

SYNERGY

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**INNOVATIONS AND STRATEGIES
FOR SYNAGOGUES OF TOMORROW**
TOMORROW'S SYNAGOGUE TODAY:
A GUIDE FOR STUDY AND ACTION

Created in Cooperation With the Alban Institute
Written by Rabbi Hayim Herring, Ph.D.



This guide, Volume 4 of **Innovations and Strategies for Synagogues of Tomorrow**, reflects SYNERGY: UJA-Federation of New York's commitment to identify, elevate, and share innovations and strategies in order to strengthen synagogues. In 2012, the Alban Institute published Hayim Herring's *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today* and we heard of several synagogues using the book to facilitate pivotal conversations with their boards and key professionals. Then, Allison Fine, president of Temple Beth Abraham, posted on the network weaver's Facebook group a series of questions that she had used to facilitate a generative conversation with her board. This sparked the idea of creating a formal but flexible reader's guide, which synagogues could use to spark key conversations with their leadership around the nature of tomorrow's synagogue and the issues changing in the broad synagogue landscape.

We are pleased to share this tool, created in cooperation with the Alban Institute and written by Rabbi Hayim Herring, and we welcome your thoughts and reflections. We are interested in hearing about how congregations utilize this guide. Join the conversation on Twitter at @adinafriedman or send us an e-mail at synergy@ujafedny.org. Additional copies available for download at www.ujafedny.org/synergy-resources.

A note of thanks to Ewa Maniawski for her input on the guide.

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SYNERGY: UJA-Federation of New York and Synagogues Together

For more information about *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today: Creating Vibrant Centers of Jewish Life*, see www.alban.org/tomorrowssynagogue.aspx.

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INTRODUCTION

Because this guide is designed to be used without professional facilitation, I was selective about what I included in it. Expert guides don't overwhelm their clients with too many choices — hopefully just the ones that are best suited to them.

This resource guide focuses on chapters two and three of *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today*. The other chapters, which address rabbinical education and training, are less relevant to an examination of your congregation's values and vision. What I've included in this guide are:

- Questions to help motivate you to act on some of the key concepts in *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today*.
- Tactics for beginning the implementation of these concepts.
- Jewish texts and commentary to help you contextualize these ideas for a congregation.
- Additional references and resources.

For ease of use, I've divided the material into seven sessions. Sessions can be scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes each. Consider completing one session every four to six weeks, and in a relatively brief time you'll find yourself well on the way to reorienting your congregation to some of the new directions outlined in the book. I wish you much success in using this self-guided resource and encourage you to share your experience with me, which I will in turn share with others.

Hayim Herring

May 2013

SESSION 1

From Closed Hierarchy to Open Platform: A Paradigm Shift for Synagogues

In this session, congregational leaders will focus on the idea of “synagogue as platform.” Pages 15 – 24 of *Tomorrow’s Synagogue Today* describe Temple Torah as a congregation that is organized as a platform rather than as a hierarchy. Most synagogues are currently structured as hierarchies. **This shift, from hierarchy to platform, is one of the most significant ideas in *Tomorrow’s Synagogue Today*.**

Session goals:

- Understand how your congregation is structured now.
- Visualize what it might look like if it was organized as an open platform.
- Identify the implications of reorganizing as a platform.

At a Glance: From Hierarchy to Platform

At its core, a platform is an enabling space for users who want to discuss or act upon issues. It is typically created above a foundational infrastructure so that a large number of people can organize upon it. For example, Facebook users and groups rest upon the infrastructure of Facebook’s platform. A platform can operate in:

- A digital environment, like Twitter;
- A physical realm, like a congregation (as we will explain further); or
- Both a physical and digital arena, like Meetup, a social media platform that enables users who share similar interests to connect online and then meet in person.

Keep in mind that a platform is not just a medium for fostering social interactions among diverse individuals. It is a state of mind in which leaders intentionally foster open social exchange among people with shared purposes who seek to accomplish something greater than they can alone. What makes a synagogue platform different from a hierarchy is that:

- It is a launching point for and enabler of shared meaning-making in the synagogue, in some other community venue, in members’ homes, or in a virtual space.
- Members are actively encouraged to co-create Jewish experiences along with professional staff or independently.

- They are easy for members to navigate because they don’t require committees or boards to approve their activities provided that they are a good mission fit.

Questions to Motivate You for Action to Move Your Congregation From a Hierarchy to a Platform

Spend some time analyzing digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn and discuss the following questions:

1. What makes these platforms so popular?
2. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? What are their respective individual strengths and weaknesses?
3. What physical and digital aspects of your congregation could incorporate some of the more positive attributes of these platforms?
4. What are the potential losses in moving from a hierarchy to a platform? What are the potential gains?

Tactics to Help You Move From a Hierarchy to a Platform

- Build in opportunities at board and committee meetings to share stories. For example, look at the pictures of past presidents from years ago who helped to build the congregation. Talk about their contribution to the synagogue in order to inspire current board members to make their mark.
- Invite comments from congregants on key events in the congregation. Actively solicit their feedback, but be sure to communicate the parameters for including or excluding comments. In addition to sharing comments, enable them to post relevant articles and videos.

- Facebook taps into our basic sense of needing to feel recognized by giving us the power of “Like.” Clicking “Like” is a central way for Facebook users to show approval, alignment, support, or interest. Create additional mechanisms and rituals for showing appreciation of others’ work, at meetings, gatherings, and on the web.

Text for Reflection

Hillel says, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I?”

— *Pirkei Avot* 1:14

Commentary: Individuals are on their own Jewish journey, but leaders help them experience how much richer the journey is when grounded in a community where people share the stories of their journeys.

Questions:

1. Draw upon your personal experience in answering, “When did I begin to appreciate the experience of being involved in my synagogue community?”
2. How can that experience help you engage others more deeply in congregational life?

Additional Resources on Networked Organizations

Kanter, Beth and Allison H. Fine. *The Networked Nonprofit: Connecting With Social Media to Drive Change.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

“The Value of Place: Building Community in the 21st Century,” the blog of community development leader Bill Traynor. Available at <http://valueofplace.wordpress.com>.

Holley, June. *Network Weaver Handbook: A Guide to Transformational Networks.* Available at <http://www.networkweaver.com>.

SESSION 2

Got Transparency? Then You'll Build a Better Platform!

In the prior session, congregational leaders were asked to consider the benefits of reorganizing as a platform. Perhaps they have even begun to draw up plans for experimenting with this model in one area of the congregation. In this session, congregational leaders will be honestly reflecting on how transparently they conduct their business. Rightly or wrongly, one of the criticisms often leveled at congregations is that they appear to be secretive about decision-making. While that perception is never desirable, it must be overcome so that congregations can engender the depth of trust that platforms require.

Session goals:

- Identify the formal and informal ways in which decisions are made in the congregation.
- Understand how the process of decision-making is actually perceived by those on the outside of leadership circles.
- Conduct an audit that will help you become more transparent in how you make and communicate key decisions and create ongoing channels for broader feedback.

At a Glance: Being Maximally Transparent

The fictitious Temple Torah described on pages 15 – 24 of *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today* conducts its business openly. That's because openness and transparency are the values that enable the emergence of platforms. Transparency fosters trust and trust encourages people to put their hearts into an enterprise.

Charlene Li is an expert in social media strategy and wrote the bestselling book *Open Leadership*. In her book, she presents a tool for companies to take stock of their openness quotient to help them shift away from a private, closed system. The openness audit has two components: information-sharing and decision-making. I have adapted the part of her tool on information-sharing for you to use as an audit specifically for synagogues.*

Questions to Motivate You for Action to Become More Transparent

1. How openly is information about congregational decisions shared? If you asked the same question to five other people who are not in leadership roles, how do you think they would answer?
2. What aspects of information-sharing might be initially easier to open up in your community? What aspects will prove to be more of a challenge?
3. What are your three top priorities for beginning to transition to a more open and transparent environment?

Tactics for Becoming a Transparent Congregation

Li explains that there are six elements of information-sharing: explaining, updating, conversing, "open mic," crowdsourcing, and software platforms. For each statement about each form of information-sharing, rate your congregation on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree. Also, cite examples of each form of information-sharing inside and outside of your congregation.

*The original openness audit as developed by Li is available as a free download at www.charleneli.com/resources/.

<p>Explaining</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —— Synagogue leaders have clear and regular channels for sharing how decisions are made with the congregation. —— Our synagogue website and membership materials share up-to-date information and reflect our community values. —— Partners and prospective members looking in on our congregation from the outside feel that they understand what our congregation is about, and what niche our synagogue fills in the local Jewish and general communities. 	<p>Total points: _____</p> <p>Examples:</p>
<p>Updating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —— Technology and processes are in place to facilitate sharing and collaboration across the congregation. —— Many synagogue leaders and staff frequently use social technologies like blogs, Twitter, or Facebook to provide regular and honest updates on what's happening in the community. —— Synagogue leaders and staff are genuinely open to learning about new communications vehicles and receive ongoing training. 	<p>Total points: _____</p> <p>Examples:</p>
<p>Conversing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —— Synagogue leaders are free to blog and participate publicly in social media, as long as they act responsibly. —— The congregation is committed to hearing from and talking with members and prospects about congregational issues, even when those conversations may be critical in tone. —— When we are faced with a challenging circumstance, our congregational leaders strategically engage members in the conversation to get a better sense of how we should act or respond. 	<p>Total points: _____</p> <p>Examples:</p>
<p>Open Mic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —— There are known channels through which members can contribute ideas and content for congregational activities. —— The congregation actively cultivates and encourages members to contribute their ideas and best practices. —— Members and/or partners frequently contribute ideas and suggestions that are, in fact, adopted by the organization. 	<p>Total points: _____</p> <p>Examples:</p>

<p>Crowdsourcing</p> <p>— There is a process for groups of people to be able to contribute ideas, innovations, and solutions in an organized way.</p> <p>— There is an appetite among the leadership and membership to seek out new ideas and innovate.</p> <p>— Ideas from outside the congregation are frequently considered for our congregation’s activities and operations.</p>	<p>Total points: _____</p> <p>Examples:</p>
<p>Software Platforms</p> <p>— Our synagogue strategically uses technology tools that foster openness and communication in our congregation, like e-mail listservs, social network platforms, and blogging software.</p> <p>— Multiple people — staff and lay leaders alike — can easily access and update various web platforms used by our congregation (e.g., website content manager, social media channels, and blogging interface).</p> <p>— Staff, lay leaders, and members work together via collaborative software (like Google Apps, Skype, and/or Google Chat) to lead and manage congregational projects.</p>	<p>Total points: _____</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Grand total: _____</p>
<p>Scoring: 90 is the highest score and 18 is the lowest. Use your scores as a diagnostic tool for you to understand where your organization is open and where it can grow to become more open.</p>	

Text for Reflection

“If one of them (a communally appointed collector of charity) finds money in the street, that person should not put it into his purse, but into the charity box. When he comes back home he should take it out (and repay himself). Similarly, if one of the communal charity collectors has lent someone some money, and he repays him in the street, the charity collector should not put the money into his own purse but into the charity box, and take it out again (to repay himself) when he comes home.”

— Talmud Bavli, *Bava Batra* 8b

Commentary: This passage from the Talmud speaks to the importance of transparency in leadership. By being vigilant about transparency, those who lead need to be self-aware of the scrutiny that they receive and pre-empt potential charges of gaining benefits at the expense of the public.

Questions:

1. What congregational decision-making process best illustrates transparency?
2. What can you learn from that process and apply to other areas of congregational life that require greater transparency?

Additional Resources on Transparency in Organizations

Jarvis, Jeff. *What Would Google Do?: Reverse-Engineering the Fastest Growing Company in the History of the World.* New York: HarperCollins, 2009.

Li, Charlene. *Open Leadership: How Social Technology Can Transform the Way You Lead.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

SESSION 3

Making Your Mission and Values Matter

On pages 15 – 24 of *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today*, where Temple Torah is described, you will see a congregation that is mission-focused and mission-driven. Temple Torah strives to use its mission statement as the touchstone for every decision it makes in the congregation and certainly does so for the most important ones. You should expect some skepticism about the importance of mission statements as you examine this topic, as congregational leaders may have had negative experiences in the amount of effort that goes into developing them and the inverse amount of use they ultimately have.

Session goals:

- Create the case for the potential value of having a clearly focused mission statement.
- Understand the essential need for one in an open platform synagogue model.
- Examine your current mission statement and determine if at some near future point, you wish to assign a task force to draft a new one, which the board will approve.
- If time, discuss how some programmatic focus on your congregation would change if the congregational mission more directly informed it.

At a Glance: The Importance of Mission Statements

Mission statements are underrated in importance because they are often written poorly. They tend to be long, indistinctive, and uninspiring. But when written well and utilized frequently with professional and lay leaders, they can give you a competitive advantage by helping your congregation define what it does exceptionally well. It can also help to minimize discussions about whether particular programs should be implemented or actions should be taken by using it as a filter for decision-making. The more faithful you are to your mission, the greater impact you can expect on the lives of individuals and on the broader life of your congregation.

Remember, a mission statement assumes greater importance in platform-oriented synagogues, because you will need it to make sure that member-driven activities create a coherent pattern of action.

As food for thought, here are a few samples from the Torah and Jewish liturgy that can powerfully keep you pointed in the direction of the sacred work you seek to accomplish:

- “Be holy.” — Leviticus 19:1
- “Choose life.” — Deuteronomy 30:19
- “Aim for a more perfect world.” — Adapted from daily liturgy
- “Learn, teach, act.” — From daily liturgy
- “Expand the influence of Torah and make it a beautiful thing.” — Adapted from daily liturgy
- “Love and pursue peace.” — *Pirkei Avot* 1:12

Of course, almost any congregation could say to any of the above, “This is our mission!” But think more deeply about the implications of adopting certain terms. A mission-focused congregation that explicitly names “choosing life” as a core aspect of its mission might:

- Focus social justice efforts around reducing gun violence in inner cities.
- Promote physical, mental, and spiritual health through its activities and partnerships with other organizations.
- Devote adult Jewish learning to topics related to neonatal and end-of-life biomedical ethics issues.
- Promote the congregation as a place uniquely poised to develop multigenerational relationships.

Congregational activities, resources, and vision are all filtered through this mission so that “choosing life” becomes a unifying force for the congregation.

Questions to Motivate You to Action to Create a Powerful Mission Statement

1. Do you know your mission statement by heart? Is it too long or too generic? (Tip: Can it fit neatly on a t-shirt or a coffee mug?)
2. How do you understand your mission? Ask three to five other people how they understand it and compare their responses to yours. Is your mission clear and focused enough to work well in a platform model?
3. How might three of your most significant congregational activities be different if your congregation used its mission statement and values as the basis for making choices?

Tactics to Help You Put Your Mission Statement in Action

- Ask each staff member and any lay leaders involved in programming to examine the portfolio of programs for which they are responsible. Discuss which programs fit within the congregation's mission, which do not, and which could be modified. Set a schedule for sun-setting those initiatives that fall outside of the scope of the mission.
- Post your congregation's mission statement at prominent locations around the building and on your website landing page.
- At every board and committee meeting, have someone report on how the work of that committee is helping to advance the congregation's mission.
- Make sure that the mission statement appears on all significant electronic and printed congregational communications.

Text for Reflection

“They journeyed from Rephidim and they arrived in the desert of Sinai, and they encamped in the desert, and Israel encamped (singular) there opposite the mountain’ (Exodus 19:2).

(Although there were multitudes of Israelites, the singular is used, as they were) like one person, with one heart. But all the other encampments were characterized by complaints and strife.”

— Rashi, based on the *Mechilta*

Commentary: The Jewish people's relationship to Torah best defines who we are. While we honor our ancestors, it's our relationship to a book (or more accurately, a scroll), as interpreted over generations that has shaped our collective character. Our sages wonder why it was that the Jewish people received the Torah at Mt. Sinai at that particular moment. One suggestion they offered is that it was the moment when the Israelites found an alignment of purpose — which is a wonderful way of thinking about a mission.

Questions:

1. Assume that you will receive some skepticism about the value of having a clear mission statement. What can you do to mitigate it in advance?
2. What words or phrases do you want to see included in your congregation's mission statement that will make it a valuable tool for focusing resources?

Additional Resources on Mission Statements

Drucker, Peter F. *The Drucker Foundation Self-Assessment Tool: Participant Workbook*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Leventhal, Robert. *Stepping Forward: Synagogue Visioning and Planning*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007.

SESSION 4

Collaboration as a Hallmark of Platforms

Over the past several years, federations, funders, congregations, and nonprofits in general are speaking more favorably about the value of collaboration. *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today* calls for collaboration as “a key strategy for expanding the vitality of synagogues as hubs and sponsors of Jewish life” (page 4). But, speak with leaders who have tried to turn that rhetoric into reality, and they will likely describe the challenges inherent in any collaboration.

Session goals:

- Understand when collaborations make sense for your congregation.
- Select trustworthy collaborative partners.
- Identify one or two program areas that are ripe for potential collaboration.

At a Glance: Collaborations and Their Relationship to Platforms

In Chapter 3 of *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today*, four dimensions of collaborative partnerships are defined: internal — across congregational groups and departments; external — partnerships with Jewish organizations and synagogues; external — partnerships with organizations outside of the Jewish community that have complementary agendas and

shared values; global — connecting with Jewish communities in Israel, the former Soviet Union, South America, etc., to exchange experience, programs, and people. Here, I drill further down into how to form sustainable external collaborations. The other dimensions of collaboration are equally important, but external collaborations are more prevalent and, as congregations are looking to add more value to members, offer a solid strategy to achieve that goal.

Collaborations take time, staff support, and often funding, especially when being tried for the first time. Therefore, engaging in single-shot collaborations become unattractive propositions because they provide little lasting value to their members and consume resources without the benefit of being able to draw upon them again. However, one-time collaborative programs may be valuable if they have the potential to be a springboard for a longer-term relationship.

Questions to Motivate You to Cultivate Collaborative Relationships

Many of the questions in this section have been adapted from an expert on the social sector, Kevin P. Kearns (see below for additional information), to help you determine when to avoid and when to seek a collaborative partner. These questions will enable you to assess the value of potential collaborative relationships with partners either in the Jewish community or outside of the Jewish community. To be on safe grounds, you should be able to answer “yes” to at least four out of the five questions:

Could this partnership...	Yes	No
1. Advance your synagogue's mission?		
2. Grow and expand your impact in the community?		
3. Allow you to reduce your financial costs or volunteer resources without diminishing the quality of services you provide?		
4. Reduce unproductive duplication of services in the community and enable you to create something new or improved for your members or the broader community?		
5. Enhance your congregation's visibility and build community support for a worthy cause?		

Assessing Alignment and Trust

Collaboration requires each party to be very clear about its mission and values. Why? As in any relationship, if you're uncertain about your identity, you can find yourself in a troubled relationship. Again, if you can answer "yes" to at least four out of the five questions it's likely that your potential partner will be trustworthy and reliable.

Does your prospective partner...	Yes	No
1. Have a history of exemplary performance, working in a timely and effective manner with positive outcomes for the community?		
2. Follow through on what it has publicly promised to do?		
3. Have its representatives consistently and faithfully deliver information or products to you as promised?		
4. Have sufficient staff and financial resources to dedicate in advance to support the collaboration?		
5. Provide or co-develop basic information about the collaboration, like goals, outcomes, budgets, and responsible parties?		

Tactics for Initiating Collaboration

Identify an area that is ripe for collaboration. For example, if several congregations and Jewish organizations are in relatively close proximity to one another, they often duplicate adult education classes or Israel-related programs. Using a potential area for collaboration, review and answer the questions below and then complete the table on the next page:

1. What content areas would benefit from partnerships?
 - a. What does our synagogue do well that could add value to the community beyond our congregation? Could a collaboration with another organization further extend our congregation's reach?
 - b. What are congregants asking for that we have no idea how to deliver? Does collaboration offer a way to be responsive?
 - c. What programs or projects are we considering starting in our congregation? Have they been successfully created elsewhere, and might we approach another organization to make it happen?
2. Which organizations are likely to be our most natural partners?
3. In each area, is there alignment with our mission and values? What is the direct link?
4. What resources can we make available to the partnership?
 - a. What potential does our facility have for collaborative arrangements?
 - b. Which staff and lay leaders are the most equipped for this collaboration?
 - c. Can we contribute money, or could we raise funds for this partnership? How much is feasible to commit?
5. What do we think our prospective partners will be able to offer the partnership?
6. What are some key benefits this proposed partnership will bring to our congregation, and to the wider community?
7. What are some key challenges we foresee in this proposed partnership?

Fill in this table using your answers to the questions on the previous page:

Current or proposed area of partnership	Collaborating partner(s)	Direct link to mission and values	What we can offer the partnership	What the partner(s) can give to the partnership	Benefits to the congregation and community	Challenges we foresee

Text for Reflection

“Two are better than one, for they have good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up...and a threefold cord is not easily broken.”

— Ecclesiastes 4:9 – 12

Commentary: True to its nature, this text from Ecclesiastes offers pragmatic wisdom about teamwork. Essentially, it says that there is strength in numbers. Beyond pragmatism, there is also something harder to label when collaboration works well. In bringing out the best in us, we collectively create something that transcends the mere sum of our efforts.

Questions:

1. What does the word “collaboration” mean to you?
2. How might someone who occupies a different professional or volunteer role understand it?

Additional Resources on Collaboration

Kearns, Kevin P. *Private Sector Strategies for Social Sector Success.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Winer, Michael and Karen Ray. *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey.* 2nd ed. Nashville: Fieldstone Alliance, 2011.

SESSION 5

Creating Engaging Volunteer Experiences

When you are heavily involved in a congregation and you are looking to recruit additional volunteers for an activity, it's natural to think about filling the gaps in the work that needs to get done. But, when you are on the receiving end of a request to volunteer, you are having a very different internal conversation. It goes something like this: "How much time do they really want?" "How much flexibility do I have to do things the way that I want to?" "Is the work meaningful — is the effort worth the time?" "Will I be micromanaged?" In other words, the agenda of the person making the request can be very different from the person who is being asked to volunteer. Sounds pretty obvious, doesn't it? It is, but...if you're an insider, and someone who is involved in congregational life, it's so easy to forget that other potential new volunteers may not share your natural enthusiasm!

Session goals:

- Understand the supports, values, and attitudes needed to create a sustained culture of volunteer engagement.
- Consider the variety of motivations for becoming a volunteer in your volunteer recruitment efforts.
- (Re)design volunteer engagement opportunities in three areas of synagogue life that will result in volunteers having deeply satisfying experiences.

At a Glance: A Culture of Volunteer Engagement

Currently, the most sophisticated and useful resources for congregational volunteering is *The Engaged Congregation Series*, found at Repair Labs. (The volunteer *brit* (contract) below is adapted from this series.) They offer a comprehensive "step-by-step process of creating and maintaining a culture of volunteer engagement." While I encourage you to spend the time working with these exceptional resources, here is how you can begin strengthening your volunteer culture now.

Please remember that in a platform model, you are not simply handing a "job description" to a potential

volunteer. Rather, you are developing a *brit*, an agreement infused with Jewish values, a co-created statement of understanding that can only be drafted after the staff person and volunteer have built a relationship through discussion. The talents and strengths of the volunteer member are surfaced in this discussion and put to work. There is give-and-take in a transparent conversation about expected outcomes, how to best get the work done, and how to split responsibilities. By putting everything on the table up front, staff and volunteers have a greater chance of success not only in what they achieve together but how they collaborate to get it done.

Questions to Motivate You to Foster Healthier Volunteer Relationships and Talent

Are you ready to invest time in meeting with people in order to:

1. Clarify the task;
2. Understand their motivations and expertise;
3. Provide support; and
4. Give them an arena for finding personal meaning?

Tactics for Fostering Volunteer Relationships and Talent

As a congregational board, along with senior staff members, complete this template for a volunteer *brit* for board members and try to keep it to one page in length:

Volunteer *Brit*

Title: Think carefully about the title you develop with your volunteer. A title can be a motivator. A “volunteer placement counselor” has more dignity than asking them to “follow up with new volunteers.”

Tasks: Accurately describe the responsibilities and expectations in three or four key areas. Help them envision the work that they are being asked to do, and solicit their ideas for different ways to achieve the same goals.

Impact: Stating the impact of the volunteer assignment can also be a significant motivator. Think about impact on two levels: 1) The effect that the volunteer’s work will have on some aspect of the congregation, and 2) How the volunteer may be changed in some way (for example, learning a new skill, meeting new people, etc.).

Training: Volunteers want to do a good job and may be concerned about having the skills to perform the job. If training is needed, you can allay those concerns by indicating the availability and nature of the training. For example: “The congregation will provide two hours of training on providing support to homebound congregants.”

Support: Support defines the ongoing resources that the volunteer will receive throughout the volunteer experience. For example: “Volunteer visitors to homebound congregants will meet twice per year to share their experiences and strengthen their connection to the synagogue.”

Time Commitment: Define the length of time that the volunteer is expected to contribute. Are the hours flexible? Can the volunteer work from home or do they need to be at the synagogue?

Benefits: How will the volunteer benefit from the experience (for example: meeting new people, acquiring new skills, etc.)?

In Hebrew, the word for generosity, *nedivut*, the word for volunteer, *mitnadev*, and the verb to donate, *l'nadev*, all come from the same root, “n-d-v.” This semantic connection reflects a deeper connection. Oftentimes, when people give in one way, they are motivated to give in other ways. Volunteers who give of their time may perceive the synagogue’s real need for financial assistance. Volunteers may also come to value the synagogue in new ways and thus come to see the congregation as a valuable resource worthy of their financial support. Generosity of time and money are mutually reinforcing, creating a strong emotional commitment.

Text for Reflection

“(Ben Azzai would say): Do not scorn any person...for there is no person who has not his or her hour...”

— *Pirkei Avot* 4:3

Commentary: American Jews have high levels of achievement in arts, education, business, and science, just to name a few areas. And regardless of achievement, every human being contains the same Divine spark.

Questions:

1. How would your congregation be different if you made it a goal to identify the unique talents of five to 10 new volunteers a year and use them at the right time?
2. What kind of preparation would be required for you to use these volunteers judiciously?
3. How can you track synagogue volunteer skills using a database? (View www.idealware.org/reports/synagogue-management for a comprehensive report on current customer relations management software options.)

Additional Resources for Congregational Engagement

Walfish, Mordy. *The Engaged Congregation Series.* Available at <http://repairlabs.org>.

SESSION 6

Principles of Entrepreneurship

The scenario about Temple Torah reflects a picture of an entrepreneurial congregation. Here, I expand upon that presentation to drive home the importance of entrepreneurship in a synagogue-as-platform environment. A friendly suggestion as you work through this session: when using these new resources and the material from *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today*, acknowledge that working in this capacity can be challenging. Not “entrepreneurship,” but adaptation, evolution, and incremental change are the values that characterize most congregational cultures and professionals spend little or no time on what it means to be a spiritual entrepreneur.

Session goals:

- Explore areas within your congregation where spiritual and volunteer leaders are ready to apply principles of entrepreneurship.
- Be generally successful, but also fail once or twice so that you will learn how resilient your leadership really is.
- Have a plan in place for communicating your intention to work this way within one area of the congregation.

At a Glance: Principles of Entrepreneurship

Social media platforms foster entrepreneurship. One reason they do is that new and diverse voices, ideas, and perspectives can now become a part of the discussion — fueling virtually unlimited possibilities for innovation and growth. And here's the payoff for doing so: new ideas that expand congregational thinking can solve many problems that even money can't! Social media platforms enable you to strategically include individuals who have been excluded and tap into a deep well of ideas that seed the ground for becoming entrepreneurial.

“Innovation” is a catchphrase everywhere we look, and it is often used as a substitute for entrepreneurship, but there is a difference between them:

- Innovation requires creativity but, unlike entrepreneurship, does not address issues like tolerance for risk, organizational agility, improvisational ability, and speed.
- Innovation often comes in bursts after focusing on discrete ideas and issues, while entrepreneurship requires cultivating a certain kind of culture, defined by a set of practices and attitudes that are infused throughout an organization.

Questions to Motivate You Become More Entrepreneurial

1. What big opportunity do you see for your congregation? How long have you perceived it? What do you need to help actualize this opportunity?
2. When was the last time your congregation failed? What was your reaction to that failure? What was your leadership's response to the failure?
3. Who in your congregation or community has experience with start-ups — whether starting new companies, launching new products, or working within established settings to increase their entrepreneurial behavior?

Tactics to Help You Embrace a More Entrepreneurial Culture

The diagnostic tool below will help you explore some of the practices and attitudes that you will need to embrace a culture of entrepreneurship. If your congregation has a particular ingredient, use the space to list in what aspects of congregational life it surfaces most frequently. If you need more of a particular ingredient, use the space to list your current barriers to having more.

Entrepreneurial Ingredient	We have it: Where does it surface?	We need more of it: What are our barriers?
Passion: We only do work that contributes to making a real difference in people’s lives and in the community.		
Flexibility: We can change course quickly. Optimism: Where others see problems, we see opportunities.		
Honesty: When something is clearly not working, we admit it and move on.		
Competitiveness: Within our Jewish value set, we do what it takes to succeed.		
Curiosity: We experiment with how to improve what we do.		
Reinvention: We mix-and-match elements from diverse programs and sources to create something better.		
Fun: Because we work hard, we create environments where staff and volunteers enjoy their work.		
Failure: We believe that if we don’t fail, we’re aiming too low.		
High Aspirations: “Low-hanging fruit” sounds unappetizing because it doesn’t make us stretch.		
Beta-Testing: We test ideas in pilot form, learn by doing, and gather feedback.		
Solution-Oriented Outlook: When something goes wrong, we problem-solve rather than blame.		
No Red Tape: We can move quickly through our bureaucracy, especially when new opportunities present themselves.		
Transparency: We communicate our progress during our experimentation — the good, the bad, and the ugly.		

Texts for Reflection

“(When God revealed the Torah), each and every word divided itself into seventy languages.”

— Talmud Bavli, *Shabbat* 88b

Commentary: One of the insights this text offers is that there is a multiplicity of ways of approaching an opportunity, so try generating several possibilities first before gravitating toward one.

Questions:

1. In discussing entrepreneurial opportunities, how can you keep the discussion at the strategic level and not move immediately to tactics?
2. What will your response be to the person at the meeting who says, “We tried that once and it won’t work,” when presenting an entrepreneurial idea?

Additional Resources on Entrepreneurship

Kawasaki, Guy. *The Art of the Start: The Time-Tested, Battle-Hardened Guide for Anyone Starting Anything.* New York: Penguin Group, 2004.

Kawasaki, Guy. *Reality Check: The Irreverent Guide to Outsmarting, Outmanaging, and Outmarketing Your Competition.* New York: Penguin Group, 2008.

SESSION 7

Exploring the Future

The fictional Temple Torah created an “envisioning committee,” featured on pages 17 – 18 of *Tomorrow’s Synagogue Today*. It was described as a diverse group deployed to quickly explore societal trends and integrate them within the synagogue. Exploring the future can be extremely difficult for congregations. We’re about 4,000 years old as a people, so Judaism places great value on history and memory. That can be a liability when it comes to developing the capacity to explore the future. On the other hand, one of the keys to our endurance as a people has been our ability to reimagine, time and time again, changing forms of Jewish expression. For example, Biblically-based Temple Judaism could not be more different from the worldview of Lurianic Kabbalah of medieval Spain. Our textual tradition has rooted us in the past, while our prophets and leaders have led us into the unexplored future.

Session goals:

- Have all staff and at least three to five lay leaders explore some aspect of the future that has potential relevance for or impact upon your congregation.
- Make a presentation to the board on the importance of preparing for the future on an ongoing basis.
- Create a mechanism within your congregational leadership for scanning the future as a part of board and staff work.

At a Glance: Exploring the Future

Today, it seems that most synagogues have enough difficulty just keeping up with the responsibilities of daily congregational life, and only periodically peer into the future. But given the unprecedented velocity of technological and societal change, congregations that want to thrive must build the capacity of preparing for the future into their daily operations. This is no exaggeration — everyone who works for a congregation, and all congregational board, executive, and committee chairs, should own this task.

Questions to Motivate You to Become More Future-Oriented

1. Can you commit to scheduling five minutes each day to scan the future?
 - a. Specifically focus the time on developments in fields that change rapidly, like medicine and medical technology, entertainment, and technology. What other fields might you look to?

2. The next time you’re shopping in a store that has greeting cards, spend a minute or two scanning the different kinds of occasions that greeting cards address. Ask yourself, “What do they say about how family is defined and what old and new milestones are considered noteworthy?” What are the implications for synagogue life?
3. In what ways has technology had a positive and a negative impact on your life? How can synagogues exploit the positive changes to provide a higher-quality experience and how can synagogues help people respond to negative changes?

Tactics to Get You Started Acting Like a Futurist

- Become a trendspotter by subscribing to newsletters, magazines, and blogs that scout early trends, like *Iconoculture*, *Scoop.it!*, and *Fast Company* (some of my favorites). They will stimulate your thinking about new opportunities or emerging challenges. Spend a few minutes at each board and committee meeting discussing what you have learned.
- Elliott Masie, an international expert in learning trends, suggests meeting with “learning scouts” on a regular basis. A learning scout is someone who brings a perspective that is different from yours and serves as another set of eyes and ears to the world. For example, Masie suggests that you identify members of “the youngest generation,” the “retiring generation,” and a “tech scout,” and meet with them on a regular basis to hear perspectives on issues and trends. You can identify your own categories of scouts, but Masie’s point about learning by meeting with individuals from diverse

perspectives is an easy, enjoyable, and creative way of keeping abreast of trends. Who are your learning scouts? Are you ready to meet with them on a regular basis? (Read more about Masie's work here: <http://trends.masie.com/archives/2006/2/13/381-lms-expectations-rise-learning-scouts-squidoo.html>.)

Text for Reflection

“Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said to his students, ‘Which is the best characteristic for a person to acquire?’....Rabbi Shimon said, ‘One should anticipate the future.’”

— *Pirkei Avot* 2:12

Commentary: Dwelling in the past is unhealthy and we can't plan for the present because it is fleeting. Rabbi Shimon reminds us that whatever time we have we will spend in the future, so we should plan to create the future we desire.

Concluding Thoughts

Organizing like a platform inverts the paradigm of synagogue-as-hierarchy. As with all paradigm shifts, you'll need time and support to make this move. And you'll need a cadre of leaders who share the same understanding and outlook. Once you begin operating in this mode, you'll have a more welcoming, vibrant place that recognizes the inherent and potential value of everyone walking in the door as we seek collectively to make meaning of our lives in a Jewish context.

Text for Reflection

“Rabban Gamliel, the son of Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi, says: ‘...Let all who exert themselves for the community exert themselves for the sake of heaven.’”

— *Pirkei Avot* 2:2

Questions:

1. How will you hold yourself accountable for learning about the future when you are so preoccupied by today?
2. Around what aspects of a positive future vision of your congregation do you feel the most passion?

Additional Resources on Futurism

Barker, Joel A. and Scott W. Erickson. *Five Regions of the Future: Preparing Your Business for Tomorrow's Technology Revolution*. New York: Penguin Group, 2005.

Fast Company, the magazine and website that focus on business and innovation.

Available at <http://www.fastcompany.com>.

Stanford Social Innovation Review, which covers solutions to global problems.

Available at <http://www.ssireview.org>.

Commentary: Being involved in a congregation gives people an opportunity to find transcendent purpose. As you work with staff and volunteers, you have an opportunity to help them experience the uplifting sense of purpose of being connected to an enterprise that is more significant than any solo endeavor.

Questions:

1. Which of the topics within these seven sessions require the most immediate attention?
2. To what are you prepared to commit to get started in creating tomorrow's synagogue today?

Note From the Author

When I wrote *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today: Creating Vibrant Centers of Jewish Life*, I knew there was more that I wanted to say. The book, as published, is a thought piece on how to help move synagogues into the 21st century. But I thought it would benefit from the inclusion of Jewish texts to stimulate reflection on the issues and practical tools and resources to help readers begin to apply some of the principles.

Through the support of **SYNERGY**: UJA-Federation of New York and Synagogues Together and the Alban Institute, I am able to address this gap with this companion guide for study and action. I thank both UJA-Federation of New York and the Alban Institute, who do amazing work for the congregational community — individually and in collaboration with one another.

Along the way, I had the very good fortune of meeting a fellow consultant, Lianna Levine Reisner, who was very helpful in researching aspects of this guide.

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