

# ***Compassionate Management: Insights and Applications from Biblical Tradition***

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## **Introduction**

Management theory has evolved since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the “scientific management theory” was introduced as the first systematic study of the relationship between people and their tasks. The theory is most closely associated with the writings of F. W. Taylor,<sup>1</sup> and its most famous application was the development of Henry Ford’s modern assembly line. The worker as a mere cog in the machine became the iconographic image of American business from the time of Charlie Chaplin’s movie “Modern Times” to Lucille Ball’s stuffing herself with chocolates in a futile attempt to keep up with the ever-faster conveyor belt.

A more analytical yet humane approach – one which is still discussed in business schools around the world - is the “administrative management theory” introduced by European thinkers such as Max Weber, whose contributions to the theory of bureaucracy created a basis for understanding how complex systems operate, and how systems could

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, G. & George, J. (Eds.). (2002). *Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management: Selections from Contemporary Management*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Primis, p. 37.

be organized to enhance productivity.<sup>2</sup> One of Weber's contemporaries in the 1920's was Henri Fayol, a noted French CEO, who was among the first to speak to the importance of what he called "employee equity." He wrote: "For personnel to be encouraged to carry out their duties with all the devotion and loyalty of which they are capable, they must be treated with respect for their own sense of integrity, and equity results from the combination of respect and justice."<sup>3</sup>

In the United States, the need for human dignity as part of efficient operations was the focus of the work of theorist Mary Parker Follett, who emphasized the importance of employee initiative and participation in decision making.<sup>4</sup>

In the following decades, various theories waxed and waned, influenced by the experiences of the armed forces during wartime and the growth of large corporations in the post World War II era. A new "scientific approach to management," utilizing rigorous quantitative techniques to maximize resources, grew in popularity as the methods for number crunching (and computerized spread sheets) became more widely available. One aspect of this approach was the Total Quality Management (TQM) system and the workers' circle programs which focus on analyzing how the organizations' internal processes, including its employees, affect output.<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary management discussions continue to consider the importance of the ethical treatment of employees initiated by Fayol and Follett. Modern thinkers stress the need to "incorporate the soul" into operations, and dispel the notion that management must put emphasis on things rather than people.<sup>6</sup>

It has been suggested that the core value of an ethical employee is to place the interest of the organization first. From a purely economic perspective, it makes sense for management to restrain any organizational stakeholders – workers, managers, stockholders, suppliers - from engaging in unethical behavior, because placing one's individual interest above that of the organization interferes with the efficient allocation of

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<sup>2</sup> Jones & George, p. 41. Concepts such as the division of labor, authority and responsibility, unity of command, lines of authority, and centralization became key components of management thinking.

<sup>3</sup> Jones & George, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Jones & George, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Jones & George, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Mann, C.J. & Gutz, K. (Eds.) (2002). *The Development of Management Theory and Practice in the United States*. Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing, p. 159.

resources.<sup>7</sup> In other words, ethical behavior makes economic sense because ethical behavior leads to a more efficient and productive organization.

As part of the importance of ethical business conduct, a concept of “compassionate management” has been discussed by human relations theorists in recent years.<sup>8</sup> The theory posits that a manager can maximize the performance of employees by emphasizing their welfare and personal development through civilized, nurturing, spiritual, and sympathetic management techniques.<sup>9</sup> The compassionate manager exhibits the following significant traits:<sup>10</sup>

1. *consulting actively with employees and involving them in decision making;*
2. *delegating authority effectively, and promoting employee growth;*
3. *fairly and equitably treating employees, and considering their personal needs;*
4. *teaching employees through appropriate feedback and training; and*
5. *leading by example, promoting self-awareness and modesty.*

As synagogue professionals, we know that our Jewish tradition provides comprehensive instruction about the entire range of human behavior. While secular management theorists have written about the ethical treatment of employees from the point of view of economic efficiency, Jewish writers have linked the ethical treatment of employees with traditional Jewish textual sources. For example, Rabbi David Baron has written that the central paradox of Moses’ life – his manifest compassion inexorably linked to his undeniable zealotry – suggests that contemporary leaders should balance compassion for their staff with their drive for organizational success.<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly, a major part of our tradition deals with the employer-employee relationship. Meir Tamari, Chief Economist, Office of the Governor of the Bank of Israel,

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<sup>7</sup>Jones & George, p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Anti-Defamation League. (2001). *A World of Difference*. Washington, DC: Anti-Defamation League; Center for Excellence in Nonprofits. (2000). *Best Practices: Process Management*. San Jose, CA: Center for Excellence in Nonprofits.

<sup>9</sup> Minnesota Council of Nonprofits. (1998). *Principles and Practices for Nonprofit Excellence*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Council of Nonprofits.

<sup>10</sup> Zust, Christine W. (2001). *The Compassionate Leader*. Retrieved November 18, 2003 from [www.Emerging Leader.Com](http://www.EmergingLeader.Com).

<sup>11</sup> Baron, Rabbi D. & Padwa, L. (1999). *Moses on Management: 50 Leadership Lessons from the Greatest Manager of All Time*. New York, NY: Simon and Shuster, Inc., p. xiv.

has written about the expansiveness of this thread of Jewish thought as follows: “The importance of the halakhic<sup>12</sup> treatment of this subject lies...not in the determination of wages but in its contribution to the problems of workers’ protections and workers’ rights and obligations....The worker is entitled to special protection regarding his wages and working conditions over and above the normal legalisms regarding contracts.”<sup>13</sup>

I believe that those in congregational management should foster an effective, efficient workplace where we apply modern management techniques through the lens of our rich ethical tradition. As is stated by the Union for Reform Judaism’s Department of Synagogue Management, “Jewish tradition calls on us to treat our employees equitably and fairly. In modern society this means contract negotiations, compensation, and other work issues having to do with the synagogue staff and leadership should reflect the highest goals of Jewish moral teaching... It is important that interactions among the congregation and the synagogue staff demonstrate moral sensitivity, fairness, impartiality, and concern for one another.”<sup>14</sup>

Just as generations of rabbis and scholars have “read from” and “read into” the text of the Torah through midrash and exegesis to find a relevant “truth” applicable to their times, contemporary congregational administrators can also start with Torah text and find within it and from it inspiration for modern management principles. In this paper, I demonstrate that the concept of compassionate management may be construed as a *Jewish* ideal using a traditional framework of analysis from the proof text.<sup>15</sup>

The methodology utilized in this paper first is to reiterate the salient traits of the “compassionate manager” as the term is generally understood in the current literature,<sup>16</sup> and then demonstrate that these characteristics were in a sense foreshadowed in Biblical text and its analysis through the centuries. At times, the connection is clear; at other times, this relationship is admittedly tenuous. But even when the route from point A to

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<sup>12</sup> I. e., Jewish law as developed over the centuries through interpretation and exegesis.

<sup>13</sup> Tamari, M. (1987). *With All Your Possessions: Jewish Ethics and Economic Life*. New York, NY: Free Press, pp. 128-129.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Synagogue Management, UAHC. (2000). *Who May Abide in Your House? Jewish Ethics and Decision Making*. New York, NY: UAHC Press, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> In Jewish biblical analysis, a “proof text” is the verse or verses from original scripture upon which the ensuing commentary is based.

<sup>16</sup> See text accompanying note 10.

point B forms a circuitous path rather than a straight line, the *process* of seeking contemporary applications from the ancient texts has its own reward.

The reader may nevertheless still question *why* this effort is undertaken, and what the *purpose* is of the exercise?

*First*, there is the demonstrable: I showcase the inherent modernity and applicability of traditional Jewish sources as they affect this topic.

*Second*, there is the practical: I offer some specific suggestions for enhancing the employer-employee relationship in the congregational context.

*Third*, there is the hortatory: I encourage traditional Jewish study by my fellow professionals with an eye towards its relevance in our daily lives.

As we learn in Pirke Avot: “Rabban Gamliel, son of Rabbi Yehudah the Prince said: ‘Study of Torah along with worldly occupation is seemly; for labor in the two of them makes sin forgotten. And all Torah without work ends in failure and causes sin. And all who labor with the congregation labor with them for the name of Heaven.’”<sup>17</sup> From this we learn the importance of Jewish study as an inseparable part of our professional Jewish lives.

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<sup>17</sup> Herford, T. (Ed.). (1974). *The Ethics of the Talmud: Saying of the Fathers*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, p. 41.

***1. The compassionate manager consults actively with employees, and involves them in decision making.***

*Genesis 1:26 “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...’”*

Some who read this part of the Creation story may wonder why God speaks in the plural: “Let us make man in our image...” Traditional Jewish commentators suggest that this is a use of the “plural of majesty” common to royalty.<sup>18</sup> Obadiah Sforno, the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Italian commentator, suggests that the verse implies that God is conversing with the angels when He says, “us.” Sforno adds further that God first consults with the angels because man was to be created in *their* likeness. From this observation, Sforno teaches that the “greater” should always consult with the “lesser”<sup>19</sup> (or in our professional situation, the supervisor with the employee.).

In our work, before we “create” policies for our staff, we should consult with them to gain insight into their abilities and needs. In the modern vernacular, by actively consulting with employees, we empower them. We may do some research about employee benefits, but unless we ask our employees whether they would prefer a higher out-of-pocket deductible or a higher medical insurance contribution rate, we are just imposing our own assumptions on them. When we consider them our “associates” rather than our “employees”, we convey a sense of partnership, engendering loyalty and allegiance.<sup>20</sup>

One frequently heard management tip is that a successful manager needs to circulate among his employees: the so-called “walk around theory” of management. This must be more than merely going through the motions. Real communication in both directions is needed if one is to take advantage of the abilities of employees, and to learn what “hidden strengths” each may have. A receptionist might suggest that writing out telephone messages via pink slips is no longer necessary in the days of email and electronic notification; a housekeeper might suggest that a different cleanser is better on tile than the one currently being used. However, unless the manager seeks out the suggestion, improvements cannot take place. Perhaps more importantly, the employee’s

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<sup>18</sup> Cohen, Rev. Dr. A. (Ed.). (1956). *The Soncino Chumash*. London, England: Soncino Press, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Dosick, Rabbi W. (2000). *The Business Bible*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, p. 48.

potential satisfaction in seeing an idea being implemented is lost. Involving the employee in decision making through two-way consultation can be a highly effective technique to enhance productivity and employee satisfaction.

*Genesis 12:1 “And Adonai said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your land and your birthplace and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’”*

God’s command to Abram (subsequently renamed Abraham) to leave his homeland to establish a new patrimony is curious at first reading. Traditional interpreters of the Bible assume that every word, even every repetition, has meaning and a purpose. Given the usually sparse language of the Bible, why is this command broken down into three different parts: (1) from your land (2) from your birthplace, and (3) from your father’s house? Rashi, the most famous of all Jewish medieval scholars (writing in 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century France) notes that the text goes from the general to the more specific to the most specific: go from your “land” (a generalized locale) from your “birthplace” (a specific site) and your “father’s house” (more specific yet). Rashi compares the language here to that used in another command from God to Abraham (involving the sacrifice of Isaac, in Genesis 20:2 – “Take your son, your only son, the one you love....”) and shows that the language here is a linguistic motif in the Bible.<sup>21</sup>

Rashi’s interpretation may suggest, in a modern context, that an effective manager starts from the general and moves to the specific as he provides direction to his employees.

Those who effectively manage organizations understand that when the people following orders comprehend the overall objective, they perform tasks with greater understanding, more flexibility, and with a higher probability of success. By providing context for the employee, we offer them the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process. In more modern parlance, we are seeking their “buy in” through their “ownership stake” in the process.

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<sup>21</sup> Alter, R. (1996). *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. New York, NY: Norton and Company, p. 50.

A housekeeper who understands that a Tot Shabbat dinner setup includes *kiddush* and *birkat hamazon* sheets on the tables because it is Jewish custom to recite these prayers at Friday evening dinners will not need to be reminded to set out those same items when a Sisterhood Shabbat dinner is planned. A bookkeeper who is given an orientation on the entire range of synagogue activities is more likely to code transactions correctly and to make useful suggestions for enhancements of the chart of accounts if she really understands how the entity operates. By providing context through an explanation of the general goal, the intermediate steps, and specific tasks, the employee can perform more efficiently.

In sum, by consulting with employees and involving them in decision making in the synagogue, the Executive Director acts compassionately, effectively, and in a manner consistent with our tradition.

***2. The compassionate manager delegates authority effectively, and promotes employee growth.***

*Genesis 24:1-10 “Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his house that ruled over all he had... ‘Thou shalt not take a wife for my son from among the daughters of Canaan, where I dwell, but thou shalt go to my country, and my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.’ And the servant said to him, ‘What if a woman does not consent to follow me back here, shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came?’ And Abraham answered him, ‘On no account shall you take my son back there ... If this woman refuses to follow you, you shall be clear of this oath to me.’ And Eliezer swore to him concerning the matter.”*

This story, in which Abraham orders his chief household employee to find a wife for his son Isaac, is a wonderful description of delegating authority and effectuating the abilities of the employee to whom the task has been delegated. The order is given, the employee seeks clarification, refinements are made, and the orders are accepted (and ultimately effectively fulfilled).

As congregational managers, we need to delegate authority along with responsibility, taking into account the abilities of employees and encouraging them to grow in their positions. Like Abraham in these verses, we should try to avoid the tendency to micro-manage. We can also see from these verses that empowering employees to *do* a task instead of telling them *how* the task should be accomplished is an insightful management technique that promotes employee growth and effectiveness. Asking your secretary to use his best judgment about how to get out a mailing – what kind of labels, what should be the order for stuffing materials, etc. – may well result in better production and a happier employee than prescribing every step of the process. As Rabbi Salkin writes, we need to “sanctify the creative impulse” of others<sup>22</sup> so that they, too can participate in the process of maximizing their potential. We should also understand – as this story clearly suggests – that the Jewish value of delegating authority and responsibility requires informed consent before a promise of compliance can be made

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<sup>22</sup> Salkin, Rabbi J. K. (1994). *Being God’s Partner: How to Find the Hidden Link Between Spirituality and Your Work*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing p. 82.

by the delegatee. Before we assign the work, the employee needs clearly to understand his or her responsibility and the scope of the task. Successful completion of the task will enhance employee growth.

*Exodus 18:17-22 “...And Jethro said, ‘What you are doing is not right. You will surely wear yourself out, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.... You should seek out from among all the people men of valor who are trustworthy men, men of truth who spurn ill-gotten gains...Have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself, and let them share the burden with you.’”*

Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, was a wise elder who watched Moses trying to single-handedly administer justice for the entire People of Israel - almost working himself to death in the process. Jethro's suggestions illustrate that he was an administrative pioneer in the delegation of authority.

All of us need to delegate authority because none of us can ever do alone all that must be done to run our congregations. Jethro’s standards of delegation are important to us today: the delegatee must be capable and trustworthy, and must know enough to bring to the supervisor’s attention issues which are beyond his or her capacity.

Some Administrators believe that they can create their own employment security by making themselves indispensable. They believe that every administrative decision, no matter how small, must go through them, just as was the case at first with Moses. However, the compassionate manager who seeks to promote employee growth and enhance organizational efficiency knows that delegating tasks to capable people is necessary and appropriate.

Employees cannot grow if they are not given new challenges. The flip side of the “dead wood” on our staffs is those employees who develop their abilities and “grow out” of their positions with us. One of my first supervisors taught me an important lesson: one test of a good manager is how quickly the people who work for him are ready for promotion – even if it means leaving for another employer. The principle has been stated in another way by management theorist Nathaniel Branden: “Aim your people - and get

out of the way....Let them know that you are available if needed but do not impose your presence or involvement gratuitously. Remember your business is to inspire, coach and facilitate.”<sup>23</sup>

For example, administrative assistants should be empowered to call the copier repair service when the machine breaks down. If the synagogue’s ISP loses your domain name, the call to the ISP should not wait for the Executive Director’s return from vacation. A bookkeeper is encouraged to call vendors about questions on payables. All employees should bring to the Executive Director only those issues which *really* need your intervention. Using this approach of effective delegation, your employees’ abilities grow, potential is developed, job satisfaction improves, and organizational efficiency is enhanced.

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<sup>23</sup> Baron & Padwa, p. 102.

**3. *The compassionate manager is fair and equitable to employees, and considers their personal needs.***

*Genesis 25:28 “Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; and Rebecca loved Jacob.”*

This verse is an introduction to the familial struggle in Isaac’s household between the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau. The fact that a parent has a “favorite” child is often the root cause of tension between siblings and within the family. In the case of Jacob and Esau, one can argue that parental favoritism was the reason for their estrangement. Norman J. Cohen has noted that “when we confront the conflict between Jacob and Esau, and their different relationships with their parents, we cannot help but reflect upon our own brothers and sisters, and the way we interacted with our parents as we were growing up.”<sup>24</sup>

In response to this difficulty, the rabbis enjoined us to “Love equally all of your children.”<sup>25</sup> In managing a diverse workforce, an Executive Director is wise to follow this admonition and respect and treat employees with impartiality and fairness. Note carefully the following emphasis in the phrase “love all of your children.” This is more than merely “love your children.” The inclusion of the word “all” implies to the compassionate manager that fairness and equity means taking into consideration the needs of each employee. Equity does not necessarily imply equal treatment.<sup>26</sup>

Must every employee be provided with equal pay, benefits, and responsibilities? A compassionate manager understands that an employee who is caring for an aged parent may need more flexibility in a work schedule than another employee. As Rabbi Dosick notes, “In seeking ways to foster meaning and satisfaction in your workplace, your company can best succeed when you tailor your programs to the specific needs and

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<sup>24</sup>Cohen, N.J. (1995). *Self, Struggle and Change*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> Fields, H. J. (Ed.). (1990). *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, New York, NY: UAH Press, p. 66.

<sup>26</sup> Telushkin, Rabbi J. (2000). *The Book of Jewish Values*. New York, NY: Bell Tower, p. 274. Rabbi Telushkin relates a story of Rabbi Gamliel who had Rabbi Joshua as a student. Gamliel was not aware of Joshua’s poverty, nor of his need to spend time laboring to support his family. Upon learning of Joshua’s circumstances, Gamliel was remorseful for chastising Joshua for a lack of accomplishment in his studies. This story demonstrates the importance of knowing about the needs and circumstances of one’s subordinates.

mindsets of your people.”<sup>27</sup> An employee who has shown dedication and loyalty through many years of service deserves a market rate of pay, even if prior annual “cost of living” adjustments have left the employee far behind. A cost of living adjustment may be sufficient for salaried employees, but not enough for lower-paid hourly staff. As a matter of Jewish tradition and as an aspect of compassionate management, being fair and equitable means taking into consideration the needs of each individual.

Rabbi David Baron has also emphasized the need for individualized attention, and the fact that organizational policy needs to reflect the needs of the employees. “Unlike the Ten Commandments...your company policy is not written in stone. In reality, even the Commandments were subject to commentary. For example, the prohibition against killing is mitigated in a case of self-defense. Similarly, your policies can be updated to deal with changing circumstances or staff profiles.”<sup>28</sup>

By forming our organization’s policy at least in part around the needs of the employees who labor under those policies, we can enhance their productivity while we insure our ethical treatment of them.

*Genesis 31:38-42 (Jacob said to Laban) “These twenty years I have spent in your service, your ewes and she-goats never miscarried, nor did I feast on rams from your flock. That which was torn by beasts I never brought to you; I myself made good the loss; you exacted it of me, whether snatched by day or by night. Often, scorching heat ravaged me by day and frost by night; and sleep fled from my eyes. These twenty years have I been in your house; I served you 14 years for your two daughters, and six years for the flocks; and you have changed my wages ten times.”*

According to the rabbis, these verses which recount Jacob’s bitter work-related accusations against his duplicitous father-in-law Laban formed a basis for Jewish law on the employer-employee relationship.<sup>29</sup> They derived laws on the duty of care an

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<sup>27</sup> Dosick, p. 135.

<sup>28</sup> Baron & Padwa, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Plaut, Rabbi W.G. (Ed.). (1985) *The Torah - A Modern Commentary (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. New York, NY: UAHC Press, p.215.

employee needs to observe, the concept of just compensation for work performed, and the idea that loyalty needs to be rewarded.

At the same time, our tradition expects a day's work for a day's pay; an employee who fails to work hard is, in effect, stealing from his employer. Employees are to be "punctilious in the matter of time."<sup>30</sup>

These verses also illustrate the bitterness which can arise when an employee perceives that he or she is not treated fairly.

Today, many pay issues are regulated by law and regulation. Nevertheless, substantial discretion often rests with the Executive Director regarding support staff compensation. These verses suggest that in addition to wage and hour laws, one should consider the nature of work assigned, employee loyalty, and the need for fairly compensating employees. These considerations are an inherent part of being fair and compassionate to our employees, and of taking their individual needs into proper account.

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<sup>30</sup> Telushkin, citing Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Learning" 13:7, p. 175. Rabbi Telushkin adds that it is an employee's obligation to give a full day's work during work hours, adding that stealing time by employees is just as bad as padding one's expense account.

***4. The compassionate manager teaches employees through appropriate feedback and training.***

*Genesis 40:23 “Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph; he forgot him.”*

The story of Joseph’s imprisonment on trumped-up charges by Potiphar’s wife is familiar to most of us, as is the story of how Joseph, while in prison, successfully interprets the dreams of Pharaoh’s servants. After Joseph predicted the restoration of the cupbearer to his position at court, all Joseph asked was that the cupbearer “remember” him, so that he could be freed from jail. The text here may seem confusing at first: why are two phrases used when one might suffice?

Rashbam (Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir) was Rashi’s grandson and was himself a scholar of great note, living in the 11-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. He suggested that the cupbearer “did not think” about Joseph at the time of his own release, and by the end of the intervening two years (when Pharaoh dreamed his own troubling dreams), the cupbearer had forgotten Joseph.<sup>31</sup>

All too often, employees are “not thought of” at the time of a successful accomplishment. As time passes, their efforts may also be “forgotten.” This is an example of a failed feedback process. A compassionate manager doesn’t forget his employees’ achievements in either the short or the long term. It is important to offer positive feedback at the time of good work, and to keep notes so that good performance is not “forgotten.”

Timely and constructive criticism of mistakes is an important corollary to the feedback process. While it may be uncomfortable to criticize employees, unless they learn from their errors, the errors likely will be repeated. It is misguided “compassion” which overlooks mistakes that can be avoided in the future through timely feedback.

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<sup>31</sup> Hertz, Rabbi J.H. (1964). *The Pentateuch and Haftorah (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. London, England: Soncino Press, p. 151.

Another aspect of a good feedback loop is that we need to make sure employees know the rules and the consequences of breaking the rules.<sup>32</sup> As Rabbi Baron has written, "...too often, management is unclear about exactly what will happen if an employee fails to comply with a policy, There are rules in any workplace, whether or not they are clearly articulated. When people know the rules and results of breaking them, they are in a better position to choose their actions."<sup>33</sup>

Engaging in frequent "pats on the back" when merited, and making sure that employees understand the limits, are key parts of a manager's responsibilities, and are important elements in appropriate feedback and training.

*Genesis 42:7-9 "And Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, and he played the stranger to them and spoke harshly to them, and said to them, 'Where have you come from?' And they said, 'From the land of Canaan, to buy food.' ... and he said to them, 'You are spies! You have come to see the land's nakedness!'"*

After being sold into slavery by his brothers (because of their envy of Joseph's favorite-son status) and after Joseph's miraculous rise to power in Egypt, the disguised Joseph now confronts his brothers. He demands as proof of their honorable intentions that they produce the youngest brother, Benjamin.

Why does Joseph go through this elaborate charade? Nachmanides (the 12<sup>th</sup> century Spanish commentator) offered a traditional rationale: Joseph was merely trying to carry out the prediction of his dreams at the outset of the story, in which the brothers had symbolically bowed down to him.<sup>34</sup>

Another view is that Joseph was interested to see if his brothers had learned *t'shuvah* - that is, whether they had truly repented from their actions.<sup>35</sup> Our tradition

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<sup>32</sup> Baron & Padwa, p. 61.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>34</sup> Cohen, Rev. Dr. A., p. 262. The dreams involved in one case sheaves of wheat bowing down to one central sheaf, and in the other, stars and the moon and sun bowing to a single star.

<sup>35</sup> Lieber, Rabbi D.L. (Senior Ed.). (2001). *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary*. New York, NY: Jewish Publication Society, p. 258.

teaches us that “the mark of repentance comes to the surface when the one-time sinner gains the chance to repeat the sinful deed but does not do so, the repentance is complete.”<sup>36</sup> By engaging in this deception, Joseph provided his brothers with the opportunity to demonstrate not only their regret for selling Joseph into slavery, but their determination not to sacrifice Benjamin - even at the cost of their own lives. This was to be a test of true *t'shuvah*.

Obviously, one must learn from one's errors in order to avoid repeating them. Giving employees the opportunity to fail is a part of a growth process, because through failure and appropriate feedback, one can improve one's performance. If we think of our own personal failures critically, we may learn to avoid them again in the future. This process of self-recognition is precisely (and ironically) what the rabbis understood in the story of Joseph's deception here.

Through feedback, training and offering our employees the opportunity to demonstrate improvement, we act compassionately and appropriately.

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<sup>36</sup> Neusner, Rabbi J. (1999). Repentance in Judaism. In *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* (Vol. 3, p.1254) New York, NY: Continuum Publishing Company.

***5. The compassionate manager leads by example, promoting self-awareness and modesty in leadership.***

*Leviticus 19:2* “Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, “You shall be holy; for I, Adonai your God, am holy.”

This verse introduces one of the most important sources of ethical understanding in the Bible, from the parasha<sup>37</sup> *Kedoshim* (Leviticus 19:1-20:27). We are mandated to act in a holy manner because we are to imitate the attributes of God in our worldly endeavors. As Rabbi Hertz writes, “holiness is not obtained in flight from the world, but by living in the world and fulfilling our ethical obligations.”<sup>38</sup> Many of these ethical obligations are included in the same parasha, with prohibitions against lying or dealing falsely with others,<sup>39</sup> or withholding wages from workers over night.<sup>40</sup>

Rabbi Plaut writes that the concept of *kadosh* (holy) has many meanings. It can mean “sanctified,” as we “sanctify” the Shabbat. It can be an adjective applied to God (most famously in Isaiah: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts<sup>41</sup>); it can make reference to a special place (as in the “Holy Temple” or the “Holy of Holies”). It can also mean “separate or apart,” as is the differentiation between Shabbat and the other days of the week. But in the proof text here, we are commanded to imitate the Divine, and therefore strive to be an “*Am Kadosh*” - a holy people.<sup>42</sup>

The Book of Leviticus seen in this light reveals that there is no separating our relationship with God from our relationship with other human beings, nor of separating religion from ethics. Every ethical command has, at its base, a deeply religious aspect - we obey the ethical command in order to imitate God and become holy ourselves.

This example of attempting to imitate God’s attributes is an important aspect in our ethical behavior towards our employees. Just as we wish to model the divine attributes, we need to recognize that we ourselves often serve as role models to our employees. Thus, through ethical and caring conduct, we can impart to those we

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<sup>37</sup> The Five Books of Moses are divided into 49 sections (*parshiot* in the plural, *parasha* in the singular) which are traditionally read weekly in an annual cycle in the synagogue.

<sup>38</sup> Hertz, p. 497.

<sup>39</sup> Leviticus 19:11.

<sup>40</sup> Leviticus 19:13.

<sup>41</sup> Isaiah 6:3.

<sup>42</sup> Plaut, p. 889.

supervise through our actions the way in which we hope that they can perform.

According to at least one modern management theorist, “the single most important factor in ethical decision making was the role of top management in providing commitment, leadership, and example for ethical values.”<sup>43</sup> Leading by example is a profound way of helping to create an ethical workforce.

*Exodus 28:1 “You shall bring forward your brother Aaron, with his sons, from among the Israelites, to serve Me as priests: Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eliezer and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron.”*

In this verse, God commands Moses to consecrate the priesthood from Aaron and his descendants. It is interesting to note that the weekly parasha from which this verse comes is the only one in the final book attributed to Moses that fails to mention Moses by name.<sup>44</sup> When traditional commentators observed this fact, some suggested that it was done out of modesty by Moses, by allowing Aaron to stand front and center in his own right. Others suggest that the absence of Moses in this context is similar to his lack of appearance in the Passover Hagaddah: we do not want to make Moses a cultic hero.<sup>45</sup> In either case, the lesson of Moses as the self-effacing leader is clear in any of the traditional analyses.

Today, there are of course times when leadership needs to be front and center. On the other hand, there are times when leadership is best expressed from behind the scenes. Being modest and allowing others to take the credit for their successes is an attribute of a compassionate manager.

When a congregant congratulates us for the way in which the High Holy Days were celebrated, we should remind the congregant of the important contributions of the housekeeping staff and the administrative support staff. Frequent public “thank-you’s”

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<sup>43</sup> Daft, R.L. (2001). *Organization Theory and Design (7th ed.)*. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western College Publishing.

<sup>44</sup> Plaut, citing The Gaon of Vilna, p. 625.

<sup>45</sup> Leibowitz, N. (1972). *Studies in Shemot*. New York, NY: Lambda Publishers, p. 524.

are important ways to encourage our employees. Modest leaders share the credit for achievement. By being a role model of an ethical and caring manager, and by being modest and helping our employees find a sense of importance and achievement, we follow in the footsteps of Moses, the very paradigm of Jewish managers.

## **Conclusion**

Over the centuries, the Jewish tradition has developed wise counsel about the employer-employee relationship. Many aspects of our tradition have direct counterparts to modern theories, particularly to those which stress the need for the ethical treatment of employees. While this paper only touches on our tradition's teachings on employee relations, enough is demonstrated to establish that those of us in congregational management can foster an effective, efficient workplace when we apply modern management techniques through the lens of our rich ethical tradition. Our tradition stresses our need to respect employees, their well-being, their satisfaction and their growth, their equitable compensation and the development of all of their capabilities. At the same time, these Jewish principles are recognized by modern theorists as important contributors to organizational effectiveness and productivity.

Finally, this paper reminds us that as Jewish professionals, we should see that bringing Jewish thought into the congregation's administrative offices (or as Rabbi Salkin calls it, "smuggling religion into the workplace"<sup>46</sup>) is the part of our professional lives which distinguishes us from other non-profit managers. We have an obligation to study and learn from our tradition, in order to serve both as role models for our staffs and to enhance the Jewish nature of the workplaces we manage.

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<sup>46</sup> Salkin, , p. 29.

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