

Leading With a
Jewish Heart in
Difficult Times





Editor's Comments

By Esther Herst, FTA, Executive Director, Temple Beth Am, Seattle, WA

I am deeply honored to be selected by the NATA leadership to edit the NATA Journal. Our Journal is a valuable tool for our members and our congregational leaders, offering hands-on ideas as well as philosophical concepts, all with the underpinning of Jewish values and tradition.

This issue is titled *Leading with a Jewish Heart in Difficult Times*. Through more than a year of recession, home foreclosures, job losses, personal tragedies, and budget-cutting to stay solvent, synagogue executive directors have usually been the “point people” on issues from membership maintenance to staff morale, from dues adjustments to facility usage. We’ve learned how to make do with less and how to help lay leaders and staff stay calm amidst the pressures. And we’ve tried to keep our Judaism in our hearts and in our actions at all times.

Just as our synagogues have been challenged by the economic crisis, so has NATA. In order to ensure NATA’s financial sustainability, we have made some cost-cutting changes in the Journal including using less color and fewer pages. We plan to link Journal articles with NATA’s monthly E-Exchange and our website as a way to encourage more in-depth study while saving printing and mailing costs (sound familiar?).

I am grateful to our contributors for sharing their experiences and their wisdom and also to the NATA members who responded to the questions we posed via email. Your offerings were terrific and those not included in this issue will be accessible on our website!

Finally, thank you to our new Editorial Board - Sydney Baer, Randi Jaffe, Bekki Kaplan, Michael Kimmel and Michael Liepman and our Oversight VP Ruth W. Cohen - for your insights and assistance. I am blessed to be part of such a talented team.

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From the President

A message from Edward M. Alpert, FTA, Executive Director, Am Shalom, Glencoe, IL

Rabbi Pinchas said: "When a man is singing and cannot lift his voice and another comes and sings with him, another who can lift his voice, then the first will be able to lift his voice, too. That is the secret of the bond between spirit and spirit."

- Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim

It has long been my belief that whatever success we achieve as Executive Directors truly comes about as a result of the individuals we work with. If you have a strong, supportive and caring professional and support staff, then our role is not only easier but the goals of the synagogue are met in a timely and productive manner. The individuals I work with provide tremendous strength and support and as per the above saying, help to elevate the daily work that I do. It is my hope that all of you are as lucky as I am in having a wonderful team to work with. The best advice to be offered regarding synagogue people management is for Executive Directors to look out for and care about the people they work with.

To the best of your ability meet regularly with all staff members, provide continuing education when needed, delegate responsibilities and involve your team in decision making and most important look out for their well being by offering health care and pension benefits. Never underestimate the power and accomplishments that can occur from having a cohesive and unified team that collectively "lifts up the voices" of the synagogue.

Speaking as your President I can also say the same about NATA. As I approach the end of my term as President, I am so very grateful for the incredible support I have received from the Officers, Board of Directors and indeed the entire membership. Through your important feedback, kindness and willingness to share in our sacred work, my role indeed has been so easy and very fulfilling. As an organization we have accomplished a lot over the last three years and I say with great pride it is because of the commitment made each and every day by the members of NATA. On that theme this NATA Journal marks the first edition under the new NATA Journal Editorial Board led by Esther Herst. I thank them for all of their hard work and look forward to their future editions.

L'Shalom,
Ed

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NATA CONSULTING

Representing the combined expertise and experience of our professional synagogue Executive Directors, NATA's Consulting Service, together with the URJ Office of Synagogue Management, offers URJ member congregations experienced professionals to assess and make recommendations in a variety of areas, including finance, governance and personnel. The consulting fee is waived to URJ member congregations, which are required only to reimburse for the consultant's expenses. For more information, please contact the following NATA Regional Reps: Robert French in the East, Jeff Manis in the South, Bekki Harris Kaplan in the Midwest, and Robin Rubin in the West or visit NATA's Website (natanet.org).

NATA PLACEMENT

The NATA Placement Committee is responsible for supporting the process by which URJ congregations (and a few Conservative congregations and Jewish organizations) search for an Executive Director or other top-level administrative professionals. The placement service also assists individuals looking for employment by providing them with information about available positions. Committee members, all of whom are Executive Directors working in congregations, work with congregations interested in hiring an Executive Director. In addition to posting the position on the NATA Website, this includes discussing job descriptions, salary and benefits packages, what the Executive Director can do for the congregation and what his or her role could be. NATA's Website already includes sample job descriptions: (<http://natanet.org>) and the new how-to manual, "A Guide for Congregations Going into Placement for a New Executive Director," for congregations beginning the search process. We do not match colleagues to positions. Committee members are Ruth W. Cohen, Betti Greenstein, Saralouise Reis, Beth Silver, Michael Liepman and Janice Rosenblatt, FTA. Kathy Small, NATA's Association Manager, provides ongoing support to the congregations, individuals seeking positions and to the committee.

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For this issue, instead of a survey, the Editorial Board posed several questions to NATA members. Here are a few responses that might be helpful to our colleagues.

- 1) **Have you changed your management style or methods of working with your staff or lay leaders as a result of financial challenges?**
 - ▶ More than ever, I encourage a team approach with my staff, so that no one person shoulders too heavy a workload. With the lay leaders I have stressed the need for advanced planning to enable us to continue to work efficiently and effectively.
 - ▶ I think the number one thing I've been doing is to be more and more forthcoming. Whereas in the past, I may have said "yes, we can do that" automatically to our lay leaders or rabbis, I am now drawing boundaries and saying, "no, we can't do that, and here's why" – and actually providing reasons why things can or cannot be done as requested. In the past I would have allowed the staff (and me) to absorb more and more work. However, now that we are at capacity, having laid off an FTE, we simply can't absorb more work. I've been more protective of my staff.
 - ▶ I have become more attuned to individual staff and congregant personal concerns; am spending more time on support staff training and offering them educational opportunities

- 2) **Have you found effective ways to help your staff handle an increased workload or cope with their own stresses brought on by economic hardship?**
 - ▶ In addition to a weekly meeting, I now have daily, informal meetings with each staff member during which I express my appreciation for their commitment and dedication to the congregation. After each major event/program, I bring in lunch and we eat together. It's a great opportunity to take a big sigh of relief and celebrate a job well done.
 - ▶ We have integrated additional flexibility in terms of time off/personal time for our staff, to allow for the increased workload. We have also made it easier for our staff to work from home (so they can get out of the office!) by making their computers available remotely. Finally, we made certain that, despite the tough times, everyone received a raise this year.
 - ▶ Other things that help our staff with stress – in our staff meetings, we regularly (albeit informally) acknowledge stress. By directly asking: "what is everyone stressed out about right now?" in a group setting, sometimes we find solutions to problems, helpers in our midst, and acknowledge that folks are not stressed alone!
 - ▶ Boy, are we stressed out here! Some of the things that have allowed our staff to blow off steam:
 - Cook-offs. We've had a "Crock-Pot off" where we all made a Crock-Pot dish and awarded a "prize" – an award to hang on our door/desk.
 - Olympics – we handed out "Gold Medals" for staff members based on some of the good things they bring to the team. Examples were the Gold Medal for "Fun", the Gold Medal for "Tolerance", the Gold Medal for "Budgeting", etc.

- 3) **Is there any Jewish teaching that has been a helpful guide to you, your staff, or your leadership during the past couple of years?**
 - ▶ Not a Jewish teaching, per se, but remembering that we, as stewards of our congregations, should exemplify the concepts of caring, giving and sharing
 - ▶ The mission of our congregation shall be to serve the religious needs of families and individuals through programs of life-long Jewish education (Torah), inclusive communal worship and ritual (Avodah), and the ongoing quest for greater justice, peace and acts of loving-kindness (Gemilut Chasadim).
 - ▶ We now begin each staff meeting with a discussion of the following statement, and ways that it has directly/indirectly impacted on our work with our members:
 - "In the coming year we will endeavor to develop a Theology of Relationships at Beth Torah. This Theology of Relationships will be based on nurturing meaningful and sacred connections through which each member may be recognized, validated and supported."

Additional responses can be found on the NATA Website, www.natanet.org.



The No Good, Very Bad Year – Leading our Congregations in a Time of Crisis

Carolyn Shane, Executive Director, Temple Emanu-El, Westfield, NJ

For as long as I can remember in my tenure as Executive Director, Temple Emanu-El has always budgeted defensively, both for Income and Expenses.

At the beginning of the recession and collapse of Wall Street, we acknowledged that our community would be tremendously affected. Many of our congregants were directly connected to Wall Street and the banking industry in a variety of ways. Others worked in positions that supported financial institutions.

We also recognized that our community is diverse. While we have many wealthy members, we also have those who are not financially stable.

We feel it is our obligation as a Jewish Community to offer support to all of our members. Therefore, the Special Dues Committee was prepared to respond to an increase in requests for dues assistance, religious school and early childhood education scholarships, Jewish summer camp camperships and financial aid for Jewish related summer experiences for teenagers. No one's request for help was denied.

The Temple's leadership came to the Senior Staff and told us that the consensus of the Board was to not raise dues for the 09-10 fiscal year. They asked us to accept a salary freeze in order to achieve this. As the staff leaders, we expressed concern for our administrative support and maintenance staff since a salary freeze would have a significantly greater impact on them than on the Senior Staff who are higher paid. We also shared with the lay leadership our conviction that no one should lose his or her job because of this financial crisis.

This discussion between the Senior Staff and lay leadership led to the following outcomes.

- The Senior Rabbi, Cantor, and Executive Director agreed to a “frozen” salary. Upon hearing this news our Building Supervisor also agreed to “freeze” his salary.
- All Senior Staff convention allowances were eliminated from the budget.
- Pension benefits paid on behalf of those taking a “freeze” were paid based on the “frozen” salary.
- Full time administration and maintenance staff received a net increase of 1%.
- All part time employee salaries were “frozen.”
- No one lost their job.
- One administrative assistant was reduced to part time. Her AARP health care premium was paid this fiscal year by clergy discretionary funds.
- Senior Staff members could only attend one convention – either their professional organization or the Biennial *and* only if they had a direct responsibility to attend. Any costs related to attending the convention were paid by either the Senior Rabbi or Cantor's Discretionary Fund.

Discretionary funds have been used on a few other occasions to assist staff members. A few years ago, when gas prices went up to \$5 a gallon, the administrative assistants received a gasoline allowance from the discretionary funds.

RECOGNITION AND APPRECIATION

Several times a year we make an intentional and concerted effort to show our appreciation and respect to our administrative and maintenance staffs. The Executive Director, on behalf of the Senior Staff, throws a Sukkot Luncheon for the entire staff. The President hosts a yearly Chanukah luncheon for the administrative assistants. The Senior Staff all pitch in and purchase holiday gift cards for each administrative and maintenance employee. The administrative staff plans a holiday party for everyone to attend in a true pot-luck of togetherness. Every member of the staff receives a birthday card signed by every other staff person.

This year, in particular, Senior Staff and Temple leadership as a team all tried to be very conscious of the staff's feelings, fears and morale. We felt that it was our obligation to remember on a consistent basis the daily struggles of the office and maintenance staff.

BALANCING THE BUDGET

Of course, the salary freezes did not completely resolve the budget dilemma and we needed to consider ways to save money that would still preserve the best of our programming. We found cost-cutting measures that affected our staff but we believe that they were in keeping with our commitment to maintaining support for our employees.

- We reviewed our Maintenance staffing. Through normal attrition we lost two full time staff members and replaced them with part timers. This saved us health insurance, LTD and pension fees.

We needed to control our rising health insurance fees. Every year we've sought new and innovative plan designs and benefit options. We have been able to keep our costs relatively level by changing contribution strategies and plan designs in a very tough market.

In 2010 we were faced with a 27% increase which was approximately \$80,000 more per year, an amount we could not afford.

We chose to implement a high deductible HSA (Health Savings Account) program. With a health reimbursement arrangement we were able to reduce our premium by \$58,000 against the current premium. With these savings, we could reimburse every employee and their family the full cost of the deductible. In essence, the Temple gave the employee the first \$1,500 or \$3,000 for families of covered health care. In addition, we had previously introduced an IRC Section 125 Flexible Spending Account program enabling employees to reserve pre-tax dollars for unreimbursed medical and child care expenses.

Thus, in a challenging healthcare marketplace, we were able to capitalize on an innovative concept and give the employees a better plan than they had the year before and save money for both the Temple and our employees.

- For further budget savings, we needed to closely examine our programming. In some cases, we found alternative funding to support such activities as our monthly Senior Lunches and our College Youth outreach. We decreased the number of musical Erev Shabbat services and cut the length of our monthly Bulletin from 24 to 12 pages. We increased our use of Constant Contact as a means of reaching our members, saving postage and printing costs that we would have incurred with flyers and postcards.

COMMUNAL SUPPORT FOR OUR CONGREGANTS

As a congregation, we knew that our congregants needed special care as they coped with the financial crises around them. With the philosophy that it is our responsibility and our Jewish obligation to support members in need, we acknowledged our belief that it is better to retain members at reduced dues levels, keeping them connected to the synagogue and Jewish community, than to lose them because they can't afford membership. We continue to review our members' invoices, carefully balancing the "need to do business" with an understanding heart.

To help in other ways, we augmented our programming to remind our families that Temple Emanu-El is there for them at a range of levels.

- We created two adult social groups: one is LINKS, for members aged 30 to 45, and 2nd Connect, for members aged 45-65. Both groups are doing well and thriving and enhance our existing Renaissance and Friendship Group programs. By building membership connections we were able to stave off some member resignations.
- Our Religious School Principal and Senior Rabbi worked with a lay task force to develop an improved high school program.
- Our Youth Group Director introduced 2 new groups – one for 3rd-5th graders and another for 6th-8th graders.
- Our Job Support Group ultimately merged with Jewish Family Services of the Central NJ Federation.

While these new offerings led to increased work for our already-taxed staff, we believe that we modeled an approach that reflects our Jewish communal tradition. Sharing the hardship, looking out for the well-being of those around us, finding creative alternatives to the "we've always done it that way" syndrome, and never forgetting the fundamental holiness of our synagogue's mission formed the foundation of our management approach in these difficult times.

As our Senior Rabbi Doug Sagal says, quoting Rabbi Hesch Sommer, "The real issue is not the challenge we had to face, but rather when this challenge is over did we behave in the most ethical and moral tradition of our Jewish faith?"

I believe that we at Temple Emanu-El can say, "Yes, we did our best to do right by our Jewish tradition," and by doing so we also made this "no good, very bad year" less stressful and painful for our families and for each other.



You Do It My Way and I Will Too: Some Approaches to Managing Conflict in Congregations

By Dale Glasser, M.S., M.A., MSW, Union for Reform Judaism

Among the many stereotypical qualities which are often attributed to Jews is the characteristic of holding a strong opinion and of being unwilling to yield, leading often to intense disagreement and conflict. Popular culture is filled with examples of this phenomenon including the notion of “two Jews, three opinions” and the oft-repeated story about the waiter who approaches a table filled with elderly Jews finishing their meal and asks “Is **anything** alright?”

Indeed, these ideas might resonate with anyone who has been involved professionally or on a volunteer level in a Jewish organization. Meetings can, at times, seem contentious or filled with expressions of opinion that detract from the subject at hand. Not surprisingly, our ancient texts provide some guidelines for understanding and focusing conflict, and contemporary organizational development literature suggests some approaches for managing and using conflict to frame successful outcomes.

So, what is conflict, and how can it be managed effectively? One dictionary defines conflict as “the competitive or opposing action of incompatibles.” Another reminds us that conflict is usually based on a difference over goals, objectives, or expectations between individuals or groups. Conflict also occurs when two or more people or groups compete over limited resources and/or perceived or actual, incompatible goals.

These definitions resonate when considering conflict in congregational life. Resources are often limited, decisions can be made in the absence of clear expectations, and well-meaning and passionate people can have very different motivations that lead to incompatible outcomes.

Jewish tradition offers several approaches to managing conflict and even suggests that sometimes conflict is beneficial. One of the most highly held values in Judaism is the mandate to preserve human life (*pikuach nefesh*). Another concept that takes precedence over almost every other principle in Judaism is *mipnei darchei shalom*, the acceptance of an undesirable practice in order to avoid conflict in the community. Similarly, *shalom bayit*, the desire to keep ‘peace in the home’ is one of our tradition’s highest values, and we are instructed to go to great lengths in order to ensure that peace is maintained in the places where we ‘live’.

The Hebrew word *p’shara* (from the word *poshrim* meaning a liquid that is neither too hot nor too cold) is one word used to indicate compromise, a position often advocated in Jewish texts. In fact, the 15th century code of Jewish Law known as the *Schulhan Aruch* states that judges are required to propose a compromise to the participants at the beginning of any civil proceeding.

Jewish scholars also differentiate between different types of arguments. Those which are destructive are frowned upon while an argument which is peaceful and for the sake of a worthy cause is permissible. The latter is known in Hebrew as a *mahkloket l’shem shamayim*, literally an argument in the name of heaven, and is seen as an important tool in the debate over proper interpretations of the law, such as occurred between the schools of Hillel and Shammai in the early first century CE.

These concepts can serve as a context for ways in which to manage conflict in a congregation. When confronted with a contentious situation or individual, it is always a good idea to take (at least) a moment before responding. While that moment may not be an appropriate time to transport ourselves back 20 centuries and ask ‘What would Hillel and Shammai do?’ it might be helpful to consider some questions informed by these ancient yet timely precepts:

- How can peace be maintained in this situation?
- Are there opportunities for compromise?
- Is it possible to direct the focus to ensure that the exchange that follows will be one that serves the congregation well and advances its mission and purpose?

One contemporary organizational dynamics expert, Peter Block, suggests some approaches that can be applied to managing conflict and are consistent with the principles espoused by our tradition. In his book, [The Answer To How Is Yes](#), Block writes about the importance of communication and its role in creating and maintaining healthy organizations. He suggests that asking the right questions is a critical component to organizational success and by extension to developing mechanisms for conflict resolution. Block writes that the **right** questions focus on values, purpose, human connection, and deeper philosophical inquiry and that shifting the questions can

Rules of the Road

Floy Work, Executive Director, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, Charleston, SC

Our staff reviewed our congregation's mission and we arrived at our own behavioral guidelines:

- Begin and end meetings on time
- Be honest
- Be kind
- Be respectful
- Be direct—ask for what you need
- No gossip
- Do no harm
- Be a team player
- Have fun and help others have fun, too
- Assume the best about other people

help us to come closer to answers that create relationships and organizations of meaning.

One specific approach to conflict management is reflected in Block's suggestion that the oft-asked question "How do you get those people to change?", instead be posited as "What is my contribution to the problem I am concerned with?" Block implies that this adjustment shifts accountability and provides ownership and empowerment for the questioner. Often when there is a conflict, Block notes that it is usually because we have defined ourselves out of the problem. He writes, "What keeps us stuck is the belief that someone or something else needs to change before we can move forward." Block's re-configuring of a familiar approach is a reminder that as individuals we can never change anyone else's behavior, only our own, and that we can only change a relationship of which we are a part. Applying these ideas to conflict management is a reminder of Gandhi's familiar aphorism that we need to become the change we want to see in the world.

Block also writes about the difference between the well-known question 'How long will it take?' and his suggested re-framing 'What commitment am I willing to make?' Often, in times of conflict, those involved grow impatient with what they perceive to be the intransigence of the other. Block again provides the opportunity for individuals to re-focus, perhaps away from the insignificant but immediate issues and consider how one's own actions (and in this case, patience!) can lead to positive outcomes. Block writes: "Every project of consequence or personal calling will require more of us than we originally imagined...we have time for all that is truly important to us, so the question of time shifts to 'what is important?'" He further notes, "Our ability to know how long a change in a living system will take is a guess at best...change comes from care and commitment, so let that be the more important discussion.

Some suggest that conflict is built into any relationship and into any system that is comprised of relationships. Our goal is not to avoid it completely; rather it is to develop organizational cultures and accompanying strategies that will help us to minimize the conflict and to manage it when it arises. Peter Block's ideas about reframing questions, focusing on each individual's role in managing difficult situations, clarifying expectations, living the values we espouse and understanding the importance of committing to the process of change are all significant components of a conflict management strategy.

Our ancient sages counseled that we not lose sight of our most deeply held values, especially when conflict arises. Is winning the argument or asserting authority really more important than establishing and maintaining a culture that values open discourse and the knowledge that compromise is sometimes valuable if it can lead to a peaceful environment and collective agreement on the larger goals?

As we consider the present-day conflicts with which we grapple as congregational professionals and lay leaders, we can learn from many, including the rabbis who declared that the opinions of both Hillel and Shammai had merit. In many instances Hillel's opinions were better suited to real life situations while Shammai's would be more applicable in the world-to-come. Peter Block might see this as an application of his principle that 'individually and collectively we have the wisdom to get the results we want. The challenge is to trust and act on that wisdom.'

Applying these ideas to contemporary conflicts could lead to less of the behavior that suggests 'you do it my way and I will too', and more of the outcomes suggested by the author of Pirke Avot 4:1 who wrote: 'Ben Zoma said, Who is wise? The one who learns from everyone...Who is mighty? One who controls one's [natural] urges, as it is said, 'One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty'...Who is honored? One who honors others...'



Managing Priorities When Resources are Tight

By Larry Broder, Executive Director, Temple De Hirsch Sinai, Seattle and Bellevue, WA

Wouldn't it be wonderful if our workloads were reduced commensurate with workforce reductions? Then we could simply do less with less... fewer people to manage, fewer tasks to perform. We would have resources equal to the needs, or as equal as they were before economic realities caused our budgets to shrink.

For many of us in synagogue management, our jobs are focused on finding ways to do nearly as much as before, but with less of everything. Many of our members are financially stressed and therefore so are our budgets. We are faced with demands to reduce staff, to maximize time and efficiency, to reduce vendor costs, and accomplish as much or even more despite the cuts. Our congregants tend to expect the same services from us regardless of staff and programmatic reductions, so we've had to get creative or suffer the consequences.

My experience is not unique, so it may be instructive.

MEMBER EXPECTATIONS

The first mental shift we needed to make after reducing our staff and budget by about 10% was to lower the expectations of our membership. We suspect that many of our members do not understand that fewer resources mean we are unable to provide the array of services previously offered. If members contribute less, we are forced to limit our programming. So we were very clear about what we couldn't do. Something had to give...or we'd be less able to motivate our members to give more in the future. I sometimes tell congregants that we have no deep pockets...just a bunch of shallow ones...and they're all in our members' pants!

LEVEL OF SERVICE

The second shift came when we recognized that we truly could not provide the same level and extent of services as we did before our 10% budget cuts. We started out trying to do the same with less, and midway into the year almost all of us broke down in some way. Illnesses increased, and staff suffered everything from tension headaches to serious cases of backbiting. And the stress was starting to show in the way the staff responded to congregants. Staff attitude telegraphs much to our membership and stagnant or cut wages are not conducive to a cheery staff. A frown on the face of a stressed receptionist shows in voice and

inflection. We realized we needed to do something positive or we'd all be walking around with bite marks and/or frowns.

We spent time meeting one-on-one and as a full staff sharing our concerns and trying to recapture the team spirit we once had. And I spent time with staff talking them through strategies to maximize their productivity.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Staffing a synagogue can be a crazy quilt of mundane "must-do" tasks, emergency actions in support of congregants, ringing phones, major projects requiring completion on deadline, and old-fashioned customer service. Despite staff and budget cuts, this reality won't change. So my challenge was to help each employee set their priorities and figure out how to manage their time most effectively.

There's nothing new or magical in the world of time management. Twenty minutes spent on the internet will yield a wealth of strategies workers can use to focus and manage their time. One approach, the POSEC method of time management, is summarized in the box on page 9.

But any prioritization must reflect the purpose and mission of our synagogue. So much of our work is people-centered. We serve our congregants and they, in turn, support us. Managing our time and activities when we have cut staff required us first to clearly identify our most important values.

1. What work is the most critical and central to our community and our membership?
2. What level of quality do we and our members expect and demand?
3. How can we prioritize and order our staff and their workloads to achieve the tasks most critical to our mission?
4. Can we multi-task, by tweaking our process and/or our work products to serve more than one function?
5. Can we work smarter, more efficiently or in a more focused way?
6. Can we share work with volunteers? Is it advisable for us to trade lowered dues for work? What type of work is appropriate for volunteers and what isn't?

7. How can we better use technology to help us achieve our goals?
8. Does every member of the staff know what his or her job is and what the jobs of others are, so as to avoid duplication of effort and conflicting effort?
9. Can we seek ways to make work more enjoyable?

We needed to decide what “deliverables” were most critical, how best to achieve them, and how our staff could do so with less stress and even joy. In theory, our work environment would then shift from a place that simply demands more with less, to a place that finds creative and collaborative ways to meet our mission and feel good doing it.

COPING WITH THE REALITY

Unfortunately, our synagogues are enormously vulnerable to task-derailers, because we are so people-oriented. It seems that at our Temple, planning goes right out the door when there is a member emergency, a death, or even a visiting out-of-towner who would love to take a tour of our sanctuary. Sometimes we simply must stop and respond to urgent needs. But if we've reduced office staff and there's only one person on hand to answer the phones and get out a time-sensitive mailing, it's tough to respond to immediate needs. The result can be missed deadlines, neglected members, almost certainly worker frustration and resentment, and one or another unhappy member.

I often call to mind some wisdom I read many years ago about the difficulties managers create when they take on the tasks and challenges of their staff. The author likened these problems dropped on the shoulders of managers to a “menagerie of monkeys” on the backs of the managers. When a staff member comes in to share a problem, it sometimes feels easiest to just solve the problem yourself. Each problem then becomes another monkey on the manager's back and the manager eventually collapses under the weight of all those monkeys. Equally important, when you solve the problem for your staff instead of nudging them toward finding their own solutions, you miss an opportunity to help them grow. I've learned the hard way to resist the temptation to solve it all. It is really difficult for me to hand back the problem to its owner but doing so has kept my menagerie of monkeys smaller. It's allowed me to solve the problems only I can solve, and empower others to find ways to solve theirs.

Each of us faces the challenge of reducing resources while delivering services that maintain a solid membership base. Our job is to sustain a steady course in shifting seas. The best way to keep a crew together under these circumstances is by being honest and showing that you are all members of the same team. If we as managers roll up our sleeves and get into the trenches with our staff, and if we can be straight and supportive with them, even when the news is not great, they will rise to the occasion and perform admirably.

Leading by example, helping to focus and organize tasks to get them done smarter, and remaining calm under pressure will go a long way to keeping our congregations vital and ready to rebound when the economy around us improves.

POSEC TIME MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

POSEC time management's basic tenet is that to be capable of handling things that one may face, one needs to first bring to attention one's daily personal responsibilities. The acronym POSEC stands for Prioritizing by Organizing, Streamlining, Economizing and Contributing.

The POSEC method of breaking down goals into smaller tasks works well for many people, though not all. By prioritizing these smaller tasks you can reach your ultimate goals successfully when you complete these simplified tasks one step at a time.

The method or school of time management known by the acronym POSEC provides rules for assisting people to organize their goals by level of importance and priority.

The POSEC model is comprised of the five stages listed below.

Prioritize - Characterize your responsibilities according to your set goals and prioritize your allotment of time. This could mean that you have to tackle your daily tasks in the order of their importance. This will help create personal efficiency and improve the total effectiveness of the team..

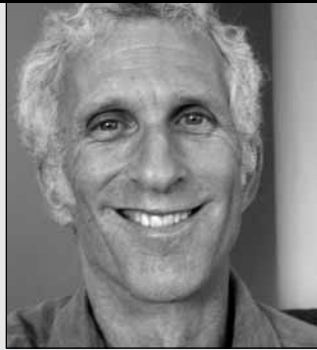
Organize - This is defined as structuring one's current set of goals in an order. The goals would be a task list that has to be achieved regularly. For instance, organizing the work desk, organizing the things around us to allow easy access to necessary equipment, efficiency at meetings, every day administrative tasks all create a helpful structure.

Streamline - Streamlining normally applies to the small jobs that you must do despite the fact that you don't enjoy them. It involves making the jobs simpler and maintaining efficiency and security.

Economize - Creating economy has to do with activities you must or would like to perform, but you are not required to do these activities urgently. Some tasks related to economizing include acquiring new skills, participating in projects of your preference, and taking part in personal development. These tasks may be considered less and, therefore, are found at the bottom of the list of priorities.

Contribution - By focusing on activities which may not give obvious benefit at once but do so over a longer period of time, one can contribute to the long-range vision of the organization and often can lead to greater self-satisfaction as well.

From <http://www.articlesbase.com/time-management-articles/get-a-grip-on-time-by-posec-method-852866.html> by Ron Finkelstein



Staff Morale & Team Building

By Michael Liepman, Executive Director, Temple Isaiah, Lafayette, CA and Norm Frankel, Executive Director of Temple Beth El in Berkeley, CA

MICHAEL: What kinds of things do you do to improve morale and team building in these difficult times?

If you have any good resources for this subject please share them with me. Here is one that I found:

http://blog.yourchurch.net/2010/03/leading_a_holistic_church_staf.html#more

My personal feeling is that a lot of what we can do to help with morale isn't necessarily that difficult. It's the small stuff that leads to the best results. Also, we must work on continuing good personnel practices no matter what we're going through with economic pressures.

Tough times will end at some point! Hopefully soon, right?

We have to deal with smaller staffs, less resources and still get the job done. However, I think it's still important to constantly look at self-improvement. I will never forget when I was in the hotel business I had a general manager who had a stuffed fish on his desk with a plaque that said, "the fish stinks at the head". That image will always stay with me. If we stay strong and we're optimistic it will filter down (and up!?) to everyone.

NORM: This is a huge issue for all of us. The first thing that comes to mind is recognition. Make sure your staff is properly acknowledged both privately and publicly for the incredibly hard work they do. Also make sure everyone is well informed, both about the financial challenges we all confront and about opportunities for individual growth and development. Even with limited resources we need to find or create opportunities for professional development for everyone.

MICHAEL: I agree that you can't say thank you enough and our staff are often left out when thank yous are made. It's up to us as EDs to support and stand up for our staff.

Learning was the second item on my list as well. We have a lot of resources in our congregations. There are therapists, trainers, HR professionals and even a masseuse that could offer their services pro bono, perhaps?

Keep on fighting is my personal goal. Have you tried anything new and exciting with your approach to team-building?

NORM: We have talked about putting together a staff softball team, but I'm not sure that I am ready to come out of retirement.

We have begun a series of internal staff trainings, each to be led by a staff member in his or her area of strength. We just did a review on the proper and efficient use of office equipment and I think everyone came away with something new, myself included. It helps to create a sense that we can all learn from each other.

I agree that good personnel practices are essential. It's crucial to be fair and honest, even when staff cutbacks are required. Maintaining morale and a sense of job security is tricky when your budget compels you to cut back on hours or lay off long time employees. We have started a strategic planning process and one of the core topics has been the roles of staff, clergy and volunteers in getting the work done.

MICHAEL: Great ideas, Norm. We could start a new softball league and play against each other? Manischewitz for the losers?

We do an annual senior staff retreat at a local retreat center and stay overnight. We discuss the upcoming year and take an opportunity to plan and regroup. It's great for team-building and gives us a chance to take a step back and move forward. Your idea of internal staff trainings will be a topic of mine at the next retreat.

It's a bit tougher with the staff but it's the small things that make a difference like buying them ice cream for our staff meetings or a pizza or cupcakes... Unfortunately, it's usually junk food but that's what they like!

I'd be interested to hear about your work being done on strategic planning.

NORM: As part of our strategic planning process we are looking very carefully at the many aspects of volunteer and staff relationships, trying to define the over-lapping areas of responsibility. We want to clearly delineate those functions that need to be managed by professional staff and those areas that can be led by or supported by volunteers. Much of this may seem obvious but at least here at Beth El it sometimes leads to very interesting discussions.

The best example here is our popular lay led Torah study and the question of the role of the Rabbi in that program. On the one hand we value the spirit and dedication of our volunteer leaders who have led this study for two generations (at least). On the other hand, the Rabbi should have a role in overseeing the study of Torah in the synagogue.

In order to achieve our long term strategic goals, staff and volunteers need to understand the skills and commitment that we each bring to the table. And if we have clarity about our roles it might be easier for me to find and recruit a pitcher for the team, or any other player willing to commit the time, energy and creativity to build a great team.

MICHAEL: Baseball seems to be on our minds! I agree that one of the most important morale boosters that we can give our employees is a clear position description. If they're a pitcher and we all of a sudden tell them we need them to play shortstop, we may have a problem, as it requires a different skill-set.

If our employees don't know what is required of them or if it is constantly changing, and we demand that they commit their "time, energy and creativity" as you put it so well, they will lose focus very quickly and we'll have to pull in a relief pitcher, or if all else fails, trade them to another team.

NORM: Well put. An important part of our strategic planning process will be rewriting all of our job descriptions and making sure that the skills we are looking for are the correct skills for meeting our long term strategic goals. And it will also certainly help staff to understand their role and the skills they bring to help reach those goals. We heard at this year's Annual Meeting and volunteer recognition event that our volunteers also would like to see clear job descriptions. So now I am looking for a volunteer to write those job descriptions for our volunteers. Any suggestions?

MICHAEL: I do but that will be a great subject for next time! Thanks again, Norm. See you at a Giants game soon!

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The National Association for Temple Administration (NATA) is an active professional network of Reform Jewish Synagogue Executive Directors committed to Judaic principles of ethics and integrity.

NATA's mission is to support its members by:

- providing educational and training activities and standards,
- providing its individual members and their URJ congregations with access to NATA resources,
- advocating for and promoting the profession of Temple Administration,
- serving as the professional partner with the Union for Reform Judaism.

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