If not now, when?
Editor’s Message

Susan Zemsky, Executive Director
Temple Shalom, Chevy Chase, MD

“If I am not for myself, who is? And when I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”
—Hillel, Pirkei Avot, Chapters of the Fathers 1:14

These three short questions guide us to think about our partnership with the holy and our work within the communities that we as executive directors serve. While rhetorical in nature, and therefore don’t require answers, each elicits a reaction which will hopefully bring us to some action to the best of our ability. The NATA Journal editorial team was guided by these questions over three issues and explored our professional roles in relationship to them.

In this final issue we ask “And if not now, when?” Hillel is presenting a challenge, cheering us on to act now, confident that if there is a will there is a way, even if the tasks are difficult. He reaches out to us from the first century BCE; astonishingly, these words ring true for many moderns. Presidents Kennedy and Reagan used this quote. As did Maya Angelou when she paraphrased by saying, “Nothing will work unless you do.” Before her, Harriet Beecher Stowe: “The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words left unsaid and deeds left undone.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. taught us, “We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.” Like Hillel, Dr. King challenges us to action.

So here we have it from the ancients to the moderns, asking us to look inward to act on our values as individuals, citizens, and professionals. Where does this most resonate for synagogue executive directors? You may not have another chance to act on the things in which you believe the most. Whether in our jobs or in our personal lives, Hillel is telling us that each moment is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity; we have to act on it. Whether it is creating a personnel manual, working on the budget, dealing with a difficult congregant situation, or supporting our staff, it is incumbent upon us to begin right away and not to wait for others.

I cannot thank the editorial team enough for working on this final issue of the Hillel trilogy. The contributors have our gratitude for putting forth material of the highest quality. Finally, I would like to thank the NATA Board and lastly the leaders of Temple Shalom of Chevy Chase for allowing me the honor of editing this Journal and participating in NATA at this level. L’Shalom,

Susan Zemsky

—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 15th year serving as Executive Director of Temple Shalom in Chevy Chase, Maryland.
President’s Message

Janice Rosenblatt, FTA, Executive Director
Temple Beth Ami, Rockville, MD

“If Not Now, When?”—Hillel the Elder (Pirkei Avot: 1:14)

Dear Colleagues,

Hillel’s words are telling us to stop procrastinating. To take a minute to consider your “self,” to consider what gives you the most pleasure, the most satisfaction. To consider your work/life balance and the work/life balance of those around you. To consider the opportunities that are available to you and the things you need to do. And to DO IT NOW.

His words direct us that, once we decide what we need to do, we need to do it. It is not enough to be aware of the need; we have to act on it. Whether it is creating a personnel manual, working on the budget, dealing with a difficult congregant situation, or supporting our staff, it is incumbent upon us to begin right away and not to wait for others TO DO IT.

Begin now to see, truly see, the people around you. Are they taking care of themselves and, when given the opportunity, are you encouraging an atmosphere supportive of mindfulness and physical well-being? Be generous with praise and support, be aware of their needs, and encourage them to find time to do that which is meaningful to them. DO IT NOW.

Look at Hillel’s words as a personal message, a message of self development. Take the trip, enroll in the course, read a book, meet a new person, take an afternoon to walk in the park – don’t wait for the “right time.” This is the right time. Become aware of your personal needs and act on them. DO IT NOW.

Whether in our jobs or in our personal lives, Hillel is telling us that each moment is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that needs to be responded to. You may not have another chance to act on the things in which you believe the most strongly. As executive directors, we often put aside our needs for those of our house of worship. Hillel is giving us permission – in fact, imploring us – to do what brings us satisfaction and well-being, and to DO IT NOW.

Janice Rosenblatt, FTA
NATA President

—Janice Rosenblatt has been in the profession, at Temple Beth Ami, for 24 years. Her background and previous work experience was in marketing/advertising, both in Boston and in DC. Janice served as President of the Temple several years prior to becoming its first Executive Director.
I have been working since I was 14 years old. My first job was as an assistant in a New York City Head Start summer program taught by my mother. This means that I have been working for about 80% of my life with almost 70% of my time in Jewish communal organizations. No, this is not the inimitable story of how I had to walk miles in the snow to get to work, but it starts with a tale that shows why healthy behaviors and a positive attitudes mentors and motivates others. As Michelle Obama once stated, “We have to do a better job of putting ourselves on our own ‘to do’ list.”

When I was four years old, I had a teacher in kindergarten who was rather rigid. One day during the first week of school, while playing in an indoor sandbox, I spilled some sand on the floor. Not only did this teacher reprimand me in front of the other children and make me sweep up the sand, she also made me sit in the corner until it was time to leave. When my mother picked me up from school and I shared this story with her, she was livid that I was embarrassed in front of the class over such a small accident.

A kindergarten teacher herself, she assured me that I was not a bad person, that I would learn how to play without spilling the sand and that she would speak with my teacher. I probably never spilled much sand after that, but I also don’t remember much about my preschool class; the teachers or the kids. I will, however, always remember my mother’s reaction and support.

As executive directors, we are an important part of the leadership of the congregation, an essential leg on the three-legged stool. We have the unique potential to serve as an energizing force in the workplace. We also have the ability to influence by example, by education and by understanding. We effect change and success by how we enable others with whom we work to process specific workplace moments. As a leader, we bring a mindset to challenging situations which can affect the attitudes and actions of the entire the staff, clergy and our volunteer leadership.

Positive thinking and acting are things that are not well-nourished by our work environment. As executive directors, we share annual High Holy Day or general member feedback experiences by email and shudder in amazement at the feelings that we have to swallow in response to our members or evaluators.

Throughout my life, I have been inspired by certain quotes that had a way of getting under my skin and agree with my internal ideals to reaffirm what I believe. The following are a few of those “mantras” that may encourage or guide you in creating a healthy, motivational environment at work.

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**Clean and fresh workspaces with plants and art and places to share time as well as places to work quietly not only enhance health and wellness, but also open minds and opportunities to think.**

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**Re: Staff**

*Never try to force the piano to produce the sounds of the violin. The results will be grotesque.* — Amos Oz

Many of us have experienced the expectation that when we started a job, some of the leaders or staff expect us to “clean house in day one.” Strong leadership depends on how well you manage actions that are under scrutiny from the moment you start. Respect, consistency, transparency, and commitment need to be the message that you are actually conveying. You will most likely bring about change within a certain time period, but it should be on your schedule with an ethical and strategic approach. Most employees will forgive your
errors and follow your lead if they feel valued and respected. Each person brings skills and history to the table which need to be respected whether or not you plan to continue their position.

**Re: Positive Thinking**

*We can complain that rose bushes have thorns or we can rejoice that thorn bushes have roses.*—Abraham Lincoln

Your communication style reflects how you express the values you live and promote. I have always looked at a glass half-full even when working with those whose approach is half empty. This allows me to go home feeling that each day is an educational experience for me and my staff. With many years of experience in the varied areas of our work, I often find myself torn between getting it done easily, by doing it myself, or waiting for someone to understand the big picture and learn. Communicating expectations and mentoring positivity is not easy, but the payoff is huge. Positive thinking allows for control and autonomy, which in turn makes it simple to brainstorm and delegate. High energy can go viral in a team setting.

**Re: Workplace Environments**

*The first act of architecture is to put a stone on the ground. That act transforms a condition of nature into a condition of culture; it’s a holy act.*

—Mario Botta, Architect

I have never met a work environment that I’ve liked when I walk in the door with the exception of one, which I helped to plan. I need to put my personal touch on my office, to clear space and to organize. Clean and fresh workspaces with plants and art and places to share time as well as places to work quietly not only enhance health and wellness, but also open minds and opportunities to think. I believe that our workplace is a powerful tool for supporting employee performance. To that end, I have encouraged visual reorganization of workspaces as well as clearing out files and opening doors. No matter how old the building, or how set the culture, some sort of visual change always gives psychological capital to relationship building.

**RE: Making Choices**

The inimitable Dr. Seuss wrote:

*You have brains in your head*
*You have feet in your shoes*
*You can steer yourself, any direction you choose.*

Studies have shown that highly engaged people are more productive, more profitable, healthier, and are more likely to be the best source of new ideas. We have daily opportunities to make a positive impact on others and even more importantly on ourselves.

**Your “To-Do” List**

We are all capable of nourishing ourselves in a way that allows us to set and meet attainable goals while enjoying all the different relationships in our lives. Now is the time to find your direction and find your own spaces in the day to engage in the things that enable you to pat yourself on the back. As Hillel the Elder said, *If not now, when?*

—Nancy Drapin is a specialist in nonprofit management with more than 35 years’ experience in public education, arts and culture, marketing and fundraising. She is presently Executive Director of Temple Kol Ami, in Scottsdale Arizona. Her background includes work in the for profit as well as nonprofit organizational world. 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 synagogue 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. Her “to-do” list includes spending time with her husband Stewart Reichlyn and their wildly enthusiastic rescue woodle, Lucy.

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You are gazing intently at the financial statements sitting in front of you, trying to figure out your newest dilemma. The numbers do not make sense, but you know you need an answer before this afternoon’s Finance and Administration committee call. Suddenly, your attention is distracted by what looked like a shadow passing by the door. You then hear the knock on the molding. A moment later, a voice. “Are you busy? Do you have a minute?” the voice asks.

“Oh of course I am busy. What does it look like?” is what you want to say, but inevitably, you do not. Instead, you respond, “Not at all, what can I do for you?”

Forty-five minutes later, the discussion ends and you turn back to the statements, only to realize you are five minutes late for a meeting with the rabbi. “Damn” you mutter under your breath as you jump up, and knock the long list of to do’s onto the floor. No time to pick it up. Gotta run. “Where did this day go,” you think to yourself, as you rush down the hallway.

Rabbi Hillel taught, “If not now, when?” but he was never an executive director. Now is never now when you have multiple people and projects competing for your time. Now is always later when the rabbi and president just don’t understand exactly what it is you do, and why can’t you do it faster, more efficiently, and oh yea, perfectly.

In the midst of such chaos, it is never easy to look at interruptions, conversations or projects as opportunities that should not be missed. As the old saying goes, “It’s hard to remember your task was to drain the swamp when the alligators are nipping at your heels.”

As an organizational enhancement consultant and a professional coach, much of my work focuses on helping professionals and organizations keep their eye on the big picture and seize opportunities as they present themselves. Whether it is a congregation as a whole, or an individual executive director, it is only when opportunities are recognized and seized, that we unpack the totality in order discover the essence of moment.

While it may seem that the executive director’s job is to balance the budget, make sure there is toilet paper in the bathrooms or ensure that the bulletin does not have typos, these are in fact not the job. These are just functions and tactics. Ultimately, the executive director’s primary role is, and always should be, dedicated to its fundamental purpose – to inspire and enable fellow professionals to perform at their peak of potential.

When that is recognized as the primary objective, then and only then, is the Executive Director able to take the time to create the big vision, stay positive, not be overwhelmed and remain focused on the end-goal. It is only then that the knock on the molding is not a distraction, but rather, an opportunity to empower, engage and inspire.
Research into employee engagement informs us that money is not the key motivator of employee drive, ambition, or fulfillment. Rather it is how we interact with those with whom we work that increases engagement and productivity. The research shows that having a supervisor who cares about each supervisee/ employee as a person, is dedicated to their growth, and provides them with opportunities to learn and grow is central to employee engagement.

In an environment where employees feel empowered and engaged (and not micro-managed), the supervisor (e.g., executive director) then has the time and energy to be less focused on the minutiae, and more on the people, and the larger strategic and operational issues.

Granted, this may sound simple (and perhaps even dismissive of the very critical operational details that every executive director must cope with), but it is neither.

It is only when a professional is able to afford him or herself the opportunity to step back and take a broader and long-term perspective that opportunities become visible and achievable. Empowering and engaging co-workers are key to removing the blinders so that opportunities suddenly become obvious.

Nevertheless, this is not easy to achieve, but not for the reasons many may think. While it may appear that the long to-do list is ultimately the primary obstacle, it is not – each of us is.

We, ourselves, are our primary obstacle. We are so used to DOING and BEING IN THE MOMENT, that any other perspective requires significant internal change (which entails a whole host of other issues and challenges).

Change, as we know too well, is never easy. Personal change is even harder, and yet, our jobs demand that we change. Every day we have the opportunity to grow. Every day we have the opportunity to learn. Every day the potential to be different presents itself. The question is, “Do we embrace the change, or do we subconsciously fight against it and embrace status quo (because it is comfortable).”

Ultimately, the Executive Director's primary role is, and always should be, dedicated to its fundamental purpose – to inspire and enable fellow professionals to perform at their peak of potential.

In their book, *Life is Uncertain...Eat Dessert First*, Sol Gordon and Harold Brecher adapted a poem by the early 20th century poet, Guillaume Apollinaire:

“Merlin motions, 'Come to the edge'
But they held back and said, 'It’s dangerous.'
He beckoned, 'Come to the edge.'
And they said, ‘But we may fall.’
Then he commanded, ‘Come to the edge!’
So they went to the edge and he pushed them...
And they flew.”

Every day we are provided a choice...we can go to the edge, gaze out and wonder what we are missing. Conversely, we can open our eyes to the opportunities, spread our wings, and fly to a new and better perspective. The choice is ultimately ours. The question is, if not now, then when?

—Rabbi Louis Feldstein is the founder and CEO of Dynamic Change Solutions, a consulting practice focused on strengthening congregations and other nonprofits as well as coaching executive directors, rabbis and congregational presidents. Prior to launching his company, he has been an Executive Director, CEO and held other senior level positions at the University of Miami Hillel, Atlanta YAD: The Jewish Young Adult Agency, The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta and the National Federation System. In addition, he currently serves on a monthly basis at Temple B’nai Israel in Hattiesburg, Mississippi and worked for 13 years as the part-time rabbi at Congregation B’nai Israel, Fayetteville, GA, where he was named their Rabbi Emeritus. He is a published author of countless articles on philanthropy, good governance, organizational change, and improving organizational impact and appeared on ABC’s 20/20 as a subject matter expert. When he is not consulting with or speaking to synagogues and nonprofits, he spends his time increasing his knowledge of issues impacting nonprofits and specifically congregations, or running (he ran his first marathon just four years ago). He is the father of four kids – three in college and one who soloed the entire Appalachian Trail upon graduating from high school.

If you would like either a copy of the full list or a self-evaluation employee engagement worksheet, please contact the author.
Without getting embroiled in political discourse, the recent elections have some of us a bit worried about the future – for the environment, for economic justice, for affordable health coverage, for the stranger in our homeland, for civil rights, for women’s rights, for gun violence prevention, and much more. As we move forward, ever-hopeful that our strong democracy will lend a caring and responsive ear to the abiding values we as a Jewish people hold dear, it might be wise for our communities to revisit the website of the Religious Action Center (RAC) and their many specific recommendations for getting involved and making a difference. The RAC is truly a beacon and its initiatives will move us closer to our common goals.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wisely reminded us that, “The arc of the moral universe is long, and bends toward justice.” Sometimes positive change takes time and a great deal of effort, but we have known such change in our own lifetime. Yet, we are an impatient bunch, we executive directors. We are “get it done” kinds of folks. Problem-solvers. Do-ers. We are, fundamentally and at minimum, chief operating officers for our institutions, with responsibility for tending to the needs of not only the physical plant, but the people who work here and the people we serve. We can, and should, use this moment to (re)organize our thinking and our actions – to energize the universes of our own, individual workplaces to live up to and achieve the higher values and goals our movement has always held dear. Some of these efforts are well within our domain as synagogue leaders to enact right now, and – through lay-professional partnerships – will lift our entire community…if not now, when?

Let’s start with economic justice: many states have endorsed raising the minimum wage to $15/hour – hardly a living wage, to be sure, but more than is legally required. Our human resources are among our most precious assets and when staff feel appreciated, it is easier for them to shower our congregants with the extra measure of care and attention that a “warm and welcoming” synagogue strives to be. Build it into your budget. Recognize your hard workers without waiting for legislation.

While the Affordable Care Act may take a bruising in the coming months and years, there’s much we can do in our roles to widen the tent in our own communities, providing access to affordable health care for more of our staff. Many models exist for covering part or all of the rising health care premiums, and you can advocate for greater synagogue coverage of premiums, if your budget will allow it. Perhaps you only have offered coverage to full time staff; consider broadening that coverage to staff working fewer than full-time hours, with proportional premiums covered by your institution.

And while we’re talking about ways to take care of our staff, consider hiring inclusively. Yes, I’m a supporter of affirmative action in our synagogues, all things being equal. I hired a transgender office manager in 2014 knowing she would be transitioning during her tenure. This was an opportunity for the community to live its values and they did not disappoint in any way. To the contrary, this was a source of tremendous pride for the community and safety and strength for the employee. I am now looking for a part-time custodian and have been actively reaching out to our good friends and neighbors from the local Arab-American Family Support Center to identify eligible, hard-working individuals who might otherwise have a more difficult time finding employment.

Moving beyond human resources to the environment, it is very possible that in the future, many of the environmental protections and initiatives of recent years may be reversed. However, it is our personal obligation to do what we can in our personal and work lives to reduce our carbon footprints and improve the environment. You may already recycle, compost food waste, save energy and water. However you can also help in your present role as an executive director or administrator. Here are some suggestions from some of our colleagues:

- No more paper tablecloths – we purchased fabric tablecloths, and put a washer and dryer in the basement. We now use cloth for meetings, dinners, events, etc. We only use paper for art projects and the like. Money saving as well as more environmentally friendly.
• Switched to all recycled paper products including cups, plates, napkins, etc. Products cost about the same as regular paper products, are attractive and help the environment.

• Lighting fixtures to all switched to LEDs – no more fluorescents or incandescents. There is a cost to switching to these more expensive fixtures, but they last much longer, save a bundle in electric costs, and are better for the environment.

• In California, you can apply to be a Green Business with the California Green Business Program, www.greenbusinessca.org. To be certified as a Green Business you will be asked to show that you take action to conserve resources and prevent pollution in both your congregation building(s) (fixtures and maintenance) and your operations (purchasing and other practices). You will be given a checklist of certain requirements, a minimum number of optional items and other items you write in (which are subject to approval). These items are then verified through several onsite assessments. Once all assessments are passed, you will be certified. See if your state has a similar program or if you're in California, apply today! You may also find that not only will you make your temple greener, but you can also save some money as well. There are many environmental organizations that are doing great work. Take a look at the Resources tab on the NATA website: http://natanet.org/resources/useful-links/environmental-organizations. If you would like to get more information about the Green Business program, you can contact Michael Liepman who went through the process in his previous congregation. Also, if you become aware of other environmental resources, or if you have some ideas of how you can get involved in environmental action, Michael would be happy to speak to you.

Install a conservation garden with a base and subbase that allow the movement of storm water through the surface. In addition to reducing runoff, this effectively traps suspended solids and filters pollutants from the water.

And outside our doors, for new and would-be immigrants in our communities, the world may well become even more difficult to navigate. Consider launching a Conversational Community volunteer initiative, bringing your members together with local organizations helping immigrants improve their English skills and study for naturalization exams. Next year, consider – as we do already – hosting an Iftar during Ramadan in your synagogue, and invite members of your local mosque to pray and break bread with your synagogue community. You'll both have a wonderful experience and learn a great deal from each other. Our synagogues ought to be the place where our members can direct their energy to make the difference in the world. Strengthen volunteer and social action opportunities for these souls and you will increase your relevance. Host anti-bullying seminars and incorporate such teaching, as well, into all levels of education and messaging throughout your institution.

For our members, if there ever was a time and place for revisiting audacious hospitality, now is it. On Wednesday, following the election, I put out a coffee and hot chocolate station with delicious baked treats so that anyone coming into our synagogue would find some nourishment and warmth. It was such a small thing to do, but it felt like the most caring gesture. You may want to consider developing a front door decal that announces your synagogue as a “Safe Space” for those who might feel threatened or unsafe out in the world – LGBTQ individuals or members of the Muslim community in your neighborhood. Wouldn’t it be nice to see such a decal universally displayed throughout your neighborhood? If not now, when?

Finally, if we learned one thing from this election, it is that citizenship can no longer be a spectator sport. Help your members get involved by supporting letter-writing campaigns on issues that are important to them. The RAC has wonderful resources including sample letters to legislators which can be easily printed out for your members to pick up, sign, and mail. These letters really do make a tremendous difference! Strengthen your presence on Facebook and other social media outlets with informative and compelling messages advocating for movement-supported initiatives in the area of human and civil rights and more.

I invite feedback and additional suggestions pertaining to any/all of these ideas. Let's make our little worlds better now. What are we waiting for?

—Sue Gold joined the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue as Executive Director in November 2012, after having served in the same capacity for six years at Temple Chaverim of Plainview, Long Island NY. Sue began her professional career in hospital finance after earning her Masters in Public Health from Yale University and worked for 20 years in health care finance before pursuing her passion of working in the field of Jewish communal service, first as Adult Services Director then as Director of Community Partnerships at the Sid Jacobson JCC in East Hills, NY. Sue is a Senior Member of NATA and serves on the national NATA Board. Sue and her husband have two sons, both accomplished professional musicians. ☘️
As Executive Directors, we have the opportunity to fulfill Hillel’s trio of directives. The first of the objectives, “If I am not for myself, who is for me?” focuses on one’s self-preservation and self-improvement. “And being only for myself, what am I?” tells us that we can never be self-centered, smug, or selfish, but always see to the welfare of others.

I suggest that the three legs of the statement are aimed at one central goal: self-actualization, the achievement of one’s full potential through creativity, independence, and spontaneity. “If not now, when?” has been used by a great number of public figures, from Oprah Winfrey, to Robert F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama. Whether or not they know its origin, all understood that it represents a mindset to enhance one’s motivation to perform.

“If not now, when?” is the most important step in achieving the goal of self-actualization. It is a demand. “Stop stalling! If you’re not going to develop your potential, if you are not going to learn a new skill, if you are not going to examine your own shortcomings, when will you ever do it?” While the first two clauses relate to each other (we are to achieve a balance between self and others), the final clause stands a bit apart. “If not now, when?” suggests that we must respond to every opportunity to perform our tasks and to support our members and congregations as best we can, promptly and expeditiously. The future is always unclear, Hillel is telling us, and we must seize the moment and do what is needed to be done now, because we have no way of knowing what tomorrow will bring.

When we work 60- or 80-hour weeks, it’s easy to put things off. The to-do list seems endless (and often is). As human beings, we often engage in avoidance behavior. We know what aspects of our jobs are least enjoyable (nobody loves everything!), and we are tempted to postpone such tasks, even when they are more important than other tasks on our plates. “If not now, when?” demands that we understand and regularly review our priorities which are often times ambiguous, depending with whom we are speaking. The president? The rabbi? The wealthy contributor? There is no one “right way” to set priorities, but I suggest you seek out the guidance of your colleagues, and make sure that you, your lay leaders, and your clergy share expectations about those priorities and how they are set.

We’ve all sat around committee meetings where members seem not to mind the endless deferral of decision-making. There comes a time when the Executive Director needs to lead by reminding those present that it’s time to get the ball rolling. “If not now, when?” reminds us to take prompt action on any task we know that we will have to complete eventually. Why do it “eventually” when you can do it today?

If we place this concept into the core of our daily activities, we will work more productively and not necessarily longer. Doing things now also lowers stress because we have fewer matters hanging over our heads like a dark cloud. My musings here should be more than an interesting (I hope) experience. Like most articles, it will be soon forgotten unless you decide to take action now. How can you make this mindset part of your daily life? Establish a plan and stick to it. Write it on a yellow sticky and put it on the top of your monitor. Add it to the tag line of your email message. Talk about it with your staff.
Hillel also said, “Do not say ‘when I have leisure, I will study.’ Perhaps you may never have leisure.” Commentators have explained that this is an elaboration of his prior statement, “If not now, when?” Frequently I urge Executive Directors to include time for Jewish study. During my career, I tried to spend 15 minutes a day reading the week’s parasha or a chapter in a history book. I also tried to attend adult education classes. Learning about Jewish life is an important ingredient to being a fully rounded executive director.

In this light, I note that as I prepare this article, our Torah reading for the week is Chayye Sarah. We can learn important management lessons from Torah text. If we look closely at the story of Eliezer’s trip to find a suitable wife for Isaac, we find in verse 24:12 a small and important matter. The trop (musical) sign which accompanies his prayer for a sign that he has found the right woman is called a shalshellet. Its melody consists of a very long upward and then downward trill, and the sign is very unusual, occurring only in connection with the story of Lot “tarrying” at Sodom after being told of its imminent destruction, in connection with Joseph’s refusal to the advances of Potiphar’s wife, and here where the servant prays for guidance and help.

Midrash tells us that he had hoped Isaac would wed his own daughter, and so he hesitated before asking for guidance. From this we learn that we can never hesitate in our roles. Eliezer succeeds in his mission, and as a result, the future of the Jewish people is secured. Here we also learn that we need to act as if everything depends upon our performance, because we never know when even a seemingly small task will be of vital importance to the future of our members, our congregations and to the Jewish people.

We are called klei kodesh (holy vessels) in part because we have the capacity to understand and act on Hillel’s teachings. We must be for ourselves, but also for others. What is most important is that we act now.

—Gary D. Simms, FTA, was Executive Director of Temple Sinai in Washington D.C. for more than a decade, and also served as an Executive Director of Orthodox and Conservative congregations in the Washington D.C. area prior to his retirement in 2014.
Hillel’s words “If not now, when?” tell us to act. As Executive Directors, in order to act, we need to understand the goals – our own goals, the goals of our Boards, the goals of our congregation. How do we determine those goals so we know what actions to take? It’s not always easy.

On Rosh Hashanah morning, we read the Haftarah from I Samuel, where Hannah goes to Shilo and offers a heartfelt private prayer for her infertility. Eli, the priest, observes her lips to be moving, with no audible voice coming out. He accuses her of being intoxicated. She responds: “No, my lord, I am a woman sore in spirit, and no wine or liquor have I drunk. For I was only pouring out my soul to God, speaking out of great preoccupation and distress.” Eli, moved by her sincerity, answers: “Go in peace; ... May the God of Israel give you what you ask – whatever you request from God.”

How many times in our roles as executive directors are we like Hannah, offering prayers for how to do our sacred work, looking for some Divine intervention? How often do we have the best of intentions to engage others in sacred and healthy conversations about fulfilling the real goals, mission and work of our congregation, only for our lips to move but our words not hit the mark. Some of us may not have the requisite mastery of engaging in and guiding crucial conversations, but it is not necessarily a lack of training or experience, or an unwillingness to delve deeply and deal with the presenting issue. Rather, it is often a deeply rooted knot in the DNA of congregations.

In other areas of the business world – for-profit and other nonprofit agencies – the term “family” is very rarely used to refer to a place of work. For us the word “family” is bedrock in our cultural nomenclature. It is how we describe our congregations in our membership outreach and in our mission/vision statements. Our use of the word “family” is often said with pride, hoping to evoke a strong sense of warmth and a deep connection with others, that they too might want to become an integral part of our congregational family. However, as soon as we begin to think of our congregation through the “family” lens, a myriad of under-the-surface issues quickly arise, and often are acted out operationally and in our interpersonal conversations.

This family model of congregational life and leadership often operates by default, and not by design. It can be laden with our own personal baggage from our “family of origin.” One reality that we can all agree upon is that there is really no normal family, as every family has its own idiosyncratic issues and behaviors. The family model in congregational life often creates unseen obstacles that don’t allow for crucial, essential and sacred conversations to occur in healthy ways. Our inability to have these important conversations often results in dysfunctional co-leadership (lay and professional), palpable tension between members of the professional staff, and increased levels of interpersonal animosity that block our paths to operational excellence. (Resource: Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue by Edwin Friedman.)

There is new research in the field of “crucial conversations” that can help us frame and learn new approaches to engaging in crucial conversations within our congregational community, allowing us to reach new levels of excellence. In particular, Vital Smarts, Inc. has mastered an approach presented in...
Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes Are High.

A crucial conversation is defined as having three key elements: opinions vary, the stakes are high, and emotions run strong. It is important to note that not every conversation is a “crucial conversation,” however all too often as synagogue professionals we miss the cues telling us we are about to have a “crucial conversation.” The result may be spending an inordinate amount of time and effort cleaning up or managing a misunderstood conversation. When we master certain basic skills and then can frame conversations appropriately, we create an operational model for the professional/administrative staff and the board, and are then able to shift our focus to act in a way that accomplishes our mission of best serving those who enter our congregational doors.

When a “crucial conversation” arises, we have three options: one is to avoid it, the second is to engage in it and not handle it well, and the third is engage in a healthy process.

Avoid – A few of the reasons we may avoid a crucial conversation: we don’t like conflict or have a conflict avoidant personality; our role/status with the other person, believing we don’t have the authority to engage in a crucial conversation; thinking if we ignore it, that it will eventually go away, but it never does and often only gets worse; we are caught by surprise, and we are just not prepared to have the conversation.

Engage and not handle well – With the best of intentions we often choose to have a crucial conversation and it does not go well, with the result of further exacerbating the situation. We don’t think through or frame the process we are about to use, we are not clear in what we are seeking as our end goal, we are uncertain about whether we want a change in behavior or a change in outcome from an earlier process/decision.

Engage and handle well – The ultimate goal of having a successful “crucial conversation” is that you have taken the time to clearly define your end goal, have a well-defined process for framing and engaging in the conversation, and have created a safe environment for the conversation.

The Vital Smarts’ process starts with four important questions before engaging in a crucial conversation: What do I really want for myself? What do I really want for others? What do I really want for the relationship? How would I behave if I really wanted these results?

Having clarity on these questions sets the stage for a successful process.

In my consulting practice, I utilize these four reflective “I” questions as the starting point to lay the cornerstone of developing the inner self-awareness to frame a crucial conversation. I ask clients to think about realistic end results they desire and what amount of energy and effort they are willing to expend on shifting their present operating paradigm to reach their desired end goals.

As executive directors we are often caught up in the whirlwind of the daily grind, and don’t allow ourselves the necessary time to think about the crucial conversations that we must have with others in our congregation. Are you ready in your role as an executive director to engage in this process? Do you have the self-awareness from these “I” questions to start to the process? Are you willing to lead others into these uncharted waters like Miriam, who stood at the lips of the sea, knowing that if she and Nacshon stood still, they all would be overtaken by those who pursued them? Or are you going to stay with the status-quo even when you know the real costs?

In order to reach congregational excellence, we must find a path to identifying what are the crucial conversations that need to occur, who they are with, and then master the requisite skills so these conversations have the outcomes we desire. As executive directors, we are often the senior staff member who sets the metronome for the tone and tenor of interpersonal dynamics within the staff, volunteers and overall operations.

As executive directors, we should be like Hannah and let our lips move with our own inner clarity and vision, then ultimately go forth with the blessing of Eli that we may be blessed in not being fearful of the necessary conversations or the end results we seek.

—Rabbi Steven Kaye is the founder of Or Chadash, a congregational consulting and coaching practice that guides congregations to new levels of excellence and member engagement. Contact Rabbi Kaye at Rabbi@OrChadash.net or www.OrChadash.net. He will be presenting at the NATA/NAASE convention in Nashville.
As synagogue administrators and executive directors, it is incumbent upon us to bring the highest professional standards and knowledge to our congregations. It is understood that continuing education to enhance our competencies is one of the most effective ways of enhancing us as professionals.

But where to start? For some of us, this is a second, or even third, career. And while we each bring the totality of our professional and volunteer experiences to our positions, what is the foundation upon which we should be standing? What core competencies do we need? Sure, we could spend hours surfing the internet – there is a wealth of information out there on management. But how much of it relates to synagogues? And with most of us spending upwards of 50-70 hours per week in our jobs, how are we to ever add to our own knowledge base?

One answer, of course, is NATA Institute. Every other year NATA invites members to spend five days at the Steve Breuer Conference Center in Malibu, California. How can that be bad? During this time, we present the entire body of knowledge constituting the core requirements established by the Certification Board. The coursework covers all areas of synagogue management and is taught by colleagues specially selected because of their demonstrated expertise.

NATA has been offering the Institute over 25 years and hundreds of colleagues have taken advantage of this opportunity.

However, it is also a unique opportunity to learn and network in a collaborative environment, sharing best practices with colleagues. For most of us, we attended at the beginning of our careers and the friendships we developed have lasted for many years. The best evidence of the value of NATA Institute comes from our colleagues:

“This is an experience like none other where you have the opportunity to test and enhance your skills, refresh your knowledge, learn something new and develop yourself on a professional and a personal level.”
—Amy Becker

“It was an excellent opportunity to take a break from my daily responsibilities to focus on the skills and knowledge that will make me a better Executive Director. Getting uninterrupted study and networking time with other Executive Directors in beautiful Malibu, California (in the winter) made the whole experience very special.”
—Beth Silver

“I feel extremely blessed to have had this opportunity to spend five days surrounded by colleagues and experts in this field and return to my work with far more confidence and positivity about my job than I had when I arrived at the Institute.”
—Sara Schwindt

So I ask you – “If not now, when?”

—Since 2005, Aliza Goland has served as the Executive Director of Temple Adat Elohim, the largest Reform synagogue between the San Fernando Valley and San Francisco. She has been active in the Jewish community of greater Los Angeles for over 35 years, both as a volunteer and as a professional. While she was raising her three children, she became an active volunteer at their schools and at her synagogue. She was a founding member of Dor L’Dor, an auxiliary support group of the Jewish Homes for the Aging of Greater Los Angeles and has served in numerous capacities on the boards of several organizations.
Sacred Time: Hillel’s Message to the Temple Executive Director

Loree B. Resnik, FTA, Executive Director Emerita
Suburban Temple-Kol Ami, Beachwood, OH

It might be easy to dismiss this article as the work of a retired executive director, five years into basking in the sunlight, having a life of free time, able to do whatever I like after a 33-year career. And though it is true that I have enjoyed the change to a no-alarm-clock lifestyle, it is also true that for those 33 years, working what seemed like 24/7, I allowed myself sacred space. I listened to those words of Hillel that tell us, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, when?”

Hillel’s words rang true to me. I determined I could work not only as the Executive Director of Suburban Temple-Kol Ami, but also on various community committees and boards to nurture my own passions: love of animals, helping pre-school families, building bridges volunteering at the Cleveland YWCA. It was important to me go beyond working in the Jewish only world, reaching a broader reality serving the secular community as well.

I understood that in helping others I was also helping myself. The Jewish community, locally and nationally, afforded me opportunities to learn, grow and share my strengths. My congregation benefitted from my work with the Board of Jewish Education, Jewish Federation and other Jewish organizations, both by receiving grants and by my being “out there.” When I was out there, so was my congregation. Indeed, my community engagement brought many people through the doors of our congregation.

Doing the holy work that all of us do as temple administrators and executive directors was significant and meaningful not only to me, but to so many others. Going beyond my own congregation, as President of NATA, on the Executive Committee of the URJ, on the ARZA board, I could help develop another passion – connecting Reform Jews with Israel, advocating for the recognition of Reform Jews there. I could contribute to bringing the kind of pluralism that most of us want to see in the “homeland” we cherish.

Looking back, I see I did a lot. I wondered, as you may, how did I manage it? The life of an ED can be overwhelming on its own, let alone taking on additional volunteer work! I was able to accomplish so much because I was inspired. A course at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, taught by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin, truly influenced me. There was so much to be done, and I simply couldn’t wait until after my retirement to put myself into the mainstream of these organizations that could effect change. And surprisingly, it didn’t exhaust me. Rather it energized, stimulated and enriched me. I came to know wonderful people and forged lasting friendships. If I needed advice in my work, I had colleagues I could call all over the world.

My involvement in organizations outside my congregation enabled my congregants to know and understand whom to seek out at the URJ for help. It helped them make sense of the alphabet soup of our Jewish world. Never once did anyone say “you are doing too much... taking too much of ‘our’ time.” They didn’t say it because they understood that this was all part of “my work.” My full plate helped me and our synagogue community envision how much more our congregation could be.

Did the temple staff resent all I was doing? No. I modeled behavior we would all want our staff, as well as our congregants, to see. For those of us who enjoy leadership, volunteerism helps us better understand the challenges of a congregant volunteering in a leadership role within our own congregation. It can teach us how to empower both staff and lay leaders.

Each of us does holy work within our temples, and can do even more outside. For you it may or may not be in a leadership role. Maybe it is working with domestic violence victims, supporting organizations like Planned Parenthood, helping with your children’s school PTA or being a museum docent. Be inspired by your passions to do something outside the temple to enhance your life now, and it may lead, as it has for me, to an even more fulfilling retirement later.

Audrey Hepburn famously said, “As you grow older you will discover that you have two hands. The first is to help yourself, the second is to help others.”

Continued on page 17 >>>
Meetings are important, but even more important is transparency. We want to stay current on work that is happening throughout our organization so that our work is informed by decisions and developments. We want an opportunity to contribute to our work. We want to be able to share work, every staff and lay team to be aware of what other teams are working on. We want to be able to share work, before it is done, so that others in our organization have awareness of what is being discussed at other meetings. Information is not being shared, leaders are not communicating.

Our temples work best when lay and staff leaders collaborate effectively in teams, and teams work best when they are collaborating effectively with other teams. When we are collaborating well, information is shared more effectively, meetings are more focused, and our organizations become stronger and more powerful.

When we are not collaborating well, we are not aware of the work of our colleagues. We find ourselves surprised at meetings with information we really should have known about beforehand. The work we have completed has to be changed to reflect developments we only recently became aware of. Committees and task forces are doing work that would be altered significantly if they only were aware of what was being discussed at other meetings. Information is not being shared, leaders are not communicating.

Ultimately, we want to strive for transparency. We want every staff and lay team to be aware of what other teams are working on. We want to be able to share work, before it is done, so that others in our organization have an opportunity to contribute to our work. We want our work to be informed by decisions and developments happening throughout our organization, developments about which we may not otherwise be aware, if not for transparency. We want to stay current on work that is happening throughout our organization so that our meetings, that most valuable of time when leaders are physically in the same room with each other, can be focused on the key, strategic conversations we need to be having in order to sustain the congregation.

Sadly, the organizations to which we belong, and the institutions where we work, generally don’t work purposefully with transparency in mind. We share work with colleagues only after that work has been completed. Naturally, we want our work to represent the very best of who we are and what we do, so we hold that work back until we feel confident in the effort, and we know that it finally (and safely) can be shared. Our staff teams and committees too often do not share meeting agendas, minutes and work product with other people unless absolutely necessary. When information is shared, it is shared as a report, if not an afterthought. We are told about the work that has been completed, and input and opinion is rarely sought prior to completion.

But if we are able to work with more transparency, we can enhance and improve the level of work we do, and that of our colleagues. We can improve the way our organization works. Simon Terry of Change Agents Worldwide, writes that, “Sharing work as it develops enables you to reflect on your work. It brings stakeholders into work early to provide feedback and assistance. It encourages you to be purposeful and effective in your work. Importantly it also enables others to develop a passive awareness of your work progress and to learn from how you do your work.” Anna Chu, Senior Product Manager for Microsoft writes that transparency can “bring more perspectives into your work, bring in more voices and break down silos while creating a dynamic team culture.”

The benefits of transparency are clear, but the change to transparency can be challenging. We have created and reinforced habits and culture that are often firmly entrenched in the way work gets done. Adopting new work and collaboration habits can be challenging. There are, however small steps we can take, and little victories we can celebrate.
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Your temples work best when lay and staff leaders and members get the support they need from clergy. Generally, everything works just fine. Planned, classes are held, checks clear, bills are paid month. Emails are sent to the congregation, services are

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Simon Terry comment in Microsoft Tech Community Yammer “Ask Microsoft Anything” discussion. November 8, 2016

• When your staff team is going to meet, make sure the rest of the staff is aware of the meeting agenda, and encourage their input.

• Make status reports available, and share meeting minutes afterwards.

• When committees or task forces meet, make those agendas available as well.

• Share data such as program attendance and related financial information with other leaders, and welcome their questions and ideas.

• In between meetings, purposefully share documents and conversations, and actively seek the input of thoughtful leaders and active volunteers.

• Explore ways that follow-up conversations can be surfaced so other colleagues can see what is being discussed, so they can participate in those conversations, and so those conversations can inform work throughout your organization.

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There will always be confidential or sensitive information that cannot be shared, but challenge yourself and your teams to consider the fact that much of your work can and should be done in a spirit of transparent collaboration.

Greater transparency can be achieved through a variety of technological tools. Web based services like Facebook, Twitter, the new Facebook for Work, Yammer, Slack, or Jive can all be very helpful. But, for any of this technology to have any impact at all, temple leadership needs to make a dedicated and visible commitment to transparency and collaboration. Unless leadership models these practices, then teams, work and projects will remain in their silos, and truly effective and impactful collaboration will remain elusive. Software is helpful, but never as helpful as real, substantive changes being made by visionary leaders.

So, we must ask ourselves, “If not now, when?” If we do not take advantage of new technological tools, and new approaches to the work we do now, when will we? If we, as leaders at our organizations do not explore other, more effective way to work, who will? Explore transparency techniques for working better and smarter at your temple. Now is the time.

—Larry Glickman, FTA, is the director of Network Engagement and Collaboration for the Union for Reform Judaism. Prior to joining the URJ in April 2013, Larry worked as a synagogue Executive Director for 10 years, most recently at Temple Chai in Long Grove, IL, and served as a board member and officer for the National Association for Temple Administration. Larry lives and works in Buffalo Grove, Illinois, with his wife Lynn, and their two daughters, Eliana and Sophie.

Director there. She completed her undergraduate studies at Ohio University and received her master’s degree from Kent State University, where she continued post-graduate studies.

She served for two years as NATA President and in various other positions on the NATA Board. She served the URJ in many different capacities and was a Vice President of ARZA and currently is a life trustee of that URJ Affiliate. She currently serves as a regional vice president of the American Jewish Committee and just completed work as the Neighborhood Team Leader of Hillary Clinton’s campaign in Geauga County.
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.

NATA Board

Executive Committee
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Renee Higer

NATA’s Chug
Judy Moseley and Dianne Neiman, NATA Membership Chairs, are excited to invite you to NATA’s Chug (circle). The verb chug means “to draw a circle.” This Chug is an opportunity to deepen your knowledge of Jewish life and broaden your social circle. This group will explore Judaism, while fostering friendship, sharing, and growth as NATA members. During each session together, we will examine a reading in the Torah, and discuss its importance and relevance to our experiences as executive directors/administrators and our lives today. All dates will be sent to NATA members. Join us for the next one.

NATAnet.org is packed full of information for NATA members. Visit it often to stay on top of up-to-date and useful information for any Executive Director!

- Chug Torah Study
- Conference and Educational Information
- Current and Upcoming Events
- Executive Summary of Compensation Studies
- Job Listings
- Member News and Spotlight
- Member Resource Library
- NATA-NET
- Online Directory
- Webinars
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.
THE NATA NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
The NATA National Office has moved to El Cerrito, California. All correspondence and inquiries should be sent to Michael Liepman, Executive Director at 3060 El Cerrito Plaza, #331, El Cerrito, CA 94530. Michael can be contacted by email: mliepman@natanet.org or phone at 800-966-NATA or 510-260-7269.

NATA National Office | 3060 El Cerrito Plaza #331 | El Cerrito 94530 | 1-800-966-NATA

NATA’s Conference next stop is Boston! We hope to see you all in Boston, December 2 through December 6, just before the URJ Biennial. Make this your conference by getting involved! To find out more and how you can make your mark on our next conference, contact Bekki Harris Kaplan (kaplan@bethemet.org) and/or Jack Feldman (feldman@templesinaiatlanta.org), Boston Conference Co-Chairs.

URJ Biennial: Every two years, thousands of Reform Jewish leaders gather to worship, network, hear from inspiring speakers, and learn new strategies to strengthen their congregation. The next Biennial will be held in Boston, MA, December 6 through 10, 2017.

SAVE THE DATE

NATA and URJ BIENNIAL 2017

BOSTON
December 2 – 10, 2017