Building Consensus in A Divided Community

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Introduction

Consensus is critical for bringing about change; without consensus, there can be no change; without change, there is stagnation. While change may be resisted by many people, because people are most comfortable with the way things are, change is necessary for an organization or group to continue to be effective. Building the consensus needed to bring about change requires a well thought out and executed strategy of education and inclusion.

People resist change if they feel that they have no control, if they see change as being imposed on them. People must be informed of and involved in the decision making process from beginning to end. Although this is a time-intensive process, it is time well invested. Consensus, once achieved, can bring about desired results, and create long-term, positive feelings among a majority of the congregation's members. Even when the results are opposite those for which the leadership had hoped, this inclusive process will result in a congregation that remains secure and cohesive. When members are included in the decision making process, they feel responsible for it, they take ownership. In this way, even when the outcome is not necessarily what some members would have desired, these members still feel positive about the role they played in the decision making process. Under these circumstances, members are less likely to leave the congregation, and may even become involved in the project against which they originally voted.
Consensus leadership requires more time than any other form of leadership. "The basic emphasis in the consensus approach (to leadership) is on the will of the group." Consensus leadership is prepared to wait longer for results, "being more concerned with the development of a cohesive infra-structure...It abhors polarization." In fact, leaders should "actively resist the temptation to become polarized over issues...Disagreement does not have to create enemies, however, if conscious good will and a common purpose transcend the disagreement...an exercised imagination discovers ways to affirm the congregation's basic solidarity..."

Background

In August 1991, the leadership of Temple Beth Ami began to recognize that the current facility would soon be unable to meet the needs of the growing congregation. There was limited space for new children and new programs in the Religious School, programming for other groups within the congregation became more difficult due to space constraints, and lifecycle celebrations were forced out of the building because of inadequate social areas. A Long Range Planning (LRP) Committee was appointed to study the problem and to make recommendations to the Board of Directors. The committee, which was comprised primarily of past and current Temple leaders, worked for 16 months.

A survey was designed and mailed to the entire membership (approximately 750 member units) for response. The LRP Committee made the assumption that most people in the congregation already knew the problems associated with the facility and, therefore, it was not necessary to send out a prior mailing or include with the survey any background information. Because of this decision, the members of the congregation were not educated about the facility's problems, the make-up and activity of the LRP Committee,
and the purpose of the survey. Although a significant response was received, fifty-one percent of the congregation returned the survey, it was interpreted by the leadership as responses based, for the most part, on emotion ("we want the congregation to stay the was it was when we joined ") and financial issues ("we don't want to contribute to build a new facility") and not on actual information (members may not have even known that space problems existed if their own family or program had not been directly affected). As a result of this survey and the research conducted by the LRP Committee, the Committee recommended to the Board, in late December 1992, that a new facility was not needed, that the congregation could still accommodate some limited growth, and that leadership should concentrate on meeting the needs of the current membership.

The congregation continued to grow and by early 1993 the problems previously identified by the leadership became more acute; the issue of growth and its effect on the current facility would have to be readdressed. The Board recognized that critical issues of space and the needs of the congregation - ritual, programmatic and social - had to be brought to the attention of the members, even though the congregation had, just two years before, rejected any consideration of a new facility. The leadership of the congregation felt that it had to take responsibility and begin to set the course for the congregation's future.

In order to meet the needs of the current congregation, three options were identified by the leadership: 1) to stay in our current facility and downsize our membership (encouraging the formation of another Reform congregation in the area), 2) to consider a satellite facility or rental space for the Religious School; or 3) to move to another site (purchase an existing building or build a new facility). Using these options as a point from which to start the discussion would enable the entire membership to have input into the final decision and, therefore, set the direction for the future of the congregation.
The President of the Board appointed a Growth Team of the Board of Directors (the Team) to study the effects of membership growth on the Temple facility, the staff and the delivery of services and programs expected by the members of the congregation. The Team worked for 15 months, concentrating on the needs of the congregation's current membership. The Team expanded consideration to five options: 1) downsize to a membership the existing facility could serve (the current building was built for 600 family units; the membership in 1993 was almost 850); 2) promote the formation of a new congregation from within the current membership; 3) lease additional Religious School space on weekends; 4) lease or construct a separate Religious School facility; and 5) build a new Temple facility at a new site.

The congregation faced a difficult decision. If it could not serve its existing membership adequately, disenchantment and dissatisfaction would result and members would leave to find a congregation where their needs would be met. If it could not admit any new young families with children just beginning their religious education, the congregation would lose both the energy brought by younger members and its future leadership. If it could not continue to serve the increasing portion of the membership whose children were beyond confirmation age, it would face the loss of its history, as well as the experience and continuity of those long-term members.

The Team concentrated its work on the needs of the current congregation. Focusing on the Religious School, the Nursery School and Temple's ritual and programming, the members of the Team tried to determine how each of the options being considered would accommodate the current needs within the aforementioned areas. It considered the philosophical, pragmatic and financial ramifications of each option. The Team worked for 15 months, interviewing congregants, consulting with Temple staff, meeting with
professional space planners and real estate consultants, and talking with other congregations.

The report of the Team recommended appointing a committee to find a new site on which to build a building, one which would meet the needs of the current membership, while promoting continued growth at a reasonable pace to insure the congregation's vitality and future.

The report was first distributed to the members of Board for discussion. After several meetings, at which serious discussions were held on the recommendation, as well as on the other options, the recommendation to appoint a committee to seek a site on which to build a new facility and to initiate a campaign to raise funds to purchase such a site and construct a new facility was adopted unanimously by the Board. A congregational vote of a simple majority was necessary to approve this recommendation.

In June 1994, every member unit received the Team report with a letter summarizing the process and inviting everyone to attend open meetings with the Team and the Board to answer questions, provide additional information and discuss issues that were of concern to members. Three open meetings were held in June, July and August, prior to the special congregational meeting and vote scheduled for September. Though a total of only 150 individuals attended the meetings, important issues were raised and the results, presented in the form of questions and answers, were mailed to all members prior to the September meeting and vote.

The September 1994 meeting was called for the sole purpose of considering the recommendation of the Board that the Congregation vote "to appoint a committee to seek
out a site on which to build a new facility, and initiate a campaign to raise funds to purchase such a site and underwrite the construction of such a facility. n 3

While a simple majority of those present and voting was all that was required by the Constitution to appoint a committee, a two-thirds majority would be necessary to purchase the land and build the building. The open debate on the motion lasted for almost four hours. With over 700 members in attendance and voting in a secret ballot, the recommendation passed by ONE vote.

Once again the leadership failed to get the support it needed for a new site. While a simple majority was all that was necessary to appoint the committee, it was not sufficient support to build a new facility. Additionally, many members were now angered that the issue had come up again so soon after the Long Range Planning Committee's report, and even went so far as to suggest that the Board was trying to railroad through something that wasn't needed and that had already been rejected (this feeling was particularly prevalent among members of the Long Range Planning Committee). The congregation made it clear that there was no consensus to authorize the Board to begin the process of building a new facility.

In trying to bring about change, leaders often fail because they

function as though their followers did not know what is good for them and, furthermore, would never change were it not for their efforts...In addition, leaders tend to assume that if they have failed to change the heads of their followers, it is because they, the leaders, did not try hard enough. Almost universally, therefore, they respond to lack of change by trying harder...the resulting treadmill of trying harder is usually energized by an absolute belief in the 'power of the word'. But even when successful, change tends to be short-lived and enervating because continued success depends so much on the continued triangulation of the leader between his/her followers, and some goal. 4
It was apparent that, even though approval was given to research a new site for a building, if the members of the congregation were not convinced of the problems and committed to the solution, the necessary two-thirds majority would not be attained at the final vote. Were this the outcome, there would probably not be another chance to raise the issue in the foreseeable future. Furthermore, if a significant mandate weren't achieved, even with a positive two-thirds vote, it might be difficult to find sufficient support to assure the large number of volunteers and the significant financial commitments necessary for a project of this magnitude. "Efforts to bring about change by dealing with the symptoms (content) rather than the process, never will achieve lasting change in an organic system. Problems will recycle..."5 Members of the congregation and its leaders had to set a goal in which both believed and then work toward it together. The majority of the congregation had to be behind this project if it was to succeed.

The process as it had been carried out in the past would have to be changed if consensus were to be achieved; a well-planned strategy would have to be developed. A strategy is defined as:

a changing pattern of a company's business and social purposes, its sense of mission, its goals and objectives, and the implementation policies needed to reach its selective ends. 'Strategy' is not a set of decisions made on high and set into holy tablets. Rather, it is the result of an on-going process...(it) is a very dynamic framework...a changing process. When reviewed in a totality (holistically), strategy is really the result of a continuing process with several distinct phases: formulation, implementation and management.6

Formulation of a strategy begins with an analysis of the current and future environment - economic and social forces which are largely beyond the control of the organization. This analysis provided the congregation with an opportunity to review its strengths,
weaknesses and past-performances with an eye toward the future. It was important to consider:

- **the emotional impact?** Many congregants joined the congregation to be part of a small, intimate environment and have not supported growth even to the current level, they do not want to be members of a congregation they consider to be large and impersonal.

- **the potential to get the support needed?** Based on the congregation's past response, when building an addition in 1988, financial support was not forthcoming due in part to the fact that the congregation's membership is primarily young to middle age and middle income and could not make large financial contributions.

- **the effect of the Federal government's shut-downs and lay-offs on the ability of the congregation to commit to such a major project?** Our membership is, for the most part, either government employees or employed by or owners of businesses directly affected by the government, shut downs and lay-offs directly impact the finances of many of our members.

- **the impact of a new location on the membership, both current and future?** Our congregants reside heavily in two zip codes; any change could affect affiliation.

Formulating a strategy alone does not guarantee success, the strategy must be implemented by creating human support systems that participate in carrying through the plan. "Turning one plan into action is the major part of the strategic process; people are the only means of turning thoughts into actions." This process, the most critical to the success of any plan, involves identifying the actions needed to carry out the plan. Responsibility and authority must be delegated to individuals capable and willing to act. The key to implementation is getting people to fully support the objectives and goals. Failure in this process can be avoided by encouraging people to support the new directions of the organization and to work toward them. People must feel involved in order to have
a vested interest in the process and its outcome, and the more people involved the more successful a project will be on all levels.

**Building Consensus**

In November 1994, a Site Search and Design Committee (SS&D Committee), comprised of 12 individuals, was appointed by the President of the Board; three sub-committees were designated to work specifically on site search, design or financing. Unlike previous committees, which were made up of past leaders of the congregation, members of the SS&D Committee and its sub-committees were appointed to represent the diversity of the congregation: new and old members; young members and seniors; congregational leaders and those never before involved; those who could financially support the campaign and those on dues relief; families with no children and those with children in Nursery School, Religious School and grown; and those who lived in different geographic areas.

Recognizing that decisions are made by the "head and the heart... that both are required when you investigate what is necessary...when members of the community grow in spirit and truth", it was necessary that everyone in the congregation feel that his/her interests were being represented on these committees and, thereby, in the final recommendation. Additionally, all congregants were encouraged to participate (all meetings were open to everyone in the congregation) so, even if a congregant were not appointed to a committee, he/she would still have the opportunity to become involved in the process. It was also believed that founding families should be represented, because many of them felt that the rapid growth of the congregation and the direction of the new leadership were leaving them and their visions for the congregation behind. They needed to feel secure that the goal of the leadership was to take that which is meaningful and unique to our congregation with us into a larger facility, not to become a new congregation that has left its past in its old building.
The SS&D Committee met several times a week, sometimes as a committee of the whole and sometimes in sub-committee. In February, a letter was sent to each member of the congregation summarizing the work of the committees to date and seeking input in the form of an open-ended survey. The survey asked questions and solicited comments on location, design, programs and the future of the congregation. In addition, there was space for general comments and the opportunity to indicate interest in serving on the SS&D Committee or its sub-committees and/or taking part in focus groups. One hundred and forty surveys were returned (a high return, representing over 15% of the congregation) and all comments were summarized in a report to the SS&D Committee and the congregation. The results of this survey were detailed and overwhelmingly consistent in what congregants wanted should the congregation decide to build a new building. These included: a sanctuary large enough for High Holiday services; social spaces for larger functions and for more than one function at a time; a Religious School that only meets on Sunday, not on Shabbat; close geographic proximity to our current location; and controlled growth. This information provided valuable input with which the SS&D Committee would work toward locating a site and designing a building that would meet the needs identified by members of the congregation.

While the committees met - setting geographic boundaries, searching for sites, interviewing architects, visiting other buildings - another very important process was taking place. Professionally facilitated focus groups were being held, with congregants selected randomly from within the categories of membership previously identified for the selection of the members of the SS&D Committee, as well as those members who had asked to participate through the survey response.
Prior to the first congregant focus group meeting, the members of the Board took part in a trial focus group. From this meeting, key issues were identified, issues which the Board felt should be discussed at each focus group session. A major issue was addressing the common congregational perception that, because the focus groups were being held seven months into the process, their purpose was not to gather input but rather to sell what was considered by many to be a "fait accompli." The Board felt that many congregants, especially those not in favor of the move, would not attend these meetings if they believed this to be true. When presenting work to date, the presenter had to be particularly aware of this perception and make it clear that, while work was progressing, no decisions had been made and all options were still open for congregational review and input.

Based upon the trial focus group, the Board made the following recommendations:

- Insure the integrity of the process. Participants would need to be informed as to the way in which the process had evolved and the rationale for certain actions on the part of the SS&D Committee, in order to allay suspicions and mistrust of the process. It was decided to: 1) show the process to date from "A-Z", including a review of the starting points and the charge to the Committee; 2) use graphics to make information simple, clear and visually accessible; 3) fully disclose what was happening in order to dispel any concern that deals were being struck without congregational approval; and 4) be prepared to clarify jargon (e.g.: Charitable Remainder Trust) that may not be familiar to all.

- Clarify the objectives of the focus group and the ways in which the collected data would be processed and used.

- Provide a summary of the results of the survey, conducted by the SS&D Committee, as part of the overview to demonstrate the degree of consistency in and common ground among the congregants.

- Provide a model or drawing of the proposed structure as a way of assisting participants in translating theoretical issues into concrete terms.
Set time frames for focus groups to be sure that each group accomplished the objectives as defined. Post the issues already identified and let participants react to these and add others, rather than starting from scratch at each session.

Develop a format that would keep the group focused and insure adequate time for relevant issues.

Provide communication to the congregation, in advance of the first focus group, clarifying the purpose of the group, providing updates of the SS&D Committee's progress, and issuing an open invitation to participate, striving to involve those who are undecided, those who voted to investigate the project but do not plan to support it, and those who voted against.

It was critical to recognize that this entire process walked a fine line between "wanting to gather input (whatever it might be) and wanting to encourage support for a project that has continued to evolve in specific directions as the investigatory phase has progressed. Anything we can do to keep in mind how threatened people feel when they are involved in change over which they feel they have no control, and what members need in order to support a change of this magnitude, will enhance the likelihood of a successful outcome." 9

Using a professional facilitator was key to achieving these objectives. The facilitator enabled each group to set its own ground rules (i.e.: all opinions were valued; everything said was in confidence; all ideas and opinions could be voiced; etc.) and follow them. She kept the groups on task so each group had the same opportunity to provide input in all areas, and created a non-threatening, impartial environment. [It was thought that a member of the Board, staff or the SS&D Committee acting as facilitator could have been seen as biased in favor of the project and members of the focus group would have felt less comfortable being open and honest with him/her because of his/her involvement in the project and because he/she was also a member of the congregation.] The groups, in order
to produce the results needed - to provide the input that, when considered in the report, could make the difference between a "yes" vote and a "no" vote -, had to be conducted in an environment that was open, honest and safe. Creating this environment was the role of the facilitator.

Each focus group lasted for two hours, unless the group voted to extend. Topics for each group included growth, costs, funding, location, exterior and interior design, ritual, Religious and Nursery School programs, parking lot issues, space for new programs, and strategies for building support for the project. At each meeting, an overview of the work to date was presented, the results of the SS&D Committee survey reviewed, and financial ramifications of moving or staying compared. The facilitator recorded every comment, opinion and suggestion on large charts on the walls. Following each meeting, the group rated the suggestions under each topic to determine those about which it felt most strongly. The results were compiled and analyzed by the facilitator into a written report for the SS&D Committee, which was included in its final report to the congregation.

During the entire process, the congregation was kept informed through monthly newsletter articles and mid-month updates. Communication was open at all times, so no one would feel excluded or feel that events were taking place secretly. The Board was briefed regularly by the SS&D Committee and the staff was briefed by the Executive Director, who served as a ex-officio member of the committee and attended all its meetings. In this way, leadership and staff were current on all information and could, therefore, speak with knowledge when questions were asked of them and issues discussed with them. It was very important, throughout this entire process, that everyone be kept as informed as possible in order to minimize a proliferation of misinformation.
The concepts and ideas of the SS&D Committee, along with congregational input from the surveys and the focus groups and the resources of the staff and lay leaders, resulted in a convergence of opinions which led directly to the recommendation that we purchase a particular site, construct a synagogue of a specific size at a specific cost, and sell our current facility to raise a portion of the funds necessary to finance the project. This was presented to the congregation in the form of a written report. Each sub-committee wrote its section, read the other sections and provided input into the final document. The complete report was written by a sub-committee of the whole, with review by the entire SS&D Committee.

The report included the charge to the SS&D Committee, the recommendation of the SS&D Committee, and the processes by which each sub-committee reached its decision. Every area was covered in detail so that every congregant could understand the Committee's deliberations. For example, in the section on site selection, each site that was considered was presented with a list of its pros and cons, so it was clear to the reader why the recommended site was selected. Financial spread sheets provided individual cost scenarios that compared staying in our present site and downsizing to moving, as well as the effects of the sale of our current building and fundraising. A schematic drawing of the site plan and draft drawings of the exterior and interior spaces were also included. All this information was provided to enable to congregation to make the most informed decision possible. The Committee, while working for a positive vote on its recommendation, felt strongly that, no matter what the outcome of the vote, the congregants should have the opportunity to make an informed decision.

The report was sent to the congregation just prior to the High Holydays of 1995, nine months after the creation of the Site Search and Design Committee. A letter from the President of the Board introduced the report and the process. The report and the
importance of an informed congregation prior to the vote were addressed from the bimah
during the High Holydays by both the Senior Rabbi and the President. In addition, they
addressed the significance of a large voter turnout to insure that a majority of the
congregants would make the decision for the future of all the congregants.

Over the course of the next few months, prior to the vote, informational meetings were
held. These meetings were open to the entire congregation, held in the Temple building
and led by the Chairman of the SS&D Committee. At these meeting, the report would be
discussed and questions concerning it answered by the Chairs of the Site Search, Design
and Financing sub-committees. These meetings were not debates, but rather meetings for
the sole purpose of asking and answering questions, clarifying issues and providing
additional information. In order for this process to work, an open debate session was
scheduled for another time.

A letter supporting the recommendation, signed by the Rabbis and Cantor, was mailed to
the membership. The letter addressed many of the concerns that had been voiced to them,
and sought to allay some of the fears of increasing membership on the warmth and
intimacy of the congregation.

In order to assure the greatest participation, and to respond to those who had not been
able to vote at the previous year's meeting because they had to leave during the lengthy
(four hour) debate, the Board recommended that a special congregational meeting be
called solely for the purpose of voting on the recommendation; there would be no
discussion at this meeting. The recommendation in the report was in the form of a motion
and the motion was debated prior to the vote in a meeting called for the sole purpose of
debate. This debate, it was agreed, would continue as long a people needed and/or
wanted to be heard; no time limit would be set and all discussion would be non-confrontational.

Notice of this special congregational meeting to be held in November was mailed to all members, and eligibility to vote was clearly defined. The vote, by secret ballot, would take place over two days during specific hours, in order to best accommodate the majority of the congregation. Dates were printed in the Shabbat bulletin and announced each Shabbat from the bimah. A prominent sign with the dates of the vote was hung across the front of the building.

Prior to the vote, the members of the Board called every member of the congregation to remind him/her of the importance of voting, and to ask if there were any questions that they could answer. This was done to insure a large voter turnout so that, no matter what the outcome, the vote would represent the mandate of the entire congregation and not just two/thirds of those present and voting.

The meeting was called to order on Sunday at 9:30 a.m., recessed at 2:00 p.m., reconvened on Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. and voting was closed at 9:00 p.m. (the integrity of the process required strict adherence to the voting hours; no ballots were accepted at any other time). The ballots, which had been sealed between the two voting sessions, were counted at the close of the voting sessions. The tabulation was conducted by a group of congregants who were not on the Temple Board, had not served on the SS&D Committee, and half of whom were known to be in favor of the building and half of whom were known to be against it. The process of tabulating the vote was open to all members. In the largest vote in the congregation's history, the recommendation passed 750 to 230; the required two/thirds majority was achieved and a significant mandate received.
A message was immediately put on the answering machine and taped to the door. A letter was sent from the President thanking everyone for his/her participation. The President commended the long, thoughtful process, the constructive discussion and dialogue, the openness and high level of participation, the integrity of the process and the "honest, heartfelt debate among congregants that helped to reinforce a standard of leadership and mutual regard which will only strengthen our congregation."\(^{10}\) He asked that, regardless of how any one congregant voted, we remain one united congregation. He called upon every Temple member to join one of the many committees, and to take an active role in achieving our future goal of building our congregation's new home.

The process of building a consensus had been achieved. It had taken one full year to go from the original vote, with its one vote majority, to a consensus of 77% of those voting. Members praised the process and the people involved in it. Many congregants who were originally negative about the issue and the process, now felt positive. They had felt included, informed and respected; they were given the opportunity to speak and felt that people on the committees heard what they had to say. Very few hard feelings were created, even among those who had voted against the recommendation, and the congregation has stayed together (the report projected as many as 200 family units would leave the congregation during the first year following the vote; in fact, the congregation has grown). Another positive outcome of the process was that several founding members, who initially did not want the new building, asked to serve on new building committees.

**Personal Perspective**

Although it is important for the purpose of this paper to recognize the role of the Executive Director, and I believe there is a very important role to be played by the Executive Director, I have tried to keep the emphasis on the process itself and the
importance of creating the process, rather than on the role of one specific member of the team. Additionally, I feel it is important to recognize that this process could be used by congregations that do not have Executive Directors; in fact, it could be used when a congregation begins the process of creating the position of Executive Director.

In my opinion, the most important role for the Executive Director is that of a resource person; the person who is aware of the process, who has researched the strategies and can guide the lay leaders in achieving their goal to build consensus. Although I was intimately involved in every step, I found I was most affective when I was helping to direct the leadership in creating and implementing a strategy that would work.

The Executive Director, the President, the Committee chair and the Rabbi form a critical team. Together they work to set the strategy, guide its implementation and work to disseminate important information. Many hours are spent together, discussing issues, working out problems and creating a positive environment for the entire congregation. These people must be able to work together in a relationship that is built on trust, honesty and mutual respect.

I served as an ex-officio member of the SS&D Committee, along with the Senior Rabbi and the President. In this capacity, I attended all the meetings and had input into all discussions and written materials. I attended all the focus groups, informational meetings and the debate to assure the consistency and accuracy of all information disseminated at these sessions. While attending these meetings was critical to imparting accurate information, I would not, in retrospect, recommend that a staff member attend the professionally-facilitated focus groups; my attendance may have made it uncomfortable for some things to be said, since I am on the professional staff and sit on the Board.
Janice Rosenblatt - FTA Thesis

I was consulted in all the decisions and was expected to provide a continuity of information both from within the congregation and in the larger community. Additionally, the SS&D Committee relied heavily upon my writing and editing experience in putting together the final report.

I worked closely with my colleagues in NATA and NAASE who had already been through similar experiences. We talked often, some sharing what didn't work and telling me how to avoid these pitfalls, others sharing successes and suggesting how to include them in our project. I gained valuable insight into many issues that needed to be considered (for example, how to involve the most members in the process and how to be sure all staff felt connected), in order to bring about a successful conclusion. In addition, my colleagues provided important information on basic issues, such as the selection of a site and an architect, as well as financial concerns such as the choice of a fundraising consultant. They shared with me some of the questions to ask when interviewing these professionals, how to be sure contracts are worded to work best for the congregation, and they were open and honest about people and/or firms they had used or about which they had heard. I still seek their input on a regular basis as we move into the next phase.

During all this, the normal day-to-day operations of the Temple had to continue. I worked with the staff to help them with the massive amounts of work this process added to their already full schedules. With no additional office support, I tried to assist the staff and take on as much additional work as possible, to keep morale and productivity from being affected. Additionally, I met with the members of the staff regularly to keep them apprised of what was happening and to seek their opinions so they, too, could feel included and important in the process (which also helped them accept the increased work load). Together we worked to assure that the on-going needs of the congregants were not affected by the extra work of the new building.
Summary

Many steps involving many people took place to assure that consensus was reached. Primary among these were education, inclusion and strategy development. Educating the community means starting from the assumption that the general membership is not aware of the problems identified by the leaders of the congregation and, even if they are aware of the problems, may not necessarily see them the same way the leaders do. Articles in the Temple newsletter, letters from the President of the Board and Committee Chairs, personal phone calls from Board and committee members, focus groups, surveys and open informational meetings throughout the process will assure that anyone who wants to know what is happening will be able to find out. Open and continuous communication also creates an atmosphere of trust and inclusion.

The more people are included in the process, the more they will feel ownership in the process and the ultimate decision. This is easily accomplished by making all committees open to anyone who wants to join, and by continuously publicizing the meetings and progress of the committees. Inclusion builds a cohesive infra-structure which helps to avoid polarization and negativism and assures support. "When people see change as being imposed on them (if they feel they don't fully own the change), suspicion and anxiety are common, even when the changes are beneficial, logical and perhaps inevitable". 11

In both areas - education and inclusion - the leadership worked tirelessly to assure that everyone felt informed and included. However, the process for the congregants was somewhat passive. Information was disseminated hoping that it would be read, relying on the congregant to have the interest to become informed and involved. It would be my suggestion that, once notice has been given about an important aspect of the process (ie;
open discussion meetings, focus groups, the actual vote), every congregant be called as a reminder (this is also a wonderful opportunity to get one-on-one feedback). Sometimes the congregants need to be helped along in the process of becoming educated and included.

Strategy formulation requires a thorough analysis of the congregation's history, its current and future needs, and its strengths and weaknesses. While it is true that "People and organizations that do not change risk becoming obsolete, less effective", it is also true that "Finding the balance between continuity and change is the key to surviving". In order to succeed, a strategy must be developed that incorporates the past and the future, and that recognizes and addresses the opposition to and concerns about change.

Once the strategy is developed, it must be implemented. Congregants must get behind the objectives and fully support them. It is important to identify and involve a cross section of the congregation; authority should be delegated to those who are capable and willing to become involved and not only to those have been involved (who may be seen as biased toward the project and its outcome). This works because people from all groups within the congregation feel represented and, therefore, feel that their needs and opinions are included.

While this process of including many people in decision making may take tremendous time and effort and may be cumbersome (the more people involved, the harder it may be to come to a decision), it is probably the most important piece in the entire process. People must be included if they are to feel that they have ownership in the decision making process.
Due to the success of the Board's effort, it was assumed that this new strategy would be implemented in all future congregational projects. However, only six months after the vote, the Board reverted back to its old methods. While these methods consumed far less time and energy, the results were not successful.

A personnel issue was to be brought to the membership at the congregation's annual meeting. Except for the actual motion on the issue, which was included with everything else in the packet of information mailed prior to the meeting, nothing was written in the newsletter, no separate mailings went out, no meetings were held, and no phone calls made to let the congregants know what the motion meant and what its long term effects would be. Since the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion, its leaders assumed that the congregants would accept its recommendation as best for the congregation. The Board failed to educate and involve the members in the process. Without information, the members could not make an informed decision, and rumors about what the motion would mean in the long term spread without any chance to be dispelled. The Board did not follow the strategy it had created to build consensus. Additionally, the issue was placed toward the end of a long agenda, at which time only 60 people were still in attendance. This was a strategic error because it meant that, no matter what the outcome of the vote, it would be made only by those who stayed through the entire meeting (in this case, only 6% of the congregation). By a simple majority of those voting, the issue failed.

The defeat created hard feelings and made many of the congregants attending the meeting feel very uncomfortable both during and after the meeting. The Board, through a painful experience, had to relearn what it had already learned - that information and inclusion are key to the success (or even the successful failure) of any issue.
"Congregants...want to participate in the leadership of the congregation along with the elected, identified leaders. They want to dialogue with the leadership about their synagogue. They want to think along with the leaders as to the nature and future of their congregation. In order to do this, the leaders must promote team learning. The leaders of the synagogue must have the capacity to suspend assumptions about the congregation and enter into genuine thinking together with congregants and other leaders about the programs, projects and future of the congregation. It means that leaders have to directly, intentionally, ask congregants to dialogue with them about their shared community. This is very different from the professional staff and the Board trying to guess or intuit what congregants want and need." 13

Two months later, when the preliminary plans for the new building were to be brought before the Montgomery County Planning Board for a change in the County's Master Plan for the plot of land on which we were planning to build, the Land Acquisition Committee did its homework. Residents of the communities neighboring the land were invited to see the plans and talk with members of the Committee, so they would feel included from the beginning and support the project. The Committee initiated a letter writing campaign from within the congregation and the neighboring communities to the Planning Commission to show support for the change in the master plan. Members of the neighboring communities as well as members of the congregation attended the hearing. The Planning Board voted unanimously in our favor. One Planning Board member, praising the Temple, stated that because the Temple had done its homework, the process worked efficiently. According to him, most religious institutions do not come prepared and, therefore, approval is a long time in coming, if it comes at all.

The leadership learned valuable lessons when working of the process of a new building. These lessons need to be carried over into every aspect of Temple life. Temple members
must be reached and heard; during the feasibility stage of the fundraising program and again during a phone-a-thon for funds, congregants were asked for their opinions and were heard. Ideas and comments were passed on to professionals and lay leaders for consideration and response. This seemingly simple process created such goodwill, that the Board plans to call every member once a year just to see how things are going for them at the Temple.

Conclusion

"Community requires that members of that community be bound to a common identity and sense of destiny. People want to join in a shared vision of the future because it gives meaning to their lives. Building a shared vision is crucial to the work of the...congregational leader."14 When planned and implemented properly, the process of educating and involving all members in the decision making process works, building a shared vision for the future of the congregation. The process should be used, in varying degrees, every time a congregation is trying to make a decision. Without a well-developed strategy, failure and fragmentation will result. Congregations should strive to include as many members as possible in the process, keeping everyone informed every step of the way and giving ample opportunity for input. Whether the issue is major or minor, the support of the membership is critical and will be achieved only when the members feel informed and involved. Education and inclusion can not always guarantee desired results, but they can guarantee a membership that feels positive toward the process, the leadership and the congregation as a whole.
Special thanks to Rabbi Samuel K. Joseph for his help, input and guidance in reading my thesis, and sharing with me his paper which will be published soon in a Festschrift in honor of Rabbi John Levin.


4. *Generation to Generation*, page 223


8. *Accountable Leadership*, page 221.


12. "Managing Transition"


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