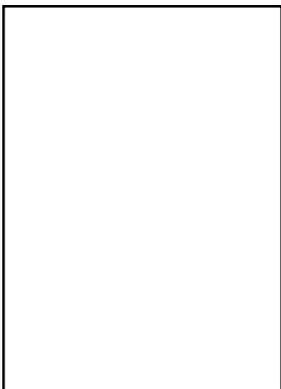
In this same vein, it may be that an employee’s tasks could be done in fewer hours. By computing a salary on an hourly basis, one might argue for (and perhaps persuade) fewer hours at a similar rate, or even a lesser yearly salary with a higher hourly rate. Time does mean money, and some employees might welcome a later arrival at work or an earlier departure.

Another offering might be additional low-cost benefits, such as life insurance, that may not be part of your benefits package. A review of what is available in the marketplace is always in order.

When embarking upon this kind of organizational change, there are two things to keep in mind: One is fair and equal treatment for all, and the other is open communications.

## *Now Is the Time for Creative Fundraising*

As the mid-year mark passed on our fiscal calendar, it became painfully clear that we were looking at a deficit for the current year. The fundraising events scheduled for the fall and spring had not raised the amounts anticipated in our budget. For several months, we discussed this matter at board meetings, but the numbers did not change.



Knowing that the cash flow was suffering but bills and payroll would roll on, I decided to offer up a fundraising idea and agreed to

chair it myself. I suggested that we sell nameplates to be put on the armrests of our sanctuary pews. I ordered the invitation-style mailing with a response card and return envelope for names and checks. Within three months, we picked up more than \$20,000. No doubt each year we will add to that number. It’s an ongoing fund-raiser with very little expense. Our deficit is reduced, our members loved the idea, and it was a financial success. My hope is that this will inspire those on the board to come up with their own original or creative ideas.

In these difficult times, executive directors are called upon to do more than manage the money. I hope these poor financial times will improve—but until then, happy fundraising.

NATA and the UAHC  
Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management  
are pleased to offer the

# Congregational Consulting Service

NATA members with longtime professional expertise in the field of temple management work with congregations, board members, and appropriate synagogue personnel. Recommendations or referrals to enhance operations are provided after consultation.

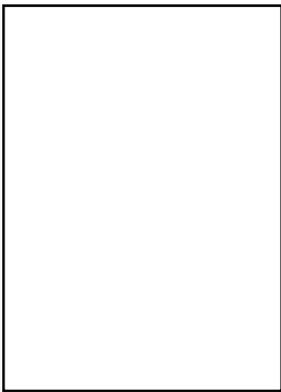
NATA members are available for consultation on:

- Membership: recruitment; retention; communications with members
- Organizational structure: boards and committees; bylaws; staff roles and structures; leadership development
- Finance: dues and system analysis; financial controls; budgets; financial statements; endowments; capital campaigns
- Facility management: insurance; catering; use of facilities
- Personnel: job descriptions; personnel policies; performance evaluation; transitions; personnel manuals
- Construction/remodeling: planning; financing; project management; controls
- Technology: telephones; computer hardware/software; office machines

The consulting fee of up to \$750 is waived for UAHC member congregations. Synagogues are required to reimburse only the consultant's travel expenses.

Consultations may be requested by completing the form linked to the NATA web site (<http://rj.org.nata>). The completed form should be returned to the Office of Synagogue Management at the UAHC. You can also contact Mark R. Jacobson (at 404-873-1731 or [mjacobson@the-temple.org](mailto:mjacobson@the-temple.org)) or Dale Glasser, Director of the Department of Synagogue Management, (at 212-650-4040 or [dglasser@uahc.org](mailto:dglasser@uahc.org)) for more information.

# Responding to Members in Tough Times



First and foremost, we are a synagogue, guided by Jewish values and Torah. A long time ago, I asked my rabbi, “Why do we read the entire Torah every year, over and over again?” The rabbi replied, “There are two reasons. First, the Torah reminds us of how to live our daily lives through good times and bad. Second, each year you will learn something new, some new aspect about

life that you can use.” In these times, it is good to have Torah to fall back on in the search for answers.

So we begin with some Torah. In Leviticus 19, we read: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.”

These are difficult times. The safety of America and Israel has been challenged by the events of September 11, the Iraq war, and the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Coupled with this is the economy, hit by a major recession with the highest unemployment in 25 years. A three-year stock market decline set off by the dot-com bust followed by the questionable (or illegal) actions of some corporate executives has taken its toll. We have been shaken. For business, it is back to the basics of remembering how to make money. For the synagogue, we look back to Torah for answers. How have these events affected the synagogue, and what can we do to bring calm, hope, and some answers to our membership?

## The Economics

Many of our synagogues are being pressed financially as a result of the tough economy, but so are our members. How do we balance this conundrum? The

temple’s expenses are rising in the areas of insurance and security, and at the same times our revenues are being pressured by the economic downturn.

The following question was circulated among some NATA members and on PresCon, the e-mail list of synagogue presidents: “Does anyone use a collection agency to go after temple dues (bad debts)?”

An interesting question. The answer for most of us was “Are you kidding?” At a time when members may be unemployed, or two-career families have reverted to one income, or the high cost of housing or food has made middle-income families feel poor, should the synagogue be asking “How do we collect?” Maybe the better question is “How can we help?”

It is time to call each member who has had a job setback and waive those membership dues that you know cannot be paid. Members wrestling with the stigma of unemployment are too embarrassed or humiliated to call the synagogue and go through the dues-adjustment process. Consider it to be the corners of your fields or, even better, the jubilee year, when all debts are forgiven.

“But,” you are thinking, “we need that money, or the temple will have a deficit.” Let’s be realistic with our expectations. If the family truly is in trouble, you won’t get the money anyway, and all you will do is alienate them. And, if they leave, you won’t get money in the future, either.

Some congregations have set up job-support groups and job-networking groups and offer job counseling through local agencies like Jewish Family or Vocational Services. It is a positive step to offer members support and to give them an opportunity to connect. In the real world, one doesn’t get a great job by sending out 300 resumes, but rather through referrals and connections. That is something that temple members are really good at doing.

As for the lost income, go meet with your top 25 donors, tell them what is going on, and ask for their support. While their portfolios may have dropped some, their hearts and souls are ready to help, if you ask.

**War, Terrorism, Health, and Safety**

People are concerned. What we have taken for granted since the fall of the Soviet Union, or even since the end of the Vietnam War, was our safety and security. Living in the United States or Canada has been both peaceful and prosperous since the 1970s began. While the threat from Eastern Bloc countries was always present, it really did not impact our lives. One could find solace everywhere. With the events of September 11 and the Iraq war, this has all been shattered.

On the Shabbat following September 11, we tripled our Friday-night worship attendance. Close to 1,000 people came to services. They wanted to feel safe. They wanted to be with each other. This is what the house of assembly, provided. A sanctuary from the dangers of the world.

But while many Jews came to the synagogue for comfort, others brought their preschool children to us in fear. They were worried that their kids were “exposed” by being in a Jewish setting. It started with the JCC shooting in Los Angeles and reached a crescendo after September 11. People were afraid. People are still afraid.

What can we do as synagogue leaders? How we communicate to our members—what we say and how we act—sends a message. Sometimes this message is good, and sometimes it is not. One of the services we provide our members is a place to come and talk. Let our members tell us their concerns and fears. Some make sense, and we can deal with solutions. Others seem irrational and just need a calm voice and a shoulder to cry on. Yes, we are a house of worship and house of study and a house of assembly. But we are also a house of spirituality and a house of information, and we need to provide these to everyone.

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