Relevancy:

Boldly Innovating, Learning, and Evolving
In our role as executive director we often have multiple projects going on at the same time and are continually re-prioritizing what should be worked on first. We have to balance what is important and what interests our community and we strive to respond in a nimble and timely manner. Juggling all information and those interested stakeholders is often an art form and that is often the challenge we have as professionals in this field. And then there is the reality of external events which force us to switch gears and all plans are off the table. It could be a life cycle event such as a funeral for a prominent community member or a national tragedy such as what recently occurred at Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life Congregation, which causes many of us to be redirected to security and safety in a seemingly exclusive way. It is our role to respond, and make the spiritual home of our congregants relevant and focus on what is most important.

How we make our institutions relevant and responsive in partnership with our leadership and congregants presents a challenge. We have explored this theme in a number of ways in this edition of the *NATA Journal*. Taking a look at what makes some of our institutions more innovative, examples of initiatives that have broadened and deepened engagement, one community’s response to the challenge, and how volunteers can enhance relevancy. While we do not have a crystal ball to see into the future, were it only so, some of these insights and examples of best practices inform us of our relevance and our role as leaders in the communities in which we serve.

I’d like to thank my team of editors and contributors who are an amazing dedicated group of professionals. It is our hope that some of you will be inspired to contribute to a future publication of the Journal. I would also like to thank the NATA board and lastly the leaders of Temple Shalom of Chevy Chase, Maryland for allowing me the honor of editing this Journal and participating in NATA at this level.

—Susan Zemsky has over 25 years of experience in Jewish congregational and communal leadership in the metropolitan Washington, DC area. She is currently in her fifteenth year serving as Executive Director of Temple Shalom in Chevy Chase, Maryland.
President’s Message

Abigail Goldberg Spiegel, FTA, Executive Director
Leo Baeck Temple, Los Angeles, CA

In Parshat Shelach, Moses sends twelve scouts to survey the land of Canaan and its people. The twelve men observe exactly the same thing, but two of them, Caleb and Joshua, return with a completely different account of their experience.

Flash forward to today. There are those who say that if affiliation patterns continue that synagogues will cease to exist. I don’t believe that, but I do believe that synagogues will have to change the manner in which they operate. As we look towards the future, executive directors have a large role to play in how our communities adapt. As leaders we need to challenge our assumptions, alter long held beliefs, create a shared vision, utilize data, think creatively, experiment and and be willing to “fail forward.” No small or easy task.

In Torah Commentary for our times, Volume Three: Numbers and Deuteronomy, Rabbi Harvey Fields wrote, we too can “conquer ‘Promised Lands’ when we have regard for our talents and believe in our creative powers.”

How will we work to inspire confidence in our communities so that we can partner together and see the future as Caleb and Joshua saw Canaan? What do we need to do to work to transform the unknown into an opportunity? How are we going to look at this moment?

This edition of the NATA Journal will focus on the role of the executive director not just in maintaining relevance, but in positioning our congregations to meet the future head on.

Thank you to Susan Zemsky, editor of the Journal, the editorial board and the writers, for all of their work and for always challenging us.

—Abigail Goldberg Spiegel has been Executive Director since the spring of 2004, having joined the Leo Baeck Temple staff as Program Director, in September 2002. She is responsible for the daily management of the temple’s operations and facilities. She serves as an ex-officio member of the Temple Board and Executive Committee and she staffs various temple committees including the Membership Committee, Finance Committee, Budget Committee, Endowment Committee, Communications, and the House and Grounds Committee. Abigail is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College. She is currently President of the National Association for Temple Administration (NATA), having served as a member of the NATA National Board, and Vice President, overseeing Education. She is also a Past President of the Professional Association of Temple Administrators (PATA). Married to Adam Spiegel, they have four children, Sydney, Maxwell, Sascha, and Harry.
Synagogue Lay Leadership in the Twenty-First Century

A Different Kind of Model

Dr. Hal M. Lewis, Principal Consultant
Leadership for Impact, Greensboro, NC

Five years after the release of the Pew Research Foundation study, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” the findings have been thoroughly scrutinized and are well known even to casual observers. The contemporary realities of American Jewish life: wide-spread secularism, unprecedentedly high levels of individualism, rising intermarriage rates, a shrinking of the historic center in favor of a corresponding rise at the poles, drops in organizational and congregational affiliation, loosening of communal bonds, distancing from Israel and declining rates of Jewish philanthropy are no longer surprising. As well trod as this territory may be, however, little attention has been given to the question of what these trends mean for those who lead our temples and synagogues.

Because changing times require new approaches to leadership, I offer here an outline of a new, twenty-first century congregational lay leader. Our ancient liturgies held a special place of esteem for the women and men who “dedicate themselves to the synagogues ... and involve themselves faithfully with the needs of the community.” Despite their changed roles over the years, we remain indebted to these individuals who constitute what in contemporary parlance is referred to as the governance function of our religious institutions. (Because things change materially when discussing smaller houses of worship, those temples that are entirely lay-led, or those in which someone other than a full-time ordained clergy person officiates, will remain beyond the current focus.).

The “new” model I propose below is, counter-intuitively, far from the zeitgeist. Indeed in most cases, it traces its roots to and draws its inspiration from classical Jewish teachings on effective leadership. That it does not, and has not for many years, describe the conventional congregational leader does not alter its potential impact. Indeed, I would argue that contemporary circumstances make its reinstitution long overdue.

In Search of a Twenty-First Century Leadership Model

The old self-help mantra reminds us that, “If we always do what we’ve always done, then we’ll always get what we’ve always got.” Today, in view of shifting demographic patterns, there is widespread agreement that a new typology of synagogue leader is needed. But determining what that looks like and agreeing on how we get there is far from settled. To this end, I propose the following profile of a twenty-first century congregational leader.

• A Learning Leader – In the twenty-first century, lay leaders can no longer afford to abdicate responsibility for Jewish learning to the rabbinic or educational staff of the congregation. To be an effective member of a synagogue board, individuals must reject the moniker of am-ha’aretz – uneducated Jew. The complexities of leading a contemporary synagogue demand that those charged with the governance function must have a working knowledge of basic Jewish literacy. Moreover, congregational leaders must be conversant with contemporary Jewish trends, particularly those that affect the modern synagogue. Finally, board members must learn to grow their own leadership skills. It is not enough that they are successful in their personal fields of endeavor; they must work to become better organizational leaders as they seek to serve their constituents.

Importantly, synagogue leaders need not enter the job with a prerequisite level of such learning. Instead, an ongoing commitment to study must accompany one’s service to the institution. This means it is not enough for congregational lay leaders to attend committee and board meetings with regularity. They must also manifest a commitment to their own Jewish education – both classical and contemporary – while “on the job.” Similarly, as leaders, they must focus on their own development and growth during the period of their service to the congregation through training programs, workshops, and related opportunities.
A Leader Dedicated to Shared Power and Collaboration – Contemporary synagogues are complex organisms. The traditional Western leadership model, often referred to as the “Great Man Theory,” in which one single individual has all the answers and can do it all, has no place in today’s congregations. Sadly, some synagogue lay leaders believe that the best way to lead is “my way or the highway.” Simply stated, in the twenty-first century only leaders passionately committed to sharing power with others will succeed in our fast-paced, rapidly changing world.

This commitment assumes a variety of formulations in the modern synagogue. Job descriptions and boundaries must be clearly articulated. Micro-managing volunteer leaders, rogue board members, and contributors wishing to disproportionately flex their muscles by insisting on their version of the Golden Rule – “the one who has the gold makes the rules” – do not serve the best interests of today’s synagogues. At the same time, professionals and clergy who believe that they are first among equals, that by virtue of their posts they are entitled to run roughshod and rule unilaterally over the future of their congregation are living in a time warp that no longer comports with contemporary realities.

A Leader with a Bias for Action – The Hebrew word for leader is manhig. It derives from a three-letter root word meaning behavior. This is more than semantics; it represents a significant insight into effective leadership, with particular resonance for synagogue lay leaders. To say that leadership is about behavior is to argue against prevailing perspectives in which leadership is often conflated with authority. Holding a title, or for that matter, making a large charitable contribution, is not the same as leading. While many contemporary congregations have wisely moved away from restricting board membership to the so-called “beautiful people,” the reality is we have so much more progress to make in this regard. In an era in which traditional notions of who can lead no longer resonate with large segments of the marketplace, defining leadership as behavior can make a huge difference.

In Judaism, the biblical personality Nachshon ben Aminadav stands as an exemplar for all who lead. Hardly a household name, and far removed from the halls of titular power in ancient Israel, Nachshon, according to rabbinic legend (Sotah 37a), stepped forward when others, including Moses, were reticent to cross the Sea of Reeds to escape Pharaoh’s army. Nachshon’s willingness to take action, to behave with the boldness of a leader, stands in sharp contrast to others who fail to understand that leadership is about behavior. In an era as deeply challenging as ours, only those with a willingness to act and act decisively, even at the risk of upending previously hallowed practice, can rightfully claim the mantle of leadership.

Lay Leaders Must Assume Their Rightful Place at the Table – In far too many U.S. synagogues, board members have a tendency to see themselves as unequal partners in the future of the enterprise. “We are just volunteers,” goes the common refrain. In point...
of fact, according to the IRS, volunteer board members are the owners of the organization. Their role should not be diminished or relegated to the back seat because they lack ordination. Successful synagogues require a partnership between rabbis and board members, as well as executive directors and others on the professional team. It is true, of course, that governance is assigned different responsibilities from management. But each area is sacred and each is essential to the effective functioning of a twenty-first century institution.

According to the Palestinian Talmud (Berakhot 53a, “Rabbi Jeremiah said, ‘He who occupies himself with communal needs is as one who occupies himself with the study of Torah.’”) Board members ought not apologize for their role. They are required to step up to assume their rightful place as leaders.

Leaders Face Forward – Synagogue lay leaders are duty-bound to help create responsible congregations. At the heart of the English word responsible are the two words: response and able. The job of the congregational board member then is to create response-able institutions. Given the frenetic pace of change in our lives generally and in the American Jewish world, in particular, synagogue lay leaders cannot afford the luxury of being focused only on the present. They must enable synagogues that are well-positioned and appropriately staffed to respond to the onslaught of radical change confronting all religious institutions in America today, and Jewish ones especially.

In today’s environment, in which potential congregants face manifold options, including the choice not to affiliate at all, board members must guarantee that their organization is committed to excellence in a highly competitive arena. Worshippers will not choose to affiliate simply because your temple is the closest to where they live, or because that is the place their parents attended. Unless your synagogue is providing the most market-resonant services possible, people will make other choices.

Today the era of Jewish “shoulds” is over. No longer is it true that one should join the temple or contribute financially, or be deferential to the rabbis, or pay homage to the past. The job of the owners, in partnership with other members of the team, is to create synagogues that address a new generation of Jewish needs.

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more disruptive. To lead is to do more than advocate for the status quo.

• **Leaders are Humble** – At the core of Judaism’s unique contribution to the study of effective leadership is the conviction that the best leaders are humble leaders. Moses, for example, was simultaneously the most effective of all leaders and the most humble person on the earth (Numbers 12:3). The ancient kings of Israel were enjoined to guard against haughtiness, and egregious cases of leaders abusing their powers are routinely condemned in classical sources.

In contrast to the way it is (mis)understood in certain contemporary circles, humility in leadership is an asset; it is not a sign of weakness. To be humble, a leader must know that “None of us is as smart as all of us.” As Peter Drucker counseled his clients, “If you are the smartest person in the room, you’re in the wrong room.” The key to effective leadership is a willingness to surround yourself with people who know more than you do about any number of issues. Humility allows a leader to ask tough questions, to challenge assumptions, and to probe deeply. In today’s synagogue environment, in which multiple stakeholders with diverse interests predominate, only an individual with the confidence to say, “I think I am right, but I might be wrong,” can hope to lead effectively.

In our rapidly changing world, old models of synagogue leadership must give way to a different approach. The need to create meaningful partnerships, to share power, and collaborate with the rabbinate, the executive director and other members of the congregational team cannot be overstated. In many congregations, the executive director plays a pivotal role as liaison with the laity. Through her work as the first point of contact she can identify potential new board members or committee chairs and because he frequently observes lay leaders in action he can have a great influence in helping to guide a member’s long-term leadership trajectory.

Traditional assumptions about how we have always done business in our temples must be challenged in light of current realities. No magic solutions exist. Board members who lead humbly, convinced that they have a valuable contribution to make without insisting that theirs is the only way, set the right tone. Congregations will become more response-able when their leaders believe that leadership is about behavior not title. When synagogue leaders are willing to take risks, to ask big questions about tomorrow, not just today, they enhance the change-readiness of their institutions. Finally, when leaders see their job as both advocating for and challenging the deeply established practices that have guided their institutions, they will echo the words of the Tanakh, “I have built You an exalted home and a place where You may dwell forever” (II Chronicles 6:2).

**Dr. Hal M. Lewis is the Principal Consultant for Leadership for Impact, LLC – a nonprofit leadership consulting firm working with executives and boards on issues ranging from executive coaching to board development. A former synagogue executive director, he is the immediate past President and CEO, and current Chancellor of Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership. A prolific writer and teacher on leadership, he serves on the Faculty of the Center For Creative Leadership.**

He can be reached at hlewis@leadershipforimpact.com. Follow his blog at leadershipforimpact.com/blog.
Taking Risks Within and Beyond Our Sacred Walls

Ellen Agler, FTA, Executive Director
Temple Sinai, Washington DC,

Taking Risks Within and Beyond Our Sacred Walls

Instead of defining success by the traditional metrics of membership “units” and attendance, sacred communities (like other nonprofit and for-profit organizations) must be positioned to compete – to be compelling alternatives to non-affiliation or other ways of being Jewish in our communities.

At Temple Sinai, we’re not just experiencing membership growth, which is great, but there is a “vibe,” an unmistakable pulse of positive energy in our temple community that indicates that we’re doing something right. More people are showing up, they are giving more money, they are doing more “things” together Jewishly with their fellow congregants and clergy. The facilities are bursting at the seams and busses from the building to community sites are full. Leaders, members and staff get along and enjoy being together.

What changed in the world and within our own priorities to enable and support these successes?

Author and motivational speaker, Catherine DeVrye, shares this observation: “the seven most expensive words in business are we have always done it that way.” She suggests, “it’s time to seriously examine the way in which your organization operates in today’s rapidly changing environment. Certainly, it’s important to build on your past successes and not simply change for the sake of change... But, never forget that, even if you don’t change, your competitors and customers may.”

Temple Sinai’s strategic plan provides the framework within which our institution experiments and evolves; we assess what we’re doing, aren’t afraid to scrap legacy activities that are dull or fail to meet current needs and have an appetite to risk trying something new.

Examples of Temple Sinai’s new approaches that have broadened and deepened member engagement are organized in three categories: 1) Don’t be afraid to mess with temple tradition; 2) Say yes most of the time, and; 3) Take the frame of adult learning outside the classroom.

Don’t be Afraid to Mess With Temple Tradition.
When out-of-the-box ideas challenge the comfort of “we’ve always done it that way,” pause and really consider them. Getting input from members and lay groups is essential to building a base of support for change. Here are some of Temple Sinai’s new traditions that have taken root in recent years.

Separate High Holy Day Youth Services
Staff became concerned our long-standing program was failing. Behavior challenges and participant complaints told us that we were not providing a meaningful or engaging High Holy Day experience for our youth. Simultaneously, some parents voiced the strong desire to be at services together with their children, so we abandoned youth services and created an “alternative” service off-site that was intentionally shorter, without the full liturgy and musically less formal with a band. It was so popular that we no longer consider it “alternative” and offer it twice for each Holy Day.

Nothing can “Compete” with Saturday Morning Shabbat Services at the Temple
Most of our members do not come to services at the temple on Saturdays and some are interested in observing Shabbat in other ways. We are fortunate to have multiple clergy and, in recent years they meet members off-site to lead volunteer groups at a community organization four to six times each year. In addition, they host “Saturdays at Sinai” play groups for families with children ages 0-5 and participate as a temple group in local marches and rallies that fall on Saturday mornings.

Youth Groups are Just for Kids
In response to a dip in attendance for the youth group with youngest students, and requests from families to spend time together with their children, a new Mishpacha family group model was tried and stuck. With the help of staff coordinators, families get together for programming ranging from holiday observance at the temple to apple-picking and bowling.
Say “Yes” Most of the Time
When members suggest using the temple as a venue for taking action on issues they feel passionately about, activities and groups can sprout and take root from the enthusiasm of one or two individuals.

Gun Violence Prevention Group (GVP)
One passionate member formed this group with a rabbi as a liaison. They gained board approval to install the “Memorial to the Lost,” a t-shirt display of those who perished from gun violence in our area over the past year and did it again the following year. They are in their third year of coordinating powerful speakers for Shabbat and other programs, and continually inform members about ways to get involved individually and with others to effect legislation on gun violence prevention.

Refugee Support
A few members drove the temple’s participation in supporting resettlement of a refugee family in our area for one year. They gathered interested members and, with the support of the senior rabbi, gained board approval. Though a fund for this purpose did not exist, members made donations and volunteers were reimbursed for recurring and unique items. New record-keeping systems with designated staff to support them were put in place for gift acceptance and disbursements. In addition to engaging dozens of members in impactful work, it provided the avenue for enhanced member financial support of the temple for ongoing social justice work more broadly.

Take the Frame of Adult Learning Out of the Classroom
We know how clergy-led trips to Israel deepen relationships between members and the clergy. Similar results come when clergy lead trips to a museum, a protest or a play, or lead book talks. Our clergy have made it a priority to both create and support creative programming that meets members where they are and takes advantage of local cultural offerings.

Book Clubs
Book Clubs began a couple of years ago when both the library committee and Temple Sinai – Women of Reform Judaism identified that members wanted to read together. One of our rabbis was inspired to help create multiple types of temple-wide book clubs that are now well into their third year.

2016-2019 Strategic Plan
Core Values
• Strengthening the Jewish Community – by fostering an open, egalitarian, and welcoming approach to all congregants; encouraging personal connection between clergy and congregants and among congregants; and providing opportunities for all of our members to find inspiration, comfort, and learning across all ages.
• Tikun Olam – by linking Jewish spirituality and ethics to action through promoting social justice and, in taking advantage of our location in the nation’s capital, having a positive impact on our community and the world in which we live.
• Balancing tradition with innovation – by affirming our Jewish heritage and commitment to Reform Judaism, while welcoming innovation in worship, education, and all other aspects of congregational life.

Theater Outings and Museum Visits
Our outings with a rabbi are scheduled up to four times each year, drawing members who enjoy getting out with their temple friends and welcome the opportunity for discussion and reflection of the arts through a Jewish lens.

Political Activism
Appealing to members across generations, clergy frequently lead and/or accompany members, sometimes on chartered busses leaving from the temple, to community organizing meetings, protests, rallies (even to the point of getting arrested).

All of these initiatives created new ways for members to find value in temple membership, broadening the foundation upon which Temple Sinai works to build a vibrant future. Having the framework of a strategic plan, an ethos that enables experimentation and risk-taking, and flexible administrative systems were main ingredients enabling development of successful points of connection. The executive director and his/her team, in sacred partnership with board and clergy, must be empowered and expected to be participants in and cheerleaders for a culture of informed risk-taking.

Notes:
Catherine DeVrye, Australian Executive Woman of the Year, is a #1 best-selling author and global speaker on service quality and change. This is an extract from her book Hot Lemon & Honey-Reflections for Success in Times of Change. More at greatmotivation.com.

—Ellen Agler has been serving Temple Sinai as its executive director since 2008. Ellen’s previous professional experiences include running facilities and programs for Jewish and healthcare organizations meeting the needs of seniors in the Washington area. Ellen attended the University of Michigan as an undergraduate, and returned there to pursue a master’s degree from the School of Public Health. Ellen lives in Gaithersburg, Maryland with her husband Jeff and son Adam.
Some long-time members come to shul because it is the steady in a sea of rapid change in the world. They like the predictable black and white cookie at the Oneg and are used to calling the temple office to make a donation. How can this need for the same exist in the same space as the current generation of synagogue shoppers, those that left the temple before going off to college, to find themselves looking for a synagogue 15 to 20 years later with young children in tow? What can we do to attract the young family who shops on Amazon, orders groceries on Peapod, and has a music list for each mood, without alienating the long-term member who just wants to hear the same melody, reluctantly accepts a new prayer book, and enjoys a black and white cookie after the service? We need to reinvent the bag of tricks we use to retain, attract, and truly engage members.

We all know that the research points to a decline in synagogue affiliation and that we now compete with “pay-as-you-go” Judaism. However, the generational shift in affiliation, and perhaps more importantly, the lack of identification with the religion is even more dramatic. About 30 percent of the Gen-X (born 1965 to 1980) and the Millennial (born after 1980) generations do not identify themselves as Jewish. This is a dramatic increase compared to 19 percent of the Baby Boomer generation (born 1946 to 1964) and more so compared to about 10 percent for Greatest and Silent generations (born 1914 to 1946). Perhaps one explanation for this shift is that we have not readily adapted congregational life to societal changes which reflect a decrease in trust for institutions in general.

In regards to Reform Judaism, specifically, it is relevant that the major growth periods of the movement, the 1930s and after World War II, occurred during a period when affiliation was at high. We are now in a period when those who built most of our synagogues are aging out of affiliation and we are trying to attract Jewish folks using the same bag of tricks that was used when Sears was the place to buy appliances and there was a Woolworth in every downtown. Our newest members were most likely never in a Woolworth store and use the internet for instant retail gratification. Meanwhile, many synagogues are still using paper flyers to advertise events, paper checks for payment of dues, and celebrating the social aspects of the religion without adjusting to how current generations interact with institutions. We have to question if the traditional open house that is used to expose members to the synagogue is relevant if they can go synagogue shopping online. Our goal is to find ways to engage prospective members by welcoming them to our services and other programs, so they can experience what is not available on our website.

Not Your Parent’s Synagogue
At Temple Shaari Emeth, Manalapan, New Jersey, we are fortunate to have several three generation families as members; but, many of our newest members are those who have not been affiliated since they had their bar or bat mitzvah, and who have made a decision to affiliate with our Reform congregation after considering other Reform, and Conservative, synagogues along with the growing number of pay-as-you-go Judaism options. Those who join do so because they see the synagogue as being relevant to their lives, accepting of their beliefs, and I believe in some part because we operate the synagogue like it should be run in the twenty-first century.

How Do Prospective Members Find You?
In the past year we have greatly expanded our Google™ footprint by building out our Google™ business page and began using Google Adwords™ to market the Synagogue, preschool, and religious school. I am no longer surprised when the response to how a prospective member became interested in Temple Shaari Emeth is that we showed up when they searched for a Reform synagogue (alone, or above other options).
Likewise, we have found that advertising by boosting posts on Facebook™ is more affordable and effective than print advertising. Google™ makes up to $10,000/month in advertising available to Google For Non-Profit™ customers. Not only are the newer advertising mediums more effective for targeted audiences, they are also more affordable and relevant since many people no longer ready paper newspapers.

**How Do Members Interact with the Temple?**

We are approaching 2020 – fifty-six percent of bills are paid electronically and only nine percent of Federal tax returns are submitted on paper (versus electronically). As more people make a growing amount of purchases online, read newspapers online, and go grocery shopping using their smartphone, many synagogues still manage their Shalach Manot fundraisers with paper order forms which have to be mailed in, entered into a database, and then charged to member accounts. Besides being a costly administrative burden, the process reinforces the impression that synagogues are not keeping up with the times. We need to give our members the tools that are available today to efficiently communicate and interact with the temple. If they can order a television with one click on Amazon™, they should be able to make a donation or sign up for an event just as easily. Alternatively, if the temple is still paper-driven, one has to ask what else at the temple is outdated?

**Making the Synagogue Relevant**

While many of our rabbis have kept the ritual aspects of Reform Judaism relevant and adaptive to changing generations, many executive directors have not done their part. We tend to do “what works” and without using our creativity to adjust our tools to reflect what millennials desire. Temple Shaari Emeth had switched to Kabbalat Shabbats for eight weeks every summer several years ago, yet we still offered the usual Oneg baked goods offered throughout the year. Asking the question, “What if we branded the summer services as The Summer Shabbat Series – like a summer concert series,” we had a thirty-minute brainstorming session at a senior staff meeting coming up with Oneg themes that alliterative with Shabbat, and Sushi Shabbat and Snow Cone Shabbat were born. We then had a poster and banners designed to reflect what would be created for any town’s summer concert series. Not only did we attract more people to the summer services than we have in recent years, we also connected with new members who were excited by how many young people were at our services and loved the vibrant community.

**What about the Black and White Cookies?**

We have to remain connected to all of those in the congregation. I changed our Oneg offerings to provide a greater variety when I saw that too much food went untouched, but I had to deal with a small rebellion when I stopped serving black and white cookies. The lesson learned is that, while you need to constantly adapt to change such as adding a new style of Oneg (Hot Diggity Dog Oneg – see flyer to the left), you have to do what is necessary to keep your long-tenured members comfortable. Overall, I found that long-tenured members want the synagogue to remain relevant for their children and grandchildren and that they welcomed positive change, made use of the mobile app, and welcomed the greater accessibility created by fresh approaches to engagement. “Just don’t forget about the black and white cookies!”

“Birth of a Synagogue Movement: Reform Worship Through the Years,” Interview with Rabbi Daniel Freelander Published on Reform Judaism.org (https://reformjudaism.org).

—Stuart Brown has been the Executive Director at Temple Shaari Emeth, in Manalapan, New Jersey, since 2017, and was previously Director of Operations at B’nai Keshet, a Reconstructionist Synagogue, in Montclair, New Jersey for six years. He entered the professional synagogue world after a twenty-year career in community development and local government administration. A lifelong affiliated Reform Jew, he lives in Monmouth County with his wife, children, and two dogs.”
Part I: The Learning Journey and its Findings by Rabbi Samuel Joseph, PhD.
Rabbi Samuel K. Joseph, PhD, is Professor of Jewish Education and Leadership Development at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati Campus, was contracted by The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati as consultant for their congregational grants, and was the creator/curriculum designer of the Learning Journey.

We are single. We are partnered. We are traditional families. We are interfaith families. We are two-parent families. We are single-parent families. We are college students. We are boomers. We are millennials. We are lifelong Midwesterners and transplants from all over the world. We are gay. We are straight. We are transgender. We are black. We are brown. We are white. We are young. We are old. We are professionals and we work with our hands. We are business owners. We are employees. We are entrepreneurs. We are observant. We are non-observant. We are here for ourselves. We are here for each other. We are Temple B’nai Jeshurun, a reform Jewish congregation that joyously celebrates what makes us different and what brings us together.

Temple B’nai Jeshurun in Des Moines, IA created a word cloud to help encompass some of what they are discovering are both the tailwinds and the headwinds, the opportunities and challenges, facing congregational life in the United States today.

Some readers may be shocked to read “in Des Moines.” The assumption that these issues are only coastal issues or issues in very large urban areas between the Rockies and the Alleghany’s is not true. Across all our part of the North American continent Jewish communities in general and synagogues in particular are grappling with what is the nature of synagogue communities in the future.

This essay is to share with the reader how one Jewish community is responding to this century’s incredibly important concern. Can we actually add to the tailwinds/opportunities for synagogues and overwhelm the headwinds/challenges? Can synagogues flourish in the decades to come? How do we do so?

In Cincinnati, Ohio the Jewish community is blessed with the presence of The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati. Originally founded in 1995, The Jewish Foundation’s (TJF) asset base has grown to exceed 300 million dollars to invest in its mission to advance, promote and strengthen the Cincinnati Jewish community. In most recent years, TJF awards grants to Cincinnati area congregations.

ENDNOTE

TJF writes on their website, “The Foundation provided over $1.3 million to support a community-wide mission trip to Israel, bringing congregational teams read articles from congregational grantees were beginning to talk about tailwinds and headwinds and can the synagogue grantees that animated the first round of grants. Questions wanted to reflect on many of the original core questions support. TJF saw the needs and at the same time look at how to award grants to local congregations in areas such as clarity of mission/vision, culture engagement and sustainability be measured?”

Beginning in the fall of 2013, TJF began to very seriously toward that end, it was decided that TJF and their congregational partners go on a Learning Journey.

Throughout this Learning Journey clearly so much has been learned by all involved. Brian Jaffee, Executive Director, Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati most recently been discussed by the reader how one Jewish community is responding to this century’s incredibly important concern.

In most recent years, TJF has gone to such organizations, institutions and programs such as: AgeWell Cincinnati; Camp Livingston; Center for Holocaust & Humanity, Education; Chai Tots Early Childhood Center; Child Poverty Collaborative; Cincinnati Hebrew Day School; Cincinnati Hillel: Campus Superstar; Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion; ish Festival; Jewish Cemeteries of Greater Cincinnati; Jewish Family Service; Jewish Federation of Cincinnati; JVS.
The themes of the Learning Journey were:

- The sociology of contemporary American life in general, and the American Jewish community in particular: What is the state of play today and where will the future take us?
- How synagogues adapt and change. Adaptive leadership, change and the impact on the future of the American Jewish community.
- Connecting the dots: What we learn, moving from competition to collaboration.

Over the first six months of the year, TJF trustees and congregational rabbis and their lay leaders came together to listen to and dialogue with experts in the field such as Dan Libenson of Judaism Unbound and Institute for the Next Jewish Future, Bob Johanson at The Institute for The Future, Rabbi Sharon Brous of IKAR and Dr. Amy Sales at Brandeis University. A number of gatherings were created for everyone to meet and be able to synthesize what was learned, ask questions, debate, and seek future directions. The trustees met individually with each congregational leadership team to have a “deep dive,” highly reflective conversation with that team about their reasoning for the direction of their first grant: what they did, accomplished, and learned: what they believe needs to be their next steps.

Throughout this Learning Journey clearly so much has been learned by all involved. Brian Jaffee, Executive Director, Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati most recently wrote about what he believed are the key ideas from the Learning Journey:

- **Tension Between “Inreach” and “Outreach”:** As much as it seems to be an imperative for synagogues to change, we learned about the risk in getting the balance wrong between serving and satisfying long-time, loyal members who are happy with the status quo, and innovating in a way that may (or may not) appeal to those not yet in the fold. Congregations seem to be faced with a real dilemma of trying to broaden the base by stretching the bandwidth of rabbis, educators and staff and risking alienating happy members, or staying in the same place and risking a slow decline while the rest of the world moves on without them.
• Think Like Futurists:  
Futurist thinking doesn’t require supernatural ability to predict what’s coming, but rather a different type of mindset. Bob Johansen taught us about the VUCA Worlds (Volatility/Uncertainty/Complexity/Ambiguity & Vision/Understanding/Clarity/Agility); our application to local synagogues focused on his admonition to be as clear as possible about where you want to end up, but flexible about how you get there. This will be a key reference point for our thinking about funding options.

In addition, there were two other themes that resonated with TJF, but not necessarily with all of the congregational leaders:

• Dissatisfaction with the Status Quo;  
Whether it was Dan Libenson’s analysis of the concentric circles of “frequent users” and “infrequent users,” Rabbi Sharon Brous’s analysis of the Extremism, Routinism and Escapism of conventional synagogues, or Amy Sale’s diagnostic tool for assessing Thriving Synagogues, everyone we spoke with seemed to emphasize that the current model, i.e. the late twentieth century model, only resonates with a small minority of Jews, too small to be sustainable for the future. If synagogues are going to not just survive but remain relevant and thrive well into the twenty-first century, they will need to adapt and evolve along with the Jewish community.

• Search for Meaning and Purpose:  
More and more people are searching for meaning and purpose, and synagogues still have the potential to be that “place” – in an era where more Jews are struggling to find their “place” for involvement and self-actualization. We learned from Dan Libenson that a central challenge for synagogues is to figure out how to “do the job” infrequent users are looking for; and we learned from Sharon Brous about an intentional effort to make the synagogue that central place for moral sustenance and spur to action. Amy Sales provided us with interesting frameworks and tools for assessing the degree to which congregations are succeeding in becoming that place.

Based on the experiences of the first round of grants to congregations and a full, rich and meaningful Learning Journey experience for TJF funders and their congregational recipient partners, a much deeper awareness of contemporary synagogue life revealed. Communication is greatly enhanced. Partnership is deeper. Coming to mutual visions, mission and direction for Cincinnati synagogues is really possible.

Part II: A Synagogue’s Response by Karen Martin, MAJPS
K. K. Bene Israel/Rockdale Temple was one of the Cincinnati congregations invited to participate in the Learning Journey Sessions with The Jewish Foundation trustees. Our rabbis, members of our Executive Committee, and I, Rockdale’s Executive Director, did a substantial amount of reading and participated in each of the six learning and reflection sessions. Our goal was two-fold: we wanted to learn as much as possible from the curriculum, and we wanted our partners at The Jewish Foundation to gain a better understanding of the headwinds and tailwinds facing Rockdale Temple in particular.

We learned a tremendous amount from this project, and are deeply grateful to The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati for the opportunity to participate. This project broadened our lens, allowing Rockdale’s leadership to put our experiences into a national context, and we developed a shared language internally to discuss our challenges, as well as the tools to plan for our future.

Our particular challenge has been the tension between “Inreach” and “Outreach.” Daniel Libenson of “Judaism Unbound” posited a group of concentric circles that provided us with a framework to understand this struggle. Our core users are happy with how things work, but our core is also shrinking. How can we grow, innovate, and reach more individuals without alienating or losing that core? Many of the examples of exemplary programs throughout the Learning Journey sessions – including IKAR, Makom NY, and others, were new Jewish communities. Rockdale Temple is the oldest congregation west of the Allegheny Mountains, founded in 1824, and we have members who can track their family histories at Rockdale through four generations. Libenson offered two different models for growth: growing the core, which many congregations are trying to do on some level, or doing outreach adjacent to the core – creating a new circle that may or may not overlap with the original, that preserves the core and cultivates separate communities, using The Well, a semi-autonomous project of Temple Israel as a prime example.

In the course of our Learning Journey sessions, Rockdale Temple had the opportunity to begin cultivating a separate community a by launching ShabbatCTY, a joyful Shabbat service in Cincinnati’s urban core. We created a musical, meaningful service that meets in a new space every month. We are targeting two...
Part III: Conclusions
In the course of six months, Trustees of the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati and local congregational leadership deepened our understanding of the major issues facing synagogue life today. We learned and were inspired by the thought leaders in our field, and shared our own best practices. Many of us identified strongly with Bob Johansen’s explanation of the military term VUCA: Volatility/Uncertainty/Complexity/Ambiguity. On a broad scale, VUCA is an opportunity for religious institutions. People facing uncertainty often want to return to the comfortable and familiar, but only if those forms are presented in a way that resonates. Yet when synagogues themselves are in a VUCA situation, whether due to finances, falling membership, or any number of other reasons, we cannot afford to be static and rely on the familiar forms we have used for the last half century. We were relieved to learn that there is an alternative definition of VUCA that reveals a path forward: Vision/Understanding/Clarity/Agility.

Overwhelmingly, we can see that the synagogue is still a relevant enterprise. People are searching for meaning, inspiration, understanding, and community. Judaism has been a source of that meaning for millennia. However, so long as synagogues maintain the same form and appearance that they had at the conclusion of the twentieth century, they will struggle to communicate that relevancy and reach new individuals.

Synagogues benefit by having a clear starting point – the data to know where they need to grow, and what their strengths are. They also must have a clear vision that is motivated by their mission and purpose. They must be agile in adapting to headwinds, flexible in the execution of their plans, so long as their goal is not forgotten. To achieve this goal, a community needs strong and stable leadership who are willing to test, learn, scrap, and adapt. Equally important are adequate resources. Prototyping is rarely inexpensive in terms of material and brainpower.

In Cincinnati, we are very lucky to call The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati a partner to our local congregations, and we deeply appreciate their ongoing support as our congregations turn our eyes toward the future. תָּחַל
Volunteers Bring True Relevancy
If you want it, we will help you do it, let’s talk
Nancy Drapin, Executive Director
Kol Ami, Scottsdale, AZ

Temple Kol Ami has one simple philosophy when it comes to encouraging leadership: “if you want it, we will help you do it so let’s talk.”

Located in Scottsdale (incorporated in 1951) Temple Kol Ami (incorporated in 1988) is a relatively young congregation in a relatively young community. Out of 400 families, approximately fifty come from families with more than one generation of adults who have been members of the temple. Of these, about twenty-five families have held volunteer leadership positions on the board or have actively facilitated programs or events because they have felt the responsibility of leadership from watching the engagement of their parents or other family members.

More than fifty percent of our membership has joined the temple in the past two years and during this time, we have taken a serious jab at engaging the many new members that have joined. They come from many backgrounds, and many have been leaders in other cities so they come with great ideas and a desire to be active. During these past two years, Temple Kol Ami has recognized the vital need to encourage a stronger community connection for each of the new member families. To that end, our programming has prioritized building community.

We have a very small staff. Our Early Childhood Director and the Director of Youth Engagement focus on their target populations when programming. While the Rabbi and I create and manage any other programs that are scheduled, we have had to let go of old management hierarchies with committees and board involvement and plunge into fully volunteer run activities so that we could offer a variety of activities. Difficult as it may be, because it requires additional time and energy from each of us, we use the process defined in the old proverb “give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Each time a member has a great idea, we work hard to get them on board as the leader of the idea. This often requires several definitive meetings, extensive emails and phone calls. While we, as professionals guide the initial planning process and help with determining the marketing strategy, we do not lead the activity.

We believe that moving program management into the hands of volunteers is the key to shifting from attendance to engagement. There have been several interesting examples of success with this approach to share in this article.

Connections
Two of our new members proposed a program that would bring members together on a monthly basis to share interests during an hour of informal discussion following an option to go out to dinner with each other. The Rabbi and I met with these new members to help them integrate her ideas into the temple’s ongoing philosophy of creating community. They took this under advisement and met with us again with a formalized version of her proposal. They wanted to create a committee of welcomers, and then create opportunities for members to meet and enjoy each other’s company and talk with each other at ten tables with different topics such as travel, fiction books, Israel, business, storytelling etc. We provided a list of potential welcomers and, with their input, we developed the marketing approach to invite members of the community, of all ages, to attend. More importantly, because the volunteers felt it was important, they made personal phone calls to invite people. More than twenty people agreed to be welcomers, and more than thirty-five additional members turned out for the first two events. The Rabbi and I attended the first event; after that, the
volunteer leaders ran the program. They adjusted the tables after the first event since some of the topics were not of interest and after each event, a growing group of members went out to dinner together following the designated discussion time. As we moved through the first few months, we learned that our Boomers (55+ age) were attending but only a few of the 35-45 year old generation attended because they had to be home with their families. The volunteers decided not to duplicate this on a Sunday afternoon. We offered the program for five months and there was a decline in the number of attendees. However, many of the new members had opportunities to meet each other and some became good friends.

Nosh and Know
Rather than cancel the Connections program, one of the volunteer leaders stepped with a new idea. She felt that we should continue to offer this format of discussion and then dinner. However, she wanted the Rabbi and other designated speakers to talk and run the discussions. The Rabbi and I discussed the pros and cons of using more of his time, and decided to launch this new program. Nosh and Know, began in August before High Holy Days and it was well received. The concept was that you “will end the day knowing more than when the day started” if you attend this program. The Rabbi will be teaching the next Nosh and Know program and the volunteer leader will find other volunteer speakers as we move into 2019. The original Connections program concept of meeting other members and then going out to dinner will remain and will continue to be planned and facilitated by a volunteer.

Dad’s Group
A younger member of the temple who has been active in the temple for nine years, a generous donor, and an active participant in activities whose children have attended the early childhood center and religious school wanted to get the dads together for some male bonding. He felt that dads should have an opportunity to meet each other and offered to bring them together informally. The Rabbi met with the volunteer and approved a program that would invite Early Childhood Center and Religious School fathers to a nearby bar to watch sports and have a drink. The hope was that the event would expand into other men’s night out gatherings. More than twenty-five dads attended the first one and more than that to the second recent event. Prior to the second event, several of the older mail members of the group wanted to join in. Again, the key to success is the volunteer who enjoys making calls and inviting people as well as organizing.

Business B’yachad (Business Together)
Another outgrowth of the Connections program was a group of young entrepreneurs who wanted to begin a business-networking program. They were not interested in schmoozing about their travels and having dinner together. The purpose of the group was discussed at the first Connections meeting and then one of the participants volunteered to expand it. The Rabbi and I subsequently met with two of the participants who wanted to bring members together to network as well as to find ways to give back to the temple. The group doubled in size since the first meeting, and is planning to develop a Member Business Directory. All of this is under the direction of the volunteers; the Rabbi and volunteers speak by phone and email to discuss any issues that arise.

None of these programs would exist without volunteer leadership and time commitment. Temple Kol Ami is aware that lack of volunteer succession may imperil some of the programs. However, we feel strongly that other volunteers will step up with more ideas as they see that ideas become reality. For now, by encouraging and helping volunteers to organize, they desire and what they feel others desire, engagement is flourishing. The temple becomes relevant and necessary to members’ lives because they are actively involved in the planning, execution, and facilitation of activities.

—Nancy Drapin is a specialist in nonprofit management with more than thirty-five years experience in public education, arts and culture, and Jewish communal organizations. She is presently Executive Director of Temple Kol Ami, in Scottsdale Arizona. Her background includes heading up Community Impact, a Stanford founded nonprofit organization that developed community service projects for large corporations as well as administrative stints in the for-profit world. The “Jewish biz” continually calls her to serve and she has held numerous executive positions in the JCC’s in both the Bay Area and Washington DC, at Congregation Sherith Israel a Reform congregation in San Francisco, and at Congregation Kol Shofar, a conservative community in Tiburon, CA.

At Kol Ami, Nancy’s door is always open and she invites everyone into her office for a piece of chocolate and discussion. When she is not working, she spends time with her husband Stewart Reichlyn and their wildly enthusiastic rescue Woodle, Lucy.
Questioning the Foundation of Our Faith

Judy Moseley, FTA, Executive Director
Temple Beth-El, Providence, RI

Why are some synagogues more innovative, more influential and more profitable than others?

Why do some command greater loyalty from congregants, lay leaders and employees?

Remember when your kids were small, curious beings, constantly repeating one question: “Why?”

It was exhausting. There is a reason that phrase made us so tired. “Why” is the ultimate question for clarification. It demands explanation, context and support. It leaves no room for waffling. It is a simple question that, when asked by a five-year-old, moves from cute to challenging to exasperating.

In the synagogue world, we don’t ask “why” enough. It feels too challenging and too direct. We would rather not make someone uncomfortable or put them on the spot. We prefer not to answer “why” for fear of possible reactions such as irritation, impatience, over-communication of non-essential details, or worse – a blank stare.

But, what we give up when we don’t ask “why” is critical information. We need to bring this simple three-letter word back into our synagogue conversations. It is a smart question; not one to be feared. After all, we are making decisions that impact revenue, brand reputation, our employees and their livelihood. Is that not worth the little bit of discomfort that the question “why” elicits?

The consequences of not asking why a decision was made, why a strategy was deemed to be the best, why a plan was changed, why a worship service should change, why a fundraising campaign was not successful, why membership is declining or stagnate – are that we may never know. Without specific answers, three things may happen.

1. **We make up the story.**
We fill in the blanks ourselves. (That’s just human nature).

   *I don’t know why he didn’t call me back... maybe he’s mad about that comment I made in yesterday’s meeting.*

   He might be, or he might be busy. He might be out sick. He might have forgotten. He might be thinking about what he wants to say before he calls back. He might be calling you now.

   It doesn’t matter. When we don’t have complete information, we complete it ourselves. Sometimes we create a story that is not only based on speculation, but that takes the entire storyline sideways. That leads to the second thing that happens.

2. **We make decisions based upon incomplete and/or incorrect information.**
When we don’t ask “why,” we don’t know the full context of a situation, so we make decisions based on what we know at the time. Sometimes that is unavoidable. If we have no good way to get to the why, and we have to move forward NOW, we go with our best guess. And, it’s just that: a best guess.

   However, other times, we make a decision assuming we actually know. We fill in the blanks and our story seems reasonable and plausible, leading us to take action based upon our made-up storyline. If our assumptions and storyline are not the same as other team members, we could be taking that hard-left turn, when we should be veering right.

3. **We impact our relationships with our congregants.**
Now we’re off and running with a story that may or may not be accurate. Our congregant is running with perhaps their own version, and now a story that was already faulty can get completely out of control. Unwinding that story can be complex and could damage any feeling of trust or credibility between congregants...
and the board, clergy or staff. This is especially true if the
story contains sensitive issues, such as synagogue
support/fundraising or an unhappy congregant.

We know WHAT we do, we know HOW we do it, now we
need to know WHY we do what we do.

If you seek change, if you want to carve out a new path
that sets you apart and lays the foundation for the future,
you are ready to discover your WHY.

A WHY is a blueprint; a set of values and beliefs through
which to make decisions that last. It is for
those organizations committed to
positive change and long-term success.

When a synagogue starts with WHY,
they stand for something bigger than
any program, result or metric. Their
brand has real meaning and true value
in the world. They are better able to
attract and unite congregants, lay
leaders and employees, AND their
congregants love coming to
synagogue.

This is your synagogue’s journey to
WHY.

In an article from the New York Times
magazine in 1988, when asked why he
chose to be a scientist and not a doctor
or lawyer or businessman, Nobel
Laureate, Dr. Isidor I. Rabi, explains
that "Every other Jewish mother in
Brooklyn would ask her child after
school: ‘So? Did you learn anything today?’
But not my mother. She always asked me a different
question. ‘Izzy,’ she would say, ‘did you ask a good
question today?’ That difference – asking good questions
– made me become a scientist!"

Questioning is the foundation of our faith. So, it is fitting
that we have added a new member to our team...She’elah
the Llama. She’elah is the Hebrew word for question and
llama is the Hebrew word for why...that is what this is all
about...asking lots and lots of questions!

This year our Temple is developing our next five-year
strategic plan. We are asking the questions especially
with respect to our board and staff. Below is just some of
questions we need ask ourselves in developing a strong
strategic plan.

1. Does everyone in our temple – board and staff – know
   how to speak effectively about the temple?
2. Does the Executive Director and Board President have
   a strong and effective working relationship?
3. Do we have the right approach to fundraising?
4. Do we have all the right people “on the bus?”
5. Do we keep our superstars happy and motivated?
6. Do we know what to do if there’s a real crisis?

So, did you ask a good question today?

—Judy L. Moseley, FTA, has more
than fifteen years of professional
experience working in the Jewish
Community. Judy spent seven years
as Executive Director of
Congregation Beth Israel in
Worcester, MA. Prior to this she
worked two years as an Operations
Manager of MetroWest Jewish Day
School in Framingham, MA. She also
taught Hebrew School for twenty
years. Before becoming a Jewish
communal worker, Judy was a small
business owner. For six years Judy
was the President of J & M Bagel Inc.
dba J & M Bagel & Bean Café. She
was responsible for all aspects of
building and running two successful
bagel restaurant/bakeries. She is
currently co-chair of NATA’s
Membership Committee. Judy Moseley
holds a BS degree in Gerontology and Volunteer
Administration from University of Massachusetts,
Amherst, a Master of Business Administration (MBA)
degree from Northeastern University and is a FTA (Fellow
in Temple Administration). Judy and her husband, John,
are proud parents to son, Mark, a Robotics Research
Software Engineer in Massachusetts, and daughter, Erin,
is The Programs and Events Manager at Temple Emanuel
in Newton, MA.  
Our dear colleague, friend, and mentor Joanne Fried, passed away on July 21, 2018 after a brief and valiant battle with pancreatic cancer, diagnosed in its late stage just months before. I visited with her family during shiva and had the good fortune to meet the "jewels" in Joanne's crown – her sons Mike, Ben, and Sam, her daughter-in-law Sara, and son-in-law Ken. Over the many years of my friendship with Joanne, we both glowed brightly when sharing happy news about each other's children, and we commiserated empathically with each other when challenges befell them. Though Joanne was the consummate professional, she was first and foremost a devoted mother who cherished family above all else. I learned so much from her about grace and purpose.

Joanne had many passions and a great "gift for seeing the potential in all things," as Mike shared in his beautiful eulogy. Throughout their lives, she supported the unique and diverse talents of her sons, helping to guide each of them toward becoming his best self. She did the same for herself, as well, carving out precious time in her busy life for her own passion as a member of the Red Hot Mommas, a dance troupe for women 55 and up. In the past few years, she even had co-founded her own production company, putting on command performance musical reviews and murder-mystery nights. It may not have been her full-time job, but she knew her life could be dedicated to music and dance, and so she found many ways that it would be.

Joanne acquired her philosophy of life from her own mother: "Que sera, sera" or "It is what it is." This philosophy seemed to temper the anger or depression that might have overwhelmed a less grounded person fighting for her life, in the prime of her life, and with so much to yet live for. It was what it was, for her: to try every means to win her battle, but not to lose her positive spirit along the way.

Joanne's education started as valedictorian of her high school and graduating magna cum laude from Boston University with a degree in Art History. Her dream was for a career in the arts, one that she realized through theater and dance. Though she pursued several full-time careers throughout her life, from publishing to business administration to aerobics instructor, the work she was most proud of was as a synagogue Executive Director. At three different congregations on Long Island – North Shore Synagogue, the Community Synagogue in Port Washington, and finally at Temple Beth El of Huntington ("her" temple) – Joanne shared her vision for what a Jewish community could be and lead them closer to what they should be. Through many long nights as well as heated and tedious board meetings, Joanne used her vision, perseverance, and gentle hand to grow, nurture, and strengthen the synagogue communities she served and to help them realize their own potential.

Joanne was a leader within NATA – on our NATA Board, NATA Membership Committee, as a frequent conference facilitator and educator, on our NATA Journal Editorial Board and, at our 75th anniversary celebration of NATA in Boston 2017, as our Choir Director. Let us remember her always, with love, with gratitude, as a source of inspiration and motivation to be our own personal best, and may her memory be for a lasting blessing.

Sue Gold
Remembering Joanne Fried, z”l

By Sue Gold

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NATA Living Values

NATA and its members embrace these core values as the guideposts for how we function individually and collectively, and how we approach our work as synagogue professionals. Each of these reflects pillars for the work we do and the people we want to be.

Build Community – Arevut Hadadit (mutual responsibility)
- Support our members individually and collectively as they confront personal and professional challenges.
- Be inclusive and embrace the diversity of the people with whom we work and those who make up our communities.

Enable Ourselves and Others to Act – Chizuk (empowerment)
- Strengthen our members by mentoring colleagues and raising the level of education and common knowledge.
- Serve as teachers, doers, and leaders within NATA, helping to strengthen our organization so that it can continue to thrive.

Give of One’s Heart and Soul – Chesed (kindness) and Kavanah (mindfulness)
- Create, maintain, and enhance caring and generous relationships with NATA colleagues and in our own communities.
- Be fully engaged in our work and our community with an open heart, curiosity, and a commitment to excellence.
- Initiate and participate in acts of loving-kindness.

Live our Torah – Tohar HaMidot (ethical person)
- Behave ethically in our work and in our relationships by showing respect, being trustworthy, and acting with integrity.
- Strive to be self-aware and recognize our own biases and that of others.

Model the Way – Dugmah Ishit (personal example)
- Inspire others and lead innovation by representing the best practices in our field and demonstrating a deep commitment to Judaism.
- Collaborate with and support our congregational lay and professional leadership.
- Value ourselves by maintaining our work-life balance, our health, our family, and other personal relationships.
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NATA Mission
NATA prepares and inspires synagogue management professionals to serve and lead congregations with excellence.

NATA Vision
Synagogues and other vibrant centers of Jewish life engage outstanding talent and have the necessary resources to thrive and evolve.

NATA Strategic Priorities
Enrich members’ professional and personal development. Advance and promote the profession. Serve as the voice of synagogue management.