

Serving the Congregation:
The Synagogue Administrator as Servant Leader

Marc J. Swatez, Ph.D.

January 2, 2002

If others do good through you, their deeds will be accounted to you as your own.
Talmud

Introduction

When I was first approached with the offer to become a synagogue administrator¹, I had no conception of what the position entailed. I called the friend of a friend who, I was told, was the well-regarded administrator of a large synagogue in Baltimore and asked him to tell me something about the job that I was considering. His response was that for a Synagogue administrator no two days are the same and that most days it takes 15 minutes to get from the outside door into his office.

While the answer was intriguing, it did not answer my basic question of the role of the Synagogue administrator in a Reform synagogue. Like most lay people, when I thought of the individuals involved in a synagogue I considered the same players as identified by Heilman (1998) in his classic examination of synagogue life: the Rabbi, Cantor, President of the Board, lay-people involved in the worship service, members and guests. The behind-the-scenes staff that make a non-profit organization such as a synagogue function effectively were exactly that: behind-the-scenes. Only later did I come to recognize the important leadership role played by Synagogue administrators and their support team.

An analogy for the leadership role of the Synagogue administrator is evasive. During the High Holy Days, the administrator is a stage manager working back stage enabling the performers (i.e. the clergy) to put on a good show (i.e. the worship service). At a meeting of the Board, the administrator is the clerk who facilitates the President's ability to run the meeting and the Board's ability to effectively reach a conclusion. In a committee meeting with an inexperienced chairperson, the administrator may be the mentor who empowers the chair to successfully navigate their first leadership experience. Working with the staff, the administrator provides guidance and helps to set priorities for daily tasks. When introducing a prospective congregant to the Synagogue, the administrator is the voice of the community, imparting information and helping a family weigh the various options of affiliation.

¹ When I use the term Synagogue administrator, I refer to those synagogue professionals whose responsibilities include overseeing the budget, programs, staff and facilities of a Reform synagogue. This job title has been changed to executive director in many congregations.

Enabling. Facilitating. Empowering. Guiding. Imparting information. Helping. These words do not convey the more popularly regarded attributes of leadership such as visioning, transforming, and motivating. In the synagogue setting, those words are most often applied to the positions of rabbi and president. While there may be no debate over the growing existence of a leadership role for the position of synagogue administrator, the exact nature of that role is certainly more elusive than it is for other traditional Synagogue leadership positions. The goal is to provide a model of leadership that explains this situation and is consistent with the role of the Synagogue administrator.

The paper will begin with an overview of the literature on leadership studies as it relates to the synagogue administrator. The reader is then guided through an examination of the role of a synagogue administrator in the modern Reform synagogue. This is followed by a discussion of the theory of servant leadership. Servant leaders are leaders who view their primary mission as one of service to the organization and its members. This theory will be applied to the case of the synagogue administrator, demonstrating it as an effective explanation for their leadership role. The concept of servant leadership will then be expanded to the institution of the synagogue itself, discussing the steps a synagogue administrator might take along with other synagogue professionals and lay leaders to establish an effective servant organization that facilitates the needs of their congregation.

Theories of Leadership

The specific context that concerns this analysis is the Reform synagogue in North America in the early twenty-first century with a membership and financial base strong enough to allow for the employment of a Synagogue administrator. Within this context, leadership will be defined as the process of influencing others to achieve common goals². While almost any theory of leadership can be adapted to the modern synagogue, several stand out as being critical to the Synagogue administrator in order to understand better their role in the leadership process.

Contemporary leadership studies began with James MacGregor Burns' path-breaking book Leadership (1979) in which the concepts of transactional and transforming leadership are introduced. Transactional leadership involves an exchange of some sort. For example, congregants agree to generally abide by the decisions made by the President and Board of Managers in exchange for an efficient and well-managed organization that meets their spiritual and social needs. Other synagogue leaders and constituents call upon Synagogue administrators to provide details about synagogue finance, procedures, calendar, etc. This information, and their expertise in applying it, is often the Synagogue administrator's primary resource and the basis of their influence in decision-making. They exchange their knowledge for further responsibility and inclusion in the leadership process. This theory fails to capture, however, the full nature of the Synagogue administrator's influence over the long term.

² Definitions of the word "leadership" abound. For an excellent review of definitions, see Joseph Rost's 1991 book Leadership for the Twenty-First Century. This particular definition is borrowed in part from Hughes, et al, p. 28.

Transforming leadership occurs when “one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality... Their purposes, which might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused” (Burns, 1979: 20). This concept fits well with the role of the congregational rabbi. The relationship between the rabbi and his/her congregation is one of mutual uplifting. The membership raises the rabbi to the position of spiritual leader while the rabbi works to bring the congregants up to a higher spiritual plane. Synagogue administrators play an important role in this relationship as they support the institutional framework of the synagogue by helping to maintain the synagogue environment. But again, this function falls short of a fully defined leadership role for the Synagogue administrator.

Visionary leadership is also often associated with synagogue leaders. The membership expects their leadership to develop a vision for the congregation and then to implement that vision. Sashkin (1995) asserts that one of the central interactions between leaders and followers center around expressing and explaining the organization’s vision. Visionary leaders are often thought of as being spokespeople, change agents and coaches for the organization (Nanus: 1992). Synagogue administrators commonly use synagogue bulletins, emails and other announcements to communicate information to the membership. But setting the vision for the Synagogue is generally perceived as the responsibility of the president and rabbi who traditionally use the pulpit and other means to express their views to the congregation.

Of course there are many more theories of leadership that could be explored, ranging from Plato’s philosopher king to Max Weber’s charismatic leader to theories of situational leadership as conceptualized by Hersey and Blanchard³. Each of these theories could be applied, with varying degrees of success, to the cast of characters that makes up the Synagogue structure. None of these, however, effectively capture the role played by a Synagogue’s administrator nor do they accurately reflect the unusual position that administrators play in a synagogue’s leadership structure. In order to find a theory that satisfies that requirement, the nature of the Synagogue administrator’s role in the synagogue will first be examined. Later, the theory of servant leadership will be successfully applied to explain the influence that Synagogue administrators might have within the synagogue community.

The Ambiguous Role of the Synagogue Administrator

There is no standardized job description for a synagogue administrator. The position varies from synagogue to synagogue, subject to the needs and structure of rabbinic and lay leadership. Responsibilities may range from those of an office manager in charge of phone calls, office supplies and mailings to the executive director of a multi-million dollar nonprofit organization overseeing the well being of the entire institution. Despite the lack of uniformity, it is important to standardize the position for the purpose of

³ These theories and others can be found in a wide variety of publications. I recommend Wren’s *Leader’s Companion* (1995) for a broad, introductory perspective on the expanding academic field of Leadership Studies.

analysis. To that end, the certification requirements for the Fellow in Temple Administration (FTA) will be applied.

The FTA certification process and its requirements were developed jointly by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), and the National Association of Temple Administrators (NATA). These three national organizations represent the lay membership of Reform congregations, the rabbinate, and synagogue administrators respectively. As stated in the program certification literature, the FTA certificate is an attempt by the three agencies to “set forth a proposed standard of knowledge and experience that is becoming a recognized credential for those who wish to demonstrate their competency as Temple Administrators”⁴. Achievement of this standard of knowledge is measured in three parts: the administrator must work in the field for a minimum of three years; the administrator must successfully complete a series of examinations; and the administrator must submit an acceptable thesis.

The content of the FTA certification examinations is as follows:

- 1) Synagogue Finance
- 2) Techniques and Tools of Management:
 - a) Office Management and Personnel Practices
 - b) Building Maintenance and Supervision
- 3) Communication and Human Relations:
 - a) With Members, Lay Leaders, Rabbis and Professionals
 - b) Leadership Development
 - c) Public Relations and Publicity
- 4) Jewish History, Including the History of Reform Judaism
- 5) Reform Jewish Practices, Customs, Ceremonies and Liturgy
- 6) The ability to read prayers, in Hebrew, from Reform prayer books.

As the certification process was developed and endorsed by the UACH, CCAR and NATA, it can be reasonably assumed that this is the standard of knowledge that is expected of an experienced and effective Synagogue administrator.

These examinations divide into two general categories: three tests on management and three centered on Judaics. This implies that the Synagogue administrator must not only be adept at running a nonprofit organization, but that he or she should be able to do so within the framework of Reform Jewish tradition. This teaches us that Jewish ethical values are institutionally considered to be critical and necessary attributes for the successful Synagogue administrator.

When comparing the management competencies of the synagogue administrator with a standard list of responsibilities for the executive director of a generic nonprofit agency, it becomes evident that the religious component is central to the unique situation of the

⁴ For more information about the origins and objectives of the FTA certificate, visit the NATA website at www.rj.org/nata.

synagogue administrator. For example, the Aspen Institute (1994) lists the key responsibilities of an executive director as being:

1. Short-term planning to fulfill long-term objectives.
2. Organizing the nonprofit's internal structure.
3. Staffing.
4. Directing, leading and motivating staff.
5. Controlling the nonprofit's activities and budget.

The arenas of financial management, staff oversight and effective communication with volunteers are common to both lists and are important to the positions of both Synagogue administrator and executive director. It is the overtly stated religious aspect of the position, and by inference the centrality of a moral code, that distinguishes the position of Synagogue administrator from its more secular counterparts.

Morality is critical to any leadership process, but perhaps even more so in a religious institution. Gardner notes that leaders are always expected to function "within the framework of law and custom and the agreed-on purposes and values of the system over which they preside" (1990:77). He goes on to explain that this expectation of morality is what distinguishes leaders from dictators. Schechter applies this principle to the synagogue when he states that "Jewish values should be at the heart of all congregational decisions" (2000: 3). It is important that Synagogue administrators consistently exhibit a sense of fair play, justice and integrity in accordance with Jewish tradition. If the congregation does not perceive their leaders as exhibiting these qualities, the individuals will lose their ability to take reasonable risks in decision-making (Howell and Avolio, 1998: 170). Therefore, Synagogue administrators must always be conscious that they are being measured against high Jewish ethical standards and to err could be a severe blow to their legitimacy as leaders.

The structure of the synagogue further complicates the matter of defining the leadership role of the Synagogue administrator. Central to most general analysis of nonprofit organizations is the relationship between the volunteers and professional staff; or, more specifically, between the Board and the executive director. The hiring of an executive director is often considered paramount to the success of an established nonprofit to achieve its goals (Drucker, 1990; O'Connell, 1993; Aspen Institute, 1994; Lakey, et al, 1995). Synagogue administrators may have a sense of the role ambiguity stemming from the realization that while they often have the responsibilities of an executive director, and increasingly the title as well, their position in the organizational hierarchy of a synagogue is not that of top professional leader. Instead, because the context is a Reform Jewish Synagogue, that position is necessarily attributed to the senior Rabbi.

The Synagogue administrator is therefore potentially caught in the midst of a personal and institutional struggle. While he or she has the responsibilities of their peers in other nonprofit organizations, their position does not allow them the status, prestige or compensation that they might be entitled to in another organization. Instead, the Synagogue administrator must build a new niche in the leadership process that reflects both the accountability of their position as well as the mandates of Jewish values and the

reality of the synagogue structure. The solution to this endeavor is found in the concept of the Servant Leader.

Synagogue Administrators as Servant Leaders

The theory of servant leadership was originally developed and defined by Robert Greenleaf as “the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served” (1991: 7). A strong sense of ethics and a reconsideration of the hierarchical position of the leader are at the heart of servant leadership. Servant leaders are less concerned with their own influence and devote more efforts towards taking initiative, cultivating the trust of others, and acting with an eye toward the long-term consequences of their actions. Larry Spears (1994) draws from Greenleaf when he identifies a servant leader through the following actions:

- 1) Servant leaders listen receptively to what others have to say.
- 2) Servant leaders accept others and have empathy towards them.
- 3) Servant leaders cultivate foresight and act on their best intuition.
- 4) Servant leaders hone their powers of awareness and perception.
- 5) Servant leaders develop their powers of persuasion.
- 6) Servant leaders effectively conceptualize and communicate concepts.
- 7) Servant leaders exert a healing influence upon individuals and institutions.
- 8) Servant leaders build community.
- 9) Servant leaders practice the art of contemplation.
- 10) Servant leaders recognize that their leadership must be coupled with the desire to change oneself in order to practice servant-leadership at the institutional level.

These attributes of servant leaders might be considered the required “job skills” for a successful Synagogue administrator when coupled with the “job description” presented earlier in connection with the FTA certification process. With the president and senior rabbi at the top of the synagogue leadership structure, Synagogue administrators must develop these skills in order to coordinate effectively the Synagogue program while allowing others to take on the more traditional leadership roles. The influence of the Synagogue administrator, therefore, is not derived by their position in the hierarchy, but rather stems from their centrality to the process and the relationships that they form.

Five principles lie behind the potential influence of the servant leader. They are a concern for people, stewardship, justice, indebtedness, and self-understanding (Hackman and Johnson: 2000). Each of these principles will be discussed below in relation to how they apply to the Synagogue administrator as servant leader.

A concern for people. Healthy synagogues care about their congregants. Synagogues are involved in the most personal aspects of a member’s life. Births, b’nai mitzvahs, marriages, deaths and other milestones of life are celebrated inside the context of the synagogue. Synagogue administrators work with the clergy to ensure that these events meet the spiritual and social needs of those concerned. While this work generally occurs “behind-the-scenes”, the way in which the administrator handles him or herself through

the proceedings reflects upon the Synagogue and greatly impacts the attitude of the congregant toward the institution.

Many Synagogue administrators, for example, are directed to talk with members who are unable to comply with the standard dues structure. By listening empathetically to the members and recognizing that the inability to meet their pledge or the need to request a dues reduction are difficult and embarrassing situations for congregants, the administrator must take special care to treat petitioners with respect, dignity and compassion. Whether or not the administrator makes the final decision, the relationship that they form with the congregant will greatly affect the attitude that the member will have towards their synagogue.

Creating positive relationships during difficult situations such as this greatly enhances the overall sense of belonging that each individual member will have. Over time, as more and more congregants find their own path towards this sense of commitment, a synagogue community will form. By recognizing the long-term consequences of their actions Synagogue administrators help shape the nature of that community. Listening receptively and treating every individual in a caring, considerate and thoughtful manner reflects positively in the community culture.

Stewardship. Servant leaders recognize that they hold their organizations in trust for the membership. Rabbis, presidents and Synagogue administrators come and go, but the congregation itself endures. Greenleaf notes that an organization's trustees have an "operational necessity to be both dogmatic and open to change" (1977: 104). The established practices of institutional dogma are necessary in order to complete routine tasks. There must be policies and procedures that allow for the day to day functioning of the institution. At the same time, change is vital for the long-term health of the organization. When a synagogue becomes closed to change, it will eventually stagnate, lose membership and fail. This dichotomy places the Synagogue administrator in a challenging situation.

Synagogue administrators rely upon institutional dogma to do their jobs. In maintaining the Synagogue calendar, overseeing employee benefits, or working with vendors they often act as the guardians of institutional history, policy and practices. Much of their time is spent managing established processes and overseeing routine activities. Nevertheless, organizations thrive through change. Servant leaders "are responsible for initiating and, in some cases, creating disequilibrium in order to maintain the vitality of the organization they lead" (Pollard: 245). Being entrusted as a steward with leadership responsibilities sets up the expectation that the Synagogue administrator will effect change for the betterment of the synagogue community. Identifying and training new volunteer leaders, facilitating innovative programming opportunities and expanding social action projects are just a few ways that Synagogue administrators can help guide the growth of the Synagogue.

Servant leaders must keep in mind that they remain accountable for their actions and therefore should always work within established procedures. They must also recognize that "different functions are served by culture at different organizational stages, and the

change issues are therefore different at each stage” (Schein: 331). Balancing the maintenance of established principles with creative ideas to further the synagogue mission adds another dimension to the definition of the job of Synagogue administrator and the challenges they face.

Justice. The importance of morality for the Synagogue administrator has already been discussed briefly above. Servant leaders have the moral responsibility to deal both fairly with individuals and to promote institutional equity. Listening to and recognizing the need for special exceptions for individual members while ensuring that no member of the community has an unfair advantage over any other is often the responsibility of the Synagogue administrator. Providing babysitting for young families, reserved parking and hearing devices for the elderly, and encouraging compliance with the American Disabilities Act are all paths towards fairness within the synagogue. Each of these examples provides for the specific needs of individuals while maintaining a balance and not opening the synagogue to accusations of favoritism.

Effective communication is often the key to achieving this goal. Synagogue administrators must always be perceived as sharing their power, i.e. information and expertise, equally amongst the membership. It is not enough simply to put these various provisions in place. Congregants must be made aware that services such as babysitting and listening devices are available to them.

Communication is vital for effective servant leadership and is an essential tool for the Synagogue administrator. Regular meetings with other staff and lay leadership help to ensure that the administrator shares their knowledge for the betterment of the institution. Synagogue newsletters, emails and other postings communicate the message to the general congregation. The Synagogue administrator who successfully communicates their message to a broad constituency will be trusted and relied upon by the staff and the congregation, and will more effectively fill the role of servant leader.

Indebtedness. In his book, Leadership is an Art (1989), DePree outlines a long series of debts that the servant leader “owes” to their institution. He begins his list by noting that “leaders owe their institutions vital financial health and the relationships and reputation that enable continuity of financial health. Leaders must deliver to their organizations the appropriate services, products, tools and equipment that people in the organization need in order to be accountable” (1989: 13). DePree regards this legacy, however, as only the beginning of the responsibilities of leadership. He goes on to add many more “debts” to his list (1989: 15-21):

- Leaders owe the organization a new reference point for what caring, purposeful, committed people can be in the institutional setting.
- Leaders owe a sense of self-worth, a sense of belonging, a sense of expectancy, a sense of responsibility, a sense of accountability and a sense of equality.

- Leaders are obligated to provide and maintain momentum, a feeling among a group of people that their lives are intertwined and moving toward a recognizable and legitimate goal.
- Leaders are responsible for effectiveness... enabling people to reach their potential. Efficiency is doing the thing right, but effectiveness is doing the right thing.⁵
- Leaders must take a role in developing, expressing and defending civility and values.

These obligations towards the institution offer a new layer to the role of Synagogue administrator as servant leader. Certainly, any Synagogue administrator who provides a safe facility and a balanced budget for their congregation would be rated a success by most standards. They would probably be perceived as effective in their position and an important contributor to the well being of the community. But Synagogue administrators must go beyond these measures; they owe it to the congregation to strive towards the higher goals of servant leadership as laid out by DePree.

Being an effective role model, helping to establish a caring community and guiding congregants raises the administrator to the status of leader. Synagogue administrators cannot simply concern themselves with the day-to-day operations of the congregation; they must act for the betterment of the synagogue community. Greenleaf expressed this by stating that “servant leaders differ from other persons of goodwill because they act on what they believe” (1977: 328). In order to be considered a leader, the Synagogue administrator must take risks based on their personal integrity and Jewish tradition, provide solutions that are in the best interests of the congregation and act to implement those ideas through the appropriate means.

Self-Understanding. Effective servant leadership relies upon the character of the leader during the decision making process. Greenleaf asserts that “the person who *is servant first*, is more likely to persevere and refine a particular hypothesis on what serves another’s highest priority needs than is the person who is a *leader first* and who later serves out of promptings of conscience or in conformity with normative expectations” (Greenleaf, 1990: 8). In order to meet this high standard, the servant leader must have a thorough understanding of themselves and their role within the organization so that they can best meet the needs of their constituents.

The nature of synagogue life dictates that, on occasion, ethical choices will be made. Does the Synagogue continue with a construction project over the Sabbath, High Holy Days and festivals? Should the Synagogue continue to invest its endowment in a socially questionable stock even if it is providing strong profits? To what lengths does the Synagogue go to ensure that every child is offered a Jewish education regardless of their physical or learning challenge? To what standards of private conduct can we hold individuals who wish to serve as religious educators?

⁵ DePree notes that he borrowed this concept from Peter Drucker. It was somewhat famously modified by Bennis and Nanus (1985) when they summarized the difference between leaders and managers as “Managers do things right. Leaders do the right things.”

In order to effectively grapple with these and similar issues, servant leaders must “analyze their motives, seek out opportunities for personal growth, and regularly take time to examine their attitudes and values” (Hackman and Johnson: 349). The Synagogue administrator may be called upon to offer an opinion and work towards resolution on any of the above situations. The congregation should expect their administrator to base their recommendations on their own moral compass as guided by their knowledge of basic Jewish ethics and values. Just as synagogues today are being encouraged to become a congregation of learners (Aron, et al: 1995), so too should Synagogue administrators continue to educate themselves both professionally and Jewishly and to regularly examine their assumptions. Developing the self is intrinsically connected with developing the institution, without one you cannot have the other.

Thus the theory of servant leadership has been effectively applied to the role of Synagogue administrator. Doing so greatly enhances our understanding of the administrator’s role in the leadership process and provides suggested avenues for effecting change within the congregation that are well within the ambiguities of their job description. Success in their endeavor as a servant leader is not measured by a balanced budget or staff retention. Instead, “the best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (Greenleaf, 1990: 7).

Synagogue administrators do not operate in a vacuum. They are merely one player in the complex leadership structure of the modern synagogue. A discussion of servant leadership within the synagogue focusing solely on the responsibilities of a single actor would be a disservice to both the individual and the institution. The Synagogue administrator cannot act alone and a synagogue cannot function with only an administrator. Recognizing this, the theory of servant leadership will now be applied to the synagogue itself. The purpose of this effort is to provide a model that will facilitate the effectiveness of not only the Synagogue administrator, but also the roles of the other professionals and the entire congregation.

Reform Synagogues as Servant Institutions

Synagogues should meet the needs of their congregants. As reasonable and perhaps obvious as this statement may seem, it is often difficult to implement. Congregants have varied and sometimes conflicting needs. The goals of synagogue leaders may or may not be the same as those needs. Nevertheless, the primary mission of the institution remains to serve its membership. In order to achieve that end, the principles of servant leadership can be applied at the institutional level.

Greenleaf believes that “if a better society is to be built, one that is more just and more loving, one that provides greater creative opportunity for its people, then the most open course is to *raise both the capacity to serve and the very performance as servant* of existing major institutions” (Greenleaf, 1977: 49). In other words, institutions have the ability to improve our society. The best way for them to do that is for them to first create a culture where it is easier for people to serve one another, and second for them to act

more like servants themselves. Four general strategies must be adopted by synagogues in order to effectively apply this philosophy and serve its congregants. They are:

1. The synagogue must envision itself as a servant institution.
2. Synagogue leadership must be committed to achieving the goal.
3. The Synagogue leadership structure must adapt itself to achieve the goal.
4. Synagogue trustees are needed to guard the vision over time.

The remainder of this paper will be devoted to the application of these four strategies.

The first strategy is to create a vision for the synagogue as a servant institution. Jewish leaders today are almost universally calling for the development of caring communities to better meet the needs of individuals:

The most meaningful human experiences are to be found in the warmth of human relationship, so that if G-d is to be experienced anywhere, it must be in the caring communities where a person's loneliness and need are assuaged by the virtue of the remarkable fact that people who might just as easily choose to be virtual strangers elect instead to reach out in love. (Hoffman: 162)

The synagogue has been identified as the most likely institution to meet this need because "more Jews look to it for primary Jewish community than to any other institution" (Woocher: 40). As servant institutions, Synagogues have not only the opportunity, but also the responsibility to create a community for its membership. Individuals do not join synagogues solely for the purpose of having a place to pray nor because of the charisma of the rabbi. They may also join a synagogue because they want to get married, to provide religious education to their children, or just to make new friends. Synagogues are in the unique position to meet all of these needs and more.

In order to supply this wide range of services, "we must build synagogue communities in which people have choices, and communities that will be able to accommodate divergent subcommunities while maintaining common bonds" (Schechter: 26). Synagogues face the ongoing challenge of establishing a single community by linking these varying groups. The servant institution that regularly listens to its membership, is accepting of them, is concerned for their long-term happiness and well-being, and provides outlets for each of their needs is well on its way to establishing itself as a community.

Synagogue leaders must embrace the idea that the purpose of their institution is to meet congregant needs. Just like the Synagogue administrator, they must guard against becoming bogged down in finances, building maintenance and personnel matters. Lay and professional leadership must be committed to this vision and actively work to shape their synagogue into a servant institution.

The second strategy is to create a relationship between Synagogue leadership and congregants that facilitates the vision of community. A caring community will not just

magically appear. Just because the leadership has decided to serve its membership does not mean that the membership is ready to be served.

The first step is to share the vision with the congregation. Each program, every flyer, formal and informal conversations should communicate the message of community. The clergy, staff, president, board of directors, sisterhood, brotherhood and all other Synagogue auxiliaries must all be deeply invested in this effort. Each one has the ability to support or undermine the work of the rest. If a synagogue is to act as the servant, then the Synagogue leaders must all take responsibility for providing that service.

The second step in the relationship is a sense of trust between leaders and followers. DePree comments on this when he compares servant leadership to a Jazz band. He writes that:

Performance depends on so many things- the environment, the volunteers playing in the band, the need for everybody to perform as individuals and as a group, the absolute dependence of the leader on the members of the band, the need of the leader for the followers to play well. (DePree, 1992: 8-9)

Like a musical concert, service is a group effort. In order for the congregation to allow itself to be served, it must trust its leaders. Likewise, leaders will only provide service to congregants if it trusts them. The ability to create a caring community is not uniquely in the hands of the Synagogue leaders. Instead, there is a mutual dependence between the leaders and congregants to move the organization forward.

The third step to facilitate the vision of community is for established leaders to empower the wider membership base to take on leadership tasks of their own. Congregational activities must be planned in partnership with members. Ideally, members take on the key leadership roles for each program with the staff providing support. If an institution is to serve, then the broad membership of that institution must become involved.

Sharing responsibility is a very difficult task, especially for a servant-first. Indeed, bringing others into the process may seem more of a burden than help. Regardless, it is important to spread the responsibility for different events by empowering congregants to take a leadership role and for the servant leader to facilitate their success. Greater responsibility and a sense of accomplishment by members will lead to their greater commitment to the synagogue. And that commitment will grow and expand the vision of a Synagogue community.

The third element in Greenleaf's strategy is that the leadership determines the most effective structure for their process. With more volunteers becoming involved in the leadership process of a servant institution, it is reasonable that the professional leadership be organized in a way that best facilitates their inclusion. A structure must be identified that will most effectively lead the congregation towards their vision of community.

Traditional hierarchical structures do not work well for a servant institution. The president and board overseeing the rabbi and Synagogue administrator who, in turn, oversee the staff, volunteers and programming will easily not lead to a caring community. This pyramidal structure does not easily meet changing demands and opportunities, and “rarely fosters individual creativity and cooperation between parts of the organization” (Lackey: 70).

The synagogue as servant institution should instead focus on a structure that emphasizes collaboration as the means to accomplish its goals. Regular meetings must be established between the various partners in the leadership process. Not only should the president and rabbi have regular meetings, but so should the Synagogue administrator, cantor and other key professional staff. The support staff must also be consulted and brought into the decision making process. “The essential ingredients for collaborative success [are] flexibility, patience, understanding of other’s viewpoints, sensitivity to diversity, and a cooperative spirit” (Goldman and Kahnweiler: 446). Regular meetings between not only the traditionally recognized synagogue leaders, but also between the other professionals and support staff will generate improved communication and cooperation.

One suggested method (Karpel: 1998) to encourage collaboration among the Synagogue leaders is to create a formal covenant. By agreeing to certain key principles to govern interactions, leaders can better ensure a civil process. For example, Karpel lists the following among the guiding principles at Synagogue Judea in Tarzana, California:

- Collegiality
- Enjoying one another as well as the process
- Deferring to and respecting individual spheres of decision
- Commitment to work with congregation and the rest of the staff
- Checking in with each other
- Open communication
- Assessing honestly
- Trusting each other
- Learning from each other
- Balance

These are all important lessons for leaders of a servant institution. The rabbi, Synagogue administrator, support staff and other leaders must work cooperatively to accomplish these and other goals for the organization. Successful collaboration will result in a more open system and structure that will facilitate community building for the entire congregation.

The last element in creating a servant organization is the establishment of Trustees. Reform synagogues are overseen by boards of volunteers. These leaders play the final, critical role in establishing the Synagogue as a servant institution. Greenleaf describes trustees as “those who stand outside but are intimately concerned, and who, with the benefit of some detachment, oversee the active leaders” (1977:40). Scott observes that critical to this definition are the words *oversee* and *detachment*, implying that trustees are

in the unique position to “see things whole and to take the longer view by benefit of some distance from the daily pressures of the organization’s life” (2000:63). Trustees must schedule time to occasionally step back from ever-present urgent matters and look at the general path that the organization is taking. Board retreats are an excellent opportunity for such a task.

If a synagogue is going to become a servant institution, the board must make it happen. While the rabbi, president and others might first develop the mission, only the board can safeguard it over time. Drucker emphasizes this point when he writes that “the board not only helps think through the institution’s mission, it is the guardian of that mission, and makes sure the organizations lives up to its basic commitment.” (1990: 157). If the basic commitment is one of service to the membership through the establishment of a caring community, then the board must support and manage the work of its lay and professional leaders to ensure that vision.

Conclusion

Synagogue administrators and the institutions they serve are vital to the continuity of Jewish tradition. By collaborating with clergy, other synagogue professionals and the volunteer leadership, they play a central role in the formation and maintenance of the Jewish community. This paper has defined both the position of Synagogue administrator as well as the nature of their leadership role within the institution.

Synagogue administrators have not only the *responsibility* to serve their institution but also the *obligation* to do so. Raising congregants to the level of leaders, forming synagogue communities and helping to ensure the survival of the Jewish people are not optional; they are requirements in order to be fully effective in the position. Synagogue administrators need not strive towards this goal alone. In fact, the more people that they recruit to help them, the more successful they will be in their accomplishment.

A fitting review of servant leadership within the synagogue is provided by Schechter as follows:

True leaders are people of substance, authenticity, and vision. They are seen to work hard to reach their goals. They show a commitment to their own personal development, and their ideas are fresh and innovative. Such synagogue leaders- clergy, other professionals and volunteers- function on at least two levels: as individuals who are deeply committed Jews; and as individuals who are sensitive to the concerns of others, and who try to deal with those concerns in synagogues and other institutions and agencies through which Judaism is translated into the service of human need (2000:54).

Bibliography

- Aron, Isa, Lee, Sara and Rossel, Seymour, ed.. *A Congregation of Learners: Transforming the Synagogue into a Learning Community*, New York: UAHC Press, 1995.
- Aspen Board Member Manual, 1994 edition*. Fredrick: Aspen Publishers, 1993.
- Bennis, Warren, and Nanus, Burt. *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*. New York: Harper Perennial: 1985.
- Burns, James M. *Leadership*. New York: Harper and Row, 1978.
- DePree, Max. *Leadership is an Art*. New York: Dell Trade Paperback, 1989.
- DePree, Max. *Leadership Jazz*. New York: Dell Trade Paperback, 1992.
- Drucker, Peter F. *Managing the Non-Profit Organization: Principles and Practices*. New York: HarperBusiness, 1990.
- Gardner, John W. *On Leadership*. New York: The Free Press, 1990.
- Goldman, Samuel and Kahnweiler, William M. "A Collaborator Profile of Executives of Nonprofit Organizations" in *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass. Volume 10, Number 4: 435-450.
- Greenleaf, Robert K. *Servant Leadership*. New York: Paulist Press, 1977.
- Greenleaf, Robert K. *The Servant as Leader*. Indianapolis: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, 1991.
- Hackman, Michael Z. and Johnson, Craig E. *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 2000.
- Heilman, Samuel C. *Synagogue Life*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998.
- Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only*. Washington D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1988.
- Howell, Jane and Avolio, Bruce J. "The Ethics of Charismatic Leadership". In *Leading Organizations: Perspectives for a New Era*, Gill Robinson Hickman, ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 166-176.
- Hughes, Richard L., Ginnet, Robert C., and Curphy, Gordon J. *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*. Chicago: Irwin Press, 1993.

Karpel, Alan. "Creating a Staff Ketubah: A Successful Staff Relationship" in *The NATA Journal*. Elaine Arffa, ed. San Francisco, Summer 1998.

Lahey, Berit, et al. *Grassroots and Nonprofit Leadership: A Guide for Organizations in Changing Times*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1995.

Nanus, Burt. *Visionary Leadership: Creating a Compelling Sense of Direction for your Organization*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1992.

O'Connell, Brian. *The Board Member's Book Second Edition*. New York: The Foundation Center, 1993.

Pollard, C. William. "The Leader Who Serves". In *The Leader of the Future*. Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, and Richard Beckhard, ed. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1996, pp. 241-248.

Rost, Joseph C. *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Praeger Press, 1991.

Sashkin, Marshall. "Visionary Leadership". In *The Leader's Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages*. J. Thomas Wren, ed. New York: The Free Press, 1995, pp. 402-407.

Schein, Edgar H. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1992.

Scott, Katherine T. *Creating Caring and Capable Boards*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000.

Schechter, Daniel S. *Synagogue Board: A Sacred Trusts*. New York: UAHC Press, 2000.

Spears, Larry C. "Servant Leadership: Quest for Caring Leadership" in *Inner Quest*, 1994, #2, pp. 9-13.

Woocher, Jonathan. "Toward a 'Unified Field Theory' of Jewish Continuity" in *A Congregation of Learners: Transforming the Synagogue into a Learning Community*, Aron, Isa, Lee, Sara and Rossel, Seymour, ed. New York: UAHC Press, 1995, pp. 14-55.

Wren, J. Thomas. *The Leader's Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages*. ed. New York: The Free Press, 1995.