Part of the Family – Strengthening Relationships in Our Congregations
Our title this issue is “Part of the Family – Strengthening Relationships in our Congregations.” Several NATA Conferences ago, Rabbi Richard Address said to us, “Synagogues are all about relationships. Everything else falls into place after that.” As Executive Directors, our job descriptions stress budgeting, facility maintenance, office management – keeping the synagogue running smoothly. Yet, we know that our working hours are often consumed with “interruptions”, calls or visits from congregants, guests or staff, each of whom needs “just a few minutes” to discuss an issue that is critical to them. They might be concerned about money or about an aspect of their job. They could want to share a positive or a negative experience at services or Religious School. We stop whatever we’re doing and turn from our ongoing tasks to the individuals before us who seek a connection. In doing so, we reassure them that the synagogue is a welcoming and supportive “home” for them.

The concepts of the temple as a spiritual home and the congregation as a family are often incorporated into our membership welcome and integration message, and this Journal seeks to place Executive Directors firmly into the mix. The relationships we build, whether on the “front porch” as welcomers or in the “living room” as we get to know our congregants more intimately, are critical to strengthening the connections our members feel towards each other, the synagogue and their Judaism.

I want to thank the contributors to this issue: Jeanne Adler, FTA, Randi Jaffe, Karen Kushner, and Amy Schwach. In addition, I appreciate all of the responses to our survey question from our colleagues.

I look forward to hearing more ideas and experiences from each of you since one of our greatest strengths as an organization is our capacity to learn from and to teach each other.

L’shalom,
Esther
Dear colleagues,

I was honored to become NATA’s president this fall, following in the footsteps of some amazing leaders. In my talk at the closing banquet, I spoke about the type of leader that I believe we should and must be in our own congregations—a leadership full of balancing acts and nuances, gray lines, challenges and opportunities, all rolled into the ongoing maelstrom of our day to day responsibilities.

As executive directors, we are expected to maintain a balance between management and governance, to be detailed administrators and soaring dreamers, to focus on the specific needs of today and to plan for tomorrow. From behind the scene, we are required to implement and be visionary in small and narrow ways and in broad strokes at the same time. Most of us work within the shadows of a complex series of ambiguities large and small. We have to build bridges between thought and action to make sure that our institutions can move forward. We have to be subtle, to weigh consequences and options, and to create opportunities for transition and change that are not overly harsh, if possible, or blindly obedient. As Mike Bonen and Roger Patterson describe in their book, Leading from the Second Chair, it means serving our congregations, fulfilling our roles and realizing our dreams from the complex and challenging role of being a leader and a follower, and from having a deep and wide role in our synagogues, and being content with the present while continuing to dream about the future.

I believe that we are all builders, the glue, and the supporting structures for the clergy and lay leadership. We provide key technical, organizational, managerial and leadership support to keep the institutions functioning well, to make sure that institutional dreams are articulated and achieved, and to engage and assist our congregants. We need to be successful second chair leaders in our organizations—acting with skill, knowledge, and quiet leadership and determination to add value and move our synagogues forward.

This wonderful new Journal edition about connections will provide us with different models of leadership and different ways to think about our work.

Livia

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Please plan to join us December 11th – 14th for the 2011 NATA Conference in Washington D.C. We will be staying at the Westin, Alexandria as we learn how to examine the information and data of today to plan for the synagogue of tomorrow. You will not want to miss these very special three days of education, community and collegiality.

Watch your email for registration information. Scholarships will be available.

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

“What do you think are the most successful ways in which you as your temple’s Executive Director/Administrator integrate congregants into your synagogue community?”

Here are a sampling of our colleagues responses.

The biggest thing we did was initiate a program of wearing name tags. We have a readable one for the staff and if people do not wear their preprinted ones, we have special stick-on tags at Temple. Although people say they know who they are, they are finding it useful to be able to learn other people’s names, even if it is just in passing.

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I came up with three things that I feel allow me, as an Executive Director, to feel connected to our 1,300 member Temple.

1) I make a concerted effort to eliminate/reduce the embarrassment which sometimes is felt by congregants who need to apply to dues relief. I listen to individual requests and make them feel as comfortable as is possible when dealing with this sensitive issue.

2) Amidst the usual ‘hustle/bustle’ of our day, I will read our emailed list of simchas/condolences and call as many congregants as possible ... I cannot tell you how special it is when you call a member to give them your condolences, but how much more meaningful it is two or three weeks later when the initial support group is gone.

3) Visibility before and after Shabbat Services helps to keep the “flock” aware of your presence, but, more importantly, your concern for the importance of community at the most important time of the week.

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[I offer] recommendations of restaurants and groceries, kids’ activities and other assets of the community that may help them (new members) settle. Serving essentially as a good neighbor and helping to welcome someone to town.

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Invitations to our monthly potluck dinner as guests of the congregation (No $5 fee and no dish required). Making sure I meet them and introduce them to the rabbi or key leaders while they’re here. Make sure they get seated with someone who might be fun. Making introductions to other members of the synagogue although this depends more on other staff these days because I’m not as present on Sunday mornings as I used to be.

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The key moments are initial meetings with potential or new members especially If they don’t know many people here. My goal then is to let them know/feel they are known by, and important to me ... I then carry through by greeting them when I see them or calling them when I think we have something of interest for them.

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We now have a board member call every Temple member at least twice per year simply to say “Shanah Tovah” and “Happy Passover”. We are thinking of expanding that to having each member have a designated board member who is their personal representative/portal to the congregation.

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We are a large congregation (2700 member units) and, therefore, know it’s difficult for our members to find a way to connect. We try to offer many different programs to different “constituencies” – including our W Group (20’s & 30’s), school families, Women of Wise (WOW), A Few Wise Men, Wiser After 50, those interested in Lifelong Learning, those interested in Social Justice, and those interested in Israel, to name a few! We have committees for each of these constituencies, and we, as staff, brainstorm on a regular basis on how to best reach our congregants and get them connected. In addition, our membership director and her membership committee have created and implemented an “ambassadors program.”

More information from our congregants’ responses will be posted on the NATA website.
May the door of this synagogue be wide enough to receive all who hunger for love, all who are lonely for friendship.  
May it welcome all who have cares to unburden, thanks to express, hopes to nurture.  
May the door of this synagogue be narrow enough to shut out pettiness and pride, envy and enmity.  
May its threshold be no stumbling block to young or straying feet.  
May it be too high to admit complacency, selfishness and harshness.  
May this synagogue be, for all who enter, the doorway to a richer and more meaningful life.

- Sydney Greenberg  
Mishkan T'filah, A Reform Siddur

We are administrators and executive directors. We balance budgets, supervise staffs, raise money, create newsletters, repair buildings, and collect dues. We administrate and we direct. But the most important part of what we do is not in the list of duties and day to day transactions. Most importantly, we are in relationships. We nurture. We console. We reach out. We welcome. We are in the people business. It is our job to fulfill the promise of this prayer that is part of our Shabbat liturgy.

If we took this prayer as a literal job description, what actions would we take on a daily basis to fulfill the job requirements? What every day acts would we perform to give this prayer literal meaning? Each verse is a catalyst for job performance. These words are our guide.

May the door of this synagogue be wide enough to receive all who hunger for love, all who are lonely for friendship.

What does it mean to make the door of the synagogue “wide?” One analogy is the political party description of the “big tent.” Everyone is welcome. There is a place for everyone. Each person fits in the context of the synagogue. How does an administrator make the door wide? One way is to be present at the door when people enter. We widen the door when we are there to greet members and strangers as they enter for Shabbat services. We widen the door when we are present on Sunday mornings to meet our religious school families and call the children by name. We train our staffs to pay attention to the needs of everyone who comes into our building or calls on the phone. Every person is important and how we greet and interact with each individual has the potential to make a difference in that person’s day, or possibly in that person’s life.

May it welcome all who have cares to unburden, thanks to express, hopes to nurture.

It is our job to listen. Everyone has a story, a need, a hope. We are blessed to be in a position that we get to hear these. By listening to people, we acknowledge their value as an individual. The simple act of listening, truly listening to an individual, tells them that you care about them and about what they have to say. Listening means we close our doors when we meet with someone so the outside distractions stay outside. We turn away from our computers when we are engaged on the phone with an individual. Multi-tasking is the enemy of listening. Which task is more important and gets our real attention, the email on the screen or the words coming through the phone? We must be fully present to listen and understand what we are being told.

May the door of this synagogue be narrow enough to shut out pettiness and pride, envy and enmity.

One of the greatest compliments an executive director can receive is “You are a calming influence.” We are connectors and mediators. We guide and teach our leadership. We assist and advise our rabbis. We often sit in the middle of conflict and help to find a path to resolution. Sometimes we have to speak difficult truths and call out the pettiness and enmity.

May its threshold be no stumbling block to young or straying feet.

What are the stumbling blocks to the young? We hear every day that money keeps people from coming through our doors. As executive directors, we can communicate the message of value. There is a value to belonging to the larger community. There is a value to continuing a tradition of membership. We also need to communicate the message of affordability. Every synagogue has programs that allow for everyone who wants to belong to the community to become a member at the level of financial commitment that individual can make. Money should not be a barrier if an individual wants to be a part of the community. It is our task to communicate that and facilitate the conversation with the individual.
May it be too high to admit complacency, selfishness and harshness.

Complacency is defined as a feeling of satisfaction, especially extreme self-satisfaction; smugness. Why do we need to guard against selfishness and harshness? Too often we fight the statement, “Why do I need to belong to a synagogue? What’s in it for me?” The member who asks this question is not engaged. They do not see that they are receiving a return on their financial commitment. The way to combat this attitude - to make the door too high - is through engagement. We must discover what our members are passionate about and help them find a way to bring that passion to the synagogue.

May this synagogue be, for all who enter, the doorway to a richer and more meaningful life.

If we live these words as our job description and make this prayer a reality for our synagogues, we have the power to make a difference in the lives of our members. When we welcome an individual into our synagogue, when we listen to what that person has to say, when we accept the individual where they are and engage them in learning and working to make a better world, we change lives. We help that individual to a richer life and we, in return, experience a meaningful and valuable profession.
At the 2010 NATA conference in Portland, OR, Pastor David Boots of the New Hope Community Church outlined some of the ways in which his church had made use of a “church-as-home” metaphor to create better connections among members and to welcome in newcomers. This struck many of us as potentially applicable to our own synagogues.

Clearly, the synagogue is not a place of residence (although as Executive Directors, we might feel that we “live” at our temples). It isn’t the location of birth. Another definition of home, however, does apply. Home is a safe place – where a person can find refuge and safety. It can be the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in. When we are beset by challenges from the world at large, we yearn for home because it is a place of comfort and security, both physical and psychological.

Synagogue-as-home is a metaphor that seems to flow naturally from the very idea of the synagogue. Traditionally the synagogue is not only our house of prayer (beit mikdash or beit t’filah), but also our house of study (beit midrash), and house of meeting (beit knesset). The metaphor of home immediately resonates. The metaphor works differently in different settings, and for us as executive directors and administrators, it is an important concept, for one of our primary responsibilities is to welcome people into our Jewish home.

We want our congregants to think of the synagogue as their second home – a place of love, sanctuary, and acceptance, of connection and community, as well as a place in which to pray and to learn.

To be a reasonably educated Jew requires quite a bit of study, and to participate meaningfully in ritual requires familiarity with ritual. But to be a member of a congregation requires only a commitment to the community. All the rest flows from that commitment.

So how can we, as executive directors and administrators, help to nurture that commitment? We can gently shepherd our congregants, our staff, and our fellow professionals into creating the place of comfort and connection that makes our synagogues feel like home. In this, we can lead by example, and the most obvious place for us to begin our work is in the area of welcoming.

The Front Porch

Think of your “front porch” as all the ways in which people can enter your synagogue community. Some will find you via the web, some when they spot your physical plant, some by word of mouth, some on Facebook, some via the physical publicity pieces you send out into the world. It’s relatively easy albeit time-consuming to control your web presence and physical presence: keep them up-to-date and user-friendly. Harder to achieve is the right word of mouth, the congregation’s reputation in the community. This is where staff training and your own actions, will subtly but surely make a difference.

There are books, excellent URJ management resources, useful websites, and long checklists on how to train your staff to speak with callers and visitors, how to examine your physical plant and consider the face it shows to the world, how to make your website a fountain of information about your congregation. Use them to train your staff and to make your physical and web worlds into windows into your synagogue community, as they should be.

We all work hard to balance our security needs with that basic Jewish value of the open tent. The tradition of hachnasat orchim, welcoming the stranger, stretches back to the days of Abraham and Sarah. Our staff, clergy, and congregants can be taught or at least encouraged to truly welcome the stranger and to treat each other as welcome additions to our community.

When someone walks in our temples’ doors for the first time, we want them to feel a sense of welcome—greeted quickly by someone who is happy to meet them. Example: I personally drop everything I’m doing to give sanctuary tours to visitors when they appear at our door, answer their inevitable questions about Reform Judaism, and invite them to join us on Shabbat. And when someone from the neighborhood wanders in for the first time, unsure of why they are even entering, I do the same thing—and more often than not, they come back and eventually join. The executive director is uniquely positioned to help along a new or prospective member or even someone who has
come to a service for the first time. In interviews with incoming members, we can be transparent about the nature of our own particular congregation, learn about the needs and interests of the newcomer, and begin connecting them with active members who are likely to greet them appropriately. Just as when strangers come into our own homes, we introduce ourselves, offer information, and again, most importantly, begin building relationships between them and congregants who are already involved.

The Living Room
If we carry the metaphor on, we next come to the Living Room, the place where people get together. Anyplace can be a sanctuary for Jewish prayer; all that is needed is the prayer itself. Similarly, the “living room” of the synagogue, like the front porch, is not a place but a concept. We can think of the living room as all the activities of the congregation: services, classes for children and for adults, lectures, mitzvah projects, social events, holiday celebrations, even our fundraisers. What we want is to get our members (both new and not-so-new) into the living room, where they can connect with each other in a wide variety of ways.

So how can we help our congregants move from the entryway into the living room?

When we develop the most appropriate and engaging publicity /information about the synagogue’s services, activities and mission, we give newcomers and those who are not so new a reminder of the programs that they will find meaningful. We can encourage our committees and boards to provide a wide variety of Jewish experiences that will appeal to the different cohorts of members. All too often, congregations get into a rut in which the usual people show up for the usual events, year after year, until eventually it seems that only those people are welcome. Part of our job is to be catalysts for new activities and approaches that by their nature welcome in new people, those who have just joined or who have never fully participated.

We can work to insure a structure in which there are congregants at every event who are consciously working the room to ensure that newcomers are brought into the flow and that there are greeters at every service who find seats for the bewildered and hand them a prayerbook open to the right page. We can teach our trustees that part of their job is reaching out to people they don’t know, finding commonality, learning the interests of the more marginal members of the community and then working to turn that interest into a commitment to action.

The Kitchen
That commitment to action is what brings members off the margins and into the “kitchen”, the place (again, of course, not a physical but a metaphorical place) where the synagogue cooks up what happens in the living room and on the front porch. This place, of course, is in the committees and on the Board. Ongoing leadership development is essential; fresh ideas and viewpoints must come into the structure continually, or the air in the kitchen gets stale.

Ideally, every new member should be asked, sometime in their first year, to do something – to serve on a task force, to usher at services, to help set a table at a pot-luck dinner or organize a bookshelf.

Think about how you run a household. In a household of one, that person alone makes the household work. But in a home of two or three or ten, every single person needs to contribute. The very smallest children play a role. Helping to mix the challah dough, set the table, polish silver, gives them a sense of pride and of their own value to the family.

Similarly, giving a new member the opportunity to take on a task assures them that they are of value to the community and encourages them to come back to do more. Even the smallest job, well done, adds value to the experience of all. By offering a variety of “job” opportunities to our new congregants, we begin to build our next cohort of congregational leaders. It is not a long step from working on a task force to joining a committee, or from running a committee event to chairing that committee. By continually moving people into and up through the committee structure, the most committed and the most talented congregants will find their niches, and the synagogue will be enriched by having many, many chefs at work in the kitchen. In the case of the synagogue, there can never be too many qualified chefs, or, rather, too many people qualified to be trustees.

Of course, not everyone who joins a synagogue wants to be an active member but in every congregation there are those who are not active simply because no one has ever reached out to them effectively. If those people were visiting your home, what would you do to make them feel welcome and valued?

If we think of our synagogues as “home”, we can measure everything we do there by this standard: are we helping to make this temple a place of comfort, safety and security for all its members?

Round about the year 1910, my great-grandmother wrote these words of advice to her daughter, “The mission of the ideal woman is to make the whole world more homelike.”

To make the whole world more homelike – what an excellent concept. Tweak it just a little and teach your colleagues, your staff, and your lay leaders to make the whole synagogue more homelike, and you will have helped create both a better congregation and a better world.
When it Rains, it Pours in Portland….

Amy Schwach, 
Executive Director, North Shore Synagogue, Syosset, NY

I didn’t know that using an umbrella in Portland would indicate that I was a tourist. It didn’t stop raining while we were there. I walked down to SW 10th Street to go sightseeing and I made the mistake of having an umbrella open in the rain. A man in a passing car yelled “you don’t use umbrellas in the rain!” What was I thinking? I put the umbrella away and started using the hood on my raincoat. Less effective, but apparently more popular.

This was my first NATA Conference. I couldn’t wait. I looked forward to the opportunity to spend time with my colleagues and to ask the questions I couldn’t ask anyone else. I had been in this field for eleven years at Central Synagogue in New York City, but had spent only a few months as an Executive Director at North Shore Synagogue in Syosset, New York.

Conference communication from NATA came regularly via snail mail and email. With every communication, I felt more connected to the organization. I had questions about taking classes and what some of the workshops would involve. For every question, there was a contact who could answer. This was not only helpful, but a relief. I didn’t have to try to find the right person or the right email address and everyone, including Kathy Small in the NATA Office, provided excellent customer service.

Taken by the Hand

Before the conference, I had been matched with a “NATA Buddy,” another Executive Director who would help me transition into my new role and hopefully become a mentor. A reception was held for new members of NATA and their buddies before the Opening Reception in Portland. I was very fortunate. My Buddy was fantastic and I look forward to learning from her. NATA had found another wonderful way to welcome me to the organization and create community.

In addition, when we had the chance to have meals on our own, NATA prepared lists of local eateries and offered a sign up so no one had to eat alone. After a session with one of the vendors, I was walking back to my room and there was a meeting being held for the next conference. A member of the planning committee asked if I had a few minutes to come over and listen. I did and here is why: I wanted to be a part of the planning for the conference so that I could help create a positive connection for someone else. For me, all of these small things added up to a powerful first experience.

NATA worked hard to ensure that each member, particularly first-timers, had meaningful and useful interactions with colleagues. An important question for us now is, how can we use NATA’s methods to create similar, positive experiences at our own congregations? I would hope that my congregants feel as welcome and integrated into synagogue life as I felt at the end of the conference.

This is an opportunity to think about how we manage our members’ interactions with staff and the congregation and how those interactions strengthen or weaken our congregants’ connection to our temples and, in a larger context, to their Judaism.

We can start by equating the airport and sightseeing parts of my trip to what we can do to make our members feel more welcome and that they belong. Throughout the conference, I felt like I had been “taken by the hand” and walked through everything by someone who was looking out for my welfare. We could and should be providing this to our communities at every point of contact.

Very often, it can be overwhelming to meet a group of people all at one time, but a single point of connection can be comforting. While a congregant may have met several people in the office, he/she may only remember one.

The “buddy” program is one such single point. It had such an impact on me that I volunteered to help with it in coming years. Its existence demonstrates NATA’s interest in bringing new members “into the fold.” Many congregations have mentor or ambassador programs that are similar in which one person or couple is responsible for reaching out to and engaging a new family. I think if this is managed well, it can do the same job as the buddy program. The key to this is dedicated volunteers and staff members who understand the end goal: to make members feel special. The buddy program certainly succeeded for me.

At conference events, whether classes or meals, there was a real feeling of community. There were no seat assignments, but everyone had a name tag and I think that worked well. People could sit with those they knew
if they wanted, but were able to sit at tables with all new people as well. It was as if everyone was interested in meeting new people. I was always made to feel comfortable and everyone was convivial. At one meal, all of the first-timers were asked to introduce themselves to their peers. While this may have been daunting, it allowed people to see the newcomers and it helped break the ice.

Reaching out

We can foster this environment at our congregations by encouraging our lay leaders and our staff people to behave like a “buddy.” At congregational events, that means sitting with new people and getting to know them. It means touching base to see how they are doing and if they have any questions. It could mean offering to sit with someone at services so they don’t feel alone and inviting them over for Shabbat dinner. It needs to start with being taken by the hand by someone who cares about their experience.

NATA got this right in every way. They took me by the hand and walked me through my introduction to NATA and, at the end of my first conference, I had already volunteered to write this article and help out with next year’s conference. Now I’m thinking about how my experience could benefit my congregation and what had the greatest impact upon me. It was the magnitude of it all. Everyone at NATA is doing a job similar to mine. We all share the same concerns, joys and frustrations. And we all face the same challenges that I will face as an Executive Director. No matter the size or the location, we have a unique commonality. How extraordinary it is to know that even though we may have never met, the person sitting next to me could understand what drives me to do this work and how important it is to me and to the Jewish community.

I thank NATA and all of the wonderful and creative people who planned the conference and created the “Buddy Program” and all of the members I met who made me feel like I belonged there, professionally, personally and Jewishly. I will pay it forward....

MY FIRST NATA CONFERENCE:

It was my first NATA Conference. I was nervous. I didn’t know what to expect. I was to be more than pleasantly surprised at what I found. Even my experience at the airport was truly indicative of the rest of the conference. At JFK Airport, I met up with a group of Executive Directors who were taking the same flight. We spent time talking about work - construction projects, building issues…..ED small talk. By the time I got on the plane, I already felt like one of the group.

The next morning, I got up early, trying to figure out what to do with the additional three hours afforded me by being on Pacific Time. I looked through the schedule and decided to take a walk before registration. As I walked to the front desk I experienced the power of the exceptional network of NATA members.

I had my NATA credentials hanging around my neck. I had a glittery silver star which I later learned meant that this was my first conference. There were people who had the same idea as I to go walking before the program began. They saw me by myself. Their eyes went straight to my name tag. They asked if I wanted to join them. I had three invitations by the time I got to the elevator. I was overwhelmed by how warm and friendly they all were. This was just the beginning.

At breakfast, all of the “first timers” had to introduce themselves. This was not in the brochure. I thought long and hard about what to say. For me it was as if this would be what everyone would remember about me. After I spoke, someone stopped me on the walk back to my table. “Nice job up there, how is it working on the Island after you had been in the city for so long?” (For NATA members outside of New York, “the city” is Manhattan and “the island” is Long Island). It was nice to laugh about it and it helped facilitate conversation at my table.

From beginning to end, this conference was a wonderful experience.
Creating a Sacred and Welcoming Space for Interfaith Families

Karen Kushner, Chief Education Officer and Edmund Case, Chief Executive Officer
InterfaithFamily.com

Introduction
How does an interfaith couple or any prospective member know that your synagogue is a place that takes the commandment to be welcoming seriously? What do they see and hear when they walk in the door? Do they meet people who smile and greet them? Do they hear the buzz of excited conversation, the laughter of close friends? Synagogue executive directors want their members to feel welcomed by every member of the staff, lay leaders and in fact all congregants. Whether they be singles or families, old or young, intermarried, intercultural, gay or straight, all need the warmth of community.

At InterfaithFamily.com, we have a two-part mission: we want to empower people in interfaith relationships to engage in Jewish life and community, and we want Jewish communities to welcome them. The first part of our mission can’t be achieved without the second: interfaith couples and families won’t make Jewish choices if they don’t find welcoming communities with which to engage. We are committed to helping executive directors do whatever they need to do to ensure that members in interfaith relationships routinely experience a welcome in their synagogues. We have developed trainings and resources and are pleased to offer them to you.

Goal: To communicate on all levels that this synagogue is not only a welcoming place but an extended family of individuals who care about each other.

How can we achieve this goal?
1. Teamwork! With every employee and every volunteer working together.
   As leaders, executive directors have an opportunity to emphasize to temple staff that they are engaged in a sacred endeavor.
   • Communicate an inspiring and clearly documented vision.
   • Model respectful, warm, encouraging leadership that includes all staff in the extended family.
   • Specify clear expectations to staff that express this goal.
   • Provide training for friendly phone reception and personal reception.

   • Recognize and reward good examples of welcoming by staff.
   • Publicize your vision with an explicit welcome to interfaith families on your website.

   Staff members, volunteers and lay leaders play their own roles.
   • Greet and connect enthusiastically with each caller and visitor.
   • Figure out what people need and help them to get it.
   • Give out information with a smile.
   • Go the extra mile and offer them more.
   • Make an effort to connect newcomers to other members they will like.
   • Tell them why you remain involved with this community.

   The URJ publication “Beyond Shalom”, drafted jointly by NATA and the William and Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach, is a superb training resource.

2. Create opportunities for interfaith families to be honored and to tell their stories.
   For too long, interfaith families have been unacknowledged. Working with the leadership and the clergy, executive directors can help to establish avenues in which individuals in interfaith families can speak about their participation at the synagogue and their decision to choose Judaism for their family.

3. Change preconceptions
   In Leadership Without Easy Answers (Harvard University Press, 1994), Ronald Heyfitz, a professor at the Kennedy School of Government, writes that the essential job of a leader is to influence constituents to adapt their often deep-seated attitudes to new conditions. Attitudes are critical because actions and behaviors are largely determined by them.

   Some Jews may have concerns that intermarriage will destroy Jewish continuity. This negative attitude will be expressed in casual conversation, in jokes they tell and in places where they interact with people who are intermarried.
Here are three responses you can use to counter this prejudice:

- Publish summaries of research by Leonard Saxe and his team at Brandeis in your bulletin. This study shows that Jewish behaviors and attitudes are determined most by one’s experiences of Jewish living, education and friendship. [It’s Not Just Who Stands Under the Chuppah: Intermarriage and Engagement, 2008] If we welcome interfaith couples and families they will get those experiences of Jewish living.

- Hold a panel discussion of interfaith couples who are active and can talk about their decision to raise Jewish children. Encourage them to speak honestly about what makes them want to be part of the community.

- Offer a session for those concerned about intermarriage. Read and discuss articles by children who have grown up in interfaith families such as these available at InterfaithFamily.com:
  - Half and Half by Sophie Friedman
  - Affirming My Jewish Identity in America by Lily Shaffer
  - Half-Jewish: Starting a Wholesome Conversation by Benjamin Greene
  - How to Meet Your Great-Great-Grandparents: Filling in Your Interfaith Family Tree by Cynthia Spikell

4. Increase Intensive Jewish Experiences
Jewish camps, education, and Israel trips guide young people to places and experiences where they will meet other Jews, increase Jewish identity and strengthen their desire to be part of the Jewish community.

These experiences are important in both Jewish and intermarried families.

- Invite alumni of Jewish camps (both Jewish and interfaith) to talk about the impact of the camp experience and how it changes their lives.

- Invite Birthright alumni from both in-married and interfaith families to talk about Birthright at your synagogue.

- Invite alumni parents of your preschool who have chosen synagogue membership to speak to current parents of preschoolers about why they joined and how it has enriched their lives.

5. Connect to InterfaithFamily.com and contact us directly for more information.
You can list your synagogue and your professionals on the InterfaithFamily.com Network. Over 420,000 visitors came to the site last year and many were searching for community. By listing, you can let them know that your congregation is a welcoming community.

Publicize your programs on the InterfaithFamily.com Network to let the wider community know that you are actively welcoming. Take advantage of the many resources we offer.

- Download, print and display our welcome booklets that give an easy way to learn about Jewish holidays and life cycles.

- Use the first person essays as springboards for discussion groups.

- Dedicate shelves in your library for the bi-weekly enewsletter of InterfaithFamily.com, resource guides from InterfaithFamily.com and books that we recommend.

We are in a consciousness-raising business in two directions. We want people in interfaith relationships to see the value and meaning that engaging Jewishly can bring to their lives, and we want Jewish professionals, lay leaders and just plain Jews to see the potential for positive Jewish engagement by interfaith families.

Our goal is Jewish continuity, and we are grateful that so many non-Jews choose to help create Jewish homes and to support and nurture the next generation of Jews. Let us help you to make your synagogue a sacred and welcoming place.

InterfaithFamily.com is the premiere web based resource for interfaith couples exploring Jewish life and making Jewish choices, and the leading web based advocate for attitudes, policies and practices that welcome and embrace them. The InterfaithFamily.com Network offers free listings of synagogues and Jewish professionals who welcome interfaith families and invites all NATA members to join the Network and list their temples.

To list your temple, visit http://www.interfaithfamily.com/organizations and click on “register an organization;” to join the Network visit http://www.interfaithfamily.com/join and click on “join now;” or contact connections@interfaithfamily.com for more information.
We do so much to be warm and welcoming as we invite them into our congregational home. We cheer them on to just put their toes into the water and join. But all of us know that integration is the most difficult piece, that this is time that we can begin to lose them, to fail to make that connection that will move them, as we learned at our last NATA Conference, out of the “living room” into the “kitchen” with the rest of the family. It is, of course, all about relationships, and building that has got to be part of our role. I try to be certain that each new member is invited into a circle, depending on where they fit into the mix. It may be a 75 year old woman new to the community who has come to live where her children are. I am certain to have a Women’s Committee member contact her, invite her to a program, pick her up and bring her along. I am certain to be there myself to give a warm hug, to be a familiar face and smile. Sometimes it is a new family coming to Cleveland because dad is going to be on the Cleveland Clinic staff. I help Mom find the right preschool (we do not have one) try to connect them with our other Clinic families, refer Mom to our job networking group, be there to greet them at a Friday night service and be certain to introduce them to others at the Oneg.

Most of all, it is about understanding that our congregants and our relationships with them are our job. My door is always open to them, they are never an interruption to the tasks of my day and they know that and feel that. I am reminded of the old bit of Jewish humor,

Katz is sitting naked in his room, wearing only a top hat when Cohen comes in.
“Why are you sitting here naked?”
“It’s all right,” says Katz. “Nobody comes to visit.”
“But why the hat?”
“Well, maybe somebody will come.”

Indeed, somebody will come, and he or she is worth those moments of our time. Particularly as we set appointments to meet with new members, to ask them what programs they might like, what their interests are and try to get them involved. Particularly when they are invited to bless candles or lead Kiddush or to be honored at a new member dinner or service. It is often up to me to make certain those things happen and that the mitzvah of welcoming the stranger is fulfilled.

It’s really about caring, of hearing five years later that you were the one who made it feel like home, that when they came to your office you always had magic markers and paper for their little ones. It’s about remembering their names and who might be ill in their families. It isn’t so contrived; it really is about living Torah.
NATA’s Mission Statement

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

NATA’s mission is to support its members by:

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

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR TEMPLE ADMINISTRATION

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The NATA National Office is headquartered in Ridgefield, Washington, adjacent to the Columbia River and about 15 minutes north of Portland, Oregon. The office is managed by Kathy Small of Small and Associates, which prides itself on providing top-quality customer service to the NATA membership. The national office provides the day-to-day administration of membership, convention, education and placement services, as well as support to the NATA Executive Team and Board of Directors. Kathy Small has been managing the NATA office since 1988.