"EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/ACTIVE TEMPLE MEMBER-- IS IT POSSIBLE"?

In talking with my colleagues, I discovered that I had what I thought was a unique position in my capacity as an Executive Director. I serve my Temple, Temple Isaiah as administrator and I am also an active and full participating member. The degree of participation has been and remains up to my discretion, but it offers a dimension to my position as Executive Director that has both its positive and negative factors.

It is the intention of my discussion here to present some of these factors and with the use of the survey study which was presented to my colleagues, relate some of their perceptions as well. Finally, I will offer some conclusions as to whether it is possible to be an Executive Director and full participating member of a Temple.

I have been the Executive Director of Temple Isaiah in West Los Angeles for over four years. It is a full time position and is located some distance from my home. A point made because, as a family, we choose to belong to Temple Isaiah. My children are part of the Religious School and we are members of a Chavurah. We participate in all activities of the Temple, even though affiliation with a local Temple would certainly be easier and more convenient.

Our active participation with Temple Isaiah was established early in my association. Perhaps due to the friendly—often used expression "Hamish Temple" or to the ability of the Rabbi, Rabbi Robert T. Gan to balance his life and association with the Temple. It is a place of worship and social atmosphere which offers us a friendly and warm family environment, enabling us to sustain the relationship we are discussing.

Perhaps the key factor in the relationship is the word "balance". Can one actually balance being an Executive Director with its myriad of decisions and business-like posture and on the other hand function as Temple member in combination with members who are subject to and react to that side of me?

Lest the reader think that there is not or has never been any problem with this relationship—not true. Many times, I felt I was on a "teeter-totter." Often I questioned which "hat" I needed to wear—that of the Executive Director or that of the participating member?

A survey was sent to my colleagues in September of 1986 in which I asked for their help in discussing this relationship. The first section of the survey questioned their membership and affiliation in an effort to determine if in fact the Executive Directors were members of the Temple at which they were employed.
Of the 102 respondents to the survey, 2% stated that they were required to join the Temple and take out an official membership in the congregation. 10% stated that they were already members of the congregation, one individual stated that he/she was not interested in affiliating with the Temple of his/her current occupation. The majority of the other respondents, 78%, indicated that they were not required to become members, but were given all membership privileges and rights as part of the terms of their employment.

The next question that was asked on the survey concerned the rights of membership which my colleagues could enjoy as a Temple member. The majority of the answers, 60% agreed that these rights did not include the right to be elected as a Board member or officer of the Temple. Most of the responses felt that this was an ethical matter and one in which their position could be compromised. Eight percent of my colleagues stated that—upon assuming the position of Executive Director, they were asked to relinquish the elected offices they had held. Five percent of the answers to this question reflected that the Executive Director could be elected to a board or officer position, should the occasion arise. Almost all of the respondents to this category added that although they could not be elected to a board or officer position, they were considered ex officio members and did not vote.

In addition to the question of rights of membership, I asked whether the Executive Directors had to pay tuition for religious school and/or pre-school, assuming there were children involved. The majority of those who answered stated that no tuition was paid. Two percent stated that they chose to pay tuition and 4% responded that they are continuing to pay tuition that they had assumed prior to becoming the Executive Director.

The final question in this category had to do with whether the Executive Director was a member of a Chavurah. The majority of answers to this question was not applicable because only 35% responded that there were Chavurot programs in their Temples. 52% of these Executive Directors are members of a Chavurah and 48% are not members, by choice.

The second set of questions that were asked on the survey dealt with the relationship of the Executive Director and other Temples in the community. The majority of the responses indicated that they were not involved as a member of another congregation (90%). The remainder indicated that they were in fact members of another congregation. Some of these Executive Directors are members of other congregations due to the fact that they are living a distance from the Temple of their employment. They also indicated that they sent their children, if any, to the local Temple.

Part III asked questions regarding those Executive Directors
who are members of the Temple of their employment. Even though 90% responded that they were members of their congregations of employment, many did not indicate that the spouses (if married) were active in the congregation. Three percent stated that their spouses were at one time, presidents of sisterhood/brotherhood, but most of those that answered indicated limited participation on the part of the spouse.

Part IV of the survey consisted of 10 questions directed at the kinds of stress the Executive Director, spouse and children experience as a result of their roles and status in the congregation. The first question asked was whether attending Temple services was a pleasurable experience for the Executive Director and his/her family. Ninety of the surveys were actually answered. Twelve chose not to answer this section for various reasons.

Ten percent agreed strongly that the attending services was a pleasurable experience. 40% agreed that it was a pleasurable experience with the qualification that it is always considered "work" but, at various functions, congregants treated the Executive Director as a guest.

Ten percent of my colleagues responded that they were undecided as to whether this was a pleasurable experience. They went on to add that every event, including services involves work and that most felt that at all times they were on duty. Some even qualified the answer to this question by stating that attending services with their family was not a pleasurable experience and that being alone at services was preferable.

Thirty percent of my colleagues felt that attending services was a working situation and disagreed that it was pleasurable. The reasons given were that it was "working, not praying" and that they were "not participating with their family". One of my colleagues went a step further and stated that "contrary to feeling more connected to my Judaism, I feel less connected".

Finally 10% of the Executive Directors strongly disagreed that it was a pleasurable experience to attend services. One stated "The only way to view the position is that it is a working situation. Pleasure is a benefit which is up to the individual...it is a side effect".

In response to the question whether ---attending social functions of the Temple is a pleasurable experience for the Executive Director and his/her family, 15% agreed strongly, 45% agreed, 20% were undecided, 15% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed. Some additional responses were that it was a pleasurable experience, but their spouses didn't quite agree. They were always aware that they were "working". The opposite response was also stated--ie. not pleasurable for the Executive Director but pleasurable for the spouse.

Almost tied to the previous question was the question of
whether the Executive Director was fully accepted by most members of the congregation as "social equals" and whether he/she felt comfortable socially and emotionally with the temple affiliation. Thirty-five percent of my colleagues agreed strongly and 40% agreed. 10% were undecided and 5% strongly disagreed. The rest chose not to answer this question.

In Question #4, I asked the if his/her spouse felt fully accepted by most members of the Temple and is happy with the Executive Director’s position in the Congregation. 70% of my colleagues chose to answer this—the rest, either were undecided or felt this question did not apply to them. Sixty percent of these either agreed or strongly agreed; 10% disagreed. Some qualified their answers stating that they were accepted as well as their spouses but were not exactly happy with their current position. A particularly interesting answer from one of my colleagues was that—"I feel my wife and family are cheated... my wife found it difficult to understand the position but understood the pressures of being an administrator—which seems to be a dichotomy".

The fifth question in this section dealing with stress asked whether the children, if any, experienced some stress and tension as a result of the Executive Director’s role and status in the Temple. 46 people responded—the rest stated that their children were no longer participating members of a Temple. Thirty percent of these responses indicated stress on the children, the rest indicated little or no stress.

One of my colleagues, sad to admit, stated that his children had experienced some stress, "when younger, at times due to the lay leader—the president—who vented his frustrations at them rather than at members' children".

Of the 88 responses to the sixth question, 75% (fortunately) answered that they were happy and satisfied with their work and are not dreaming about other kinds of employment.

It has been said by many colleagues that "Half the job is getting along with the Rabbi". The relationship can make or break a job and the position can be miserable if there is no communication between the Executive Director and the Rabbi. Question 7 confronted this issue. There were answers on every one of the surveys I received. All but 5% stated that this relationship was either no problem (20%), pleasurable and satisfying (40%) or very pleasurable and satisfying (35%).

The same response came from my colleagues in question #8. It asked about the relationship of the Executive Director and the President of the Temple and/or other Temple officers. The majority stated that the relationship was either pleasurable or very pleasurable and satisfying.

Some of my colleagues indicated a less than pleasurable
relationship and mentioned the reason. Their responses were generally about specific incidents with the president such as the President "talking down" to the Administrator, or the President, lacking a scapegoat—had chosen the administrator on whom to vent his/her frustrations.

One of my colleagues indicated on his survey, a particularly interesting response—one which merits discussion. He stated that the very nature of the job is one in which the Executive Director is the "scapegoat" for all problems at the Temple. Whether it is a secretary's typing mistake—or a janitorial oversight, the executive director is responsible. He went on to say that "Harry Truman's—'The Buck Stops here' is the motto of the Executive Director. When the President and/or the Board members recognize that the Executive Director, is after all only human and that mistakes can be made, then, will the relationship be pleasurable and/or tolerable!"

Similar responses were seen with question nine.——discussing the relationship of the Executive Director and other professional staff. Some colleagues, who were less than satisfied with this relationship, mentioned the "always threatening" Rabbi's secretary, the Religious School Director who wants to be the Executive Director and the clerical staff that could never be fired, but in the eyes of the Executive Director, needs to be. Most of the responses seemed to reflect a pleasurable relationship with key staff.

The final question in this survey asked the Executive Director whether he/she was reasonably satisfied with his/her salary and fringe benefits. Most of the responses (75%) were positive to this. 5% were undecided and 20% indicated dissatisfaction with the benefits.

Finally, of the 97 respondents, 53 are male and 44 are female. The age ranges of these indicated that sixteen were in the 28 to 39 year old category; twenty in the 40 to 49; twenty-nine in the 50 to 59 and twenty-seven in the 60 to 74 age range. Five chose not to indicate any age.

In addition to this survey, I interviewed several colleagues as well as my own Temple members in an effort to probe into some of the problems that this relationship can present. One universal statement seemed to emanate from this discussion. Executive Directors questioned the problem of maintaining the business attitude when dealing with Temple member "friends" or members of the same Chavurah. How, for example, does one approach a close friend or Chavurah member that is in arrears on his/her dues? This problem seemed to be the most negative factor of the relationship, I have been discussing.

Although no solution was arrived at, the consensus of opinion was to delegate the request for payment to a lay member of the Temple i.e. the Treasurer or Financial Vice President. Another solution was to be quite direct—starting the conversation
with the member in arrears as "this is really a difficult position I am placed in--but ..."

When this question was posed to the Temple members I interviewed, all of them responded that the direct manner stated above was the preferable way of handling this problem. They added that they would not mind being approached in that way and that any member that would take advantage of a relationship with the Executive Director should be handled by a third party--such as the treasurer.

The question on stress and whether the Executive Director's children had experienced tension/stress, elicited a particularly interesting response. Several colleagues mentioned the "Preacher's Kids Syndrome" in relating their own working experience. Much like the Rabbi, their children are missed at services, must behave during religious school and must set an example for the others in participation.

In my own example, I was guided by Rabbi Gan's experience with his own children. They were not "required" to attend services and therefore it did not foster negative feelings. Any behavioral misconduct was handled without the Rabbi knowing. Coincidentally, this past summer when the Rabbi's son was my son's day camp counselor, I was spared the knowledge of any of my son's misconduct.

One of my colleagues stated that the reason he was not happy and satisfied with his employment was that the job "lacks creativity." I would have to take exception to this response. What the job of being an Executive Director lacks in creativity--it soon makes up for in excitement. I agree with other colleagues that no two days are the same and that new problems are posed daily requiring solutions that stretch the mind for creativity in solving.

Perhaps the most important responsibility placed upon the Executive Director, confidentiality, is one of the areas that could seem to be compromised in this special relationship we are discussing. A colleague suggested that this was the main reason why she was not a member of a Chavurah and chose to keep a distant relationship from her Temple members.

This area does present difficulties and, in my own case, I have had many awkward moments. I cannot say that all have been handled successfully, but in most cases they were. I have reminded a Chavurah member/Temple "friend" when he/she had to tell me something of a confidential nature, that he/she should be aware of my two "hats". When this arises, I ask him/her if the information pertains to their affiliation or if it something I should know as a friend. I also question him/her as to how I should contain or disseminate this information. This method seems to have worked.
When I started this discussion, I thought my position to be unique. I have found that there are other Executive Directors who have this particular relationship. They have concurred that it is sometimes not an easy situation. It perhaps takes an individual who can handle the "teeter-totter" or a Temple that is responsive to that person's needs and personality. I have concluded that my affiliation with my employment Temple has been a pleasurable situation and has enriched me and my family. Although not easy, as long as I am aware of my two "hats" and can "balance" my life and employment, this relationship will continue to be both rewarding and satisfying to the Temple and to me.
September 9, 1986

Dear Colleague,

HELP! This is just what you needed — right before the High Holy Days.

I am doing research for the F.T.A. and would appreciate it if you would take the time to fill out the enclosed questionnaire. My thesis centers on whether it is possible for an administrator to also be an active-participating member of temple. (active - i.e.: chavurah member, brotherhood etc.)

If you have any additional comments, please include them on the questionnaire. As usual, I need this returned to me as soon as possible. Thank you in advance, and best wishes for the New Year.

Sincerely,

Alan M. Karpe1
Executive Director

AMK: an
encl.
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEMPLE ADMINISTRATORS AND TEMPLE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Please check all appropriate items in each of the questions

I. Apart from your professional status and duties in the congregation, what is your relationship with the membership of your congregation?

1. __________ 1. I was required to join the Temple and take out an official membership in the congregation.

2. __________ 2. I was not required to become a member, but was given all membership privileges and rights as part of the terms of my employment.

3. __________ 3. These rights do not include the right to be elected to Temple office or serve as an official member of a Temple committee.

4. __________ 4. These rights do include......(same as #3)

5. __________ 5. I do not have to pay any tuition fees for my child/ren to enroll in Temple schools or camps.

6. __________ 6. I do have to pay tuition fees, etc. etc.

7. __________ 7. (If your Temple has Chavurot) I am a member of a Chavurah.

8. __________ 8. (If your Temple has Chavurot) I am not a member of a Chavurah.

II. What is your relationship with other Temples in your Community?

1. __________ 1. I am a member of another congregation.

2. __________ 2. I am not involved with any other congregation.

3. __________ 3. I send my child/ren to another Temple school in our community.

III. What are the relationships of your spouse and child/ren with your congregation where you are employed?

1. __________ 1. I am not currently married.

2. __________ 2. My spouse is an active member in our congregation.

3. __________ 3. I do not have any children.

4. __________ 4. My child(ren) are enrolled in Temple schools and/or other Temple programs.

5. __________ 5. My child(ren) are not enrolled in Temple schools and/or other Temple programs.

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IV. What kinds of stress do you and or your spouse and child/ren experience as a result of your role and status in the congregation?

1. Attending Temple services is a pleasurable experience for me and my family. Do you
   ___ strongly agree
   ___ agree
   ___ undecided
   ___ disagree
   ___ strongly disagree

2. Attending social functions of the Temple is a pleasurable experience for me and my family. Do you
   ___ strongly agree
   ___ agree
   ___ undecided
   ___ disagree
   ___ strongly disagree

3. I and my family feel that we are fully accepted by most members of our congregation as "social equals" and feel very comfortable socially and emotionally with our Temple affiliation. Do you
   ___ strongly agree
   ___ agree
   ___ undecided
   ___ disagree
   ___ strongly disagree

4. My spouse is fully accepted by most members of our Temple and is happy with my position in the congregation. Do you
   ___ strongly agree
   ___ agree
   ___ undecided
   ___ disagree
   ___ strongly disagree

5. My child(ren) experience some stress and tension which is related to my role and status in the Temple. Do you
   ___ strongly agree
   ___ agree
   ___ undecided
   ___ disagree
   ___ strongly disagree

6. I am happy and satisfied with my work and am not seriously looking for or dreaming about other kinds of employment. DO you
   ___ strongly agree
   ___ agree
   ___ undecided
   ___ disagree
   ___ strongly disagree

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7. My relationships with the Rabbi(s) of our congregation are
   _____ a great burden
   _____ a burden
   _____ no problem
   _____ pleasurable and satisfying
   **** very pleasurable and satisfying

8. My relations with the President and/or other Temple officers of our congregation are
   _____ a great burden
   _____ a burden
   _____ no problem
   _____ pleasurable and satisfying
   _____ very pleasurable and satisfying

9. My relationships with other key professional staff of our congregation (e.g. Cantor, clerical staff, religious school and/or preschool staff) are
   _____ a great burden
   _____ a burden
   _____ no problem
   _____ pleasurable and satisfying
   _____ very pleasurable and satisfying

10. I am reasonably satisfied with my salary and fringe benefits
    _____ strongly agree
    _____ agree
    _____ undecided
    _____ disagree
    _____ strongly disagree

PERSONAL DATA

1. _____ Male _____ Female

2. _____ Age

3. _____ currently married
   _____ never married
   _____ formerly divorced
   _____ widowed

4. My spouse is
   _____ Jewish by birth
   _____ a convert to Judaism
   _____ not Jewish

5. No. of child(ren)

6. Ages of child(ren)

7. No. of years as a Temple Administrator

8. No. of years in current position