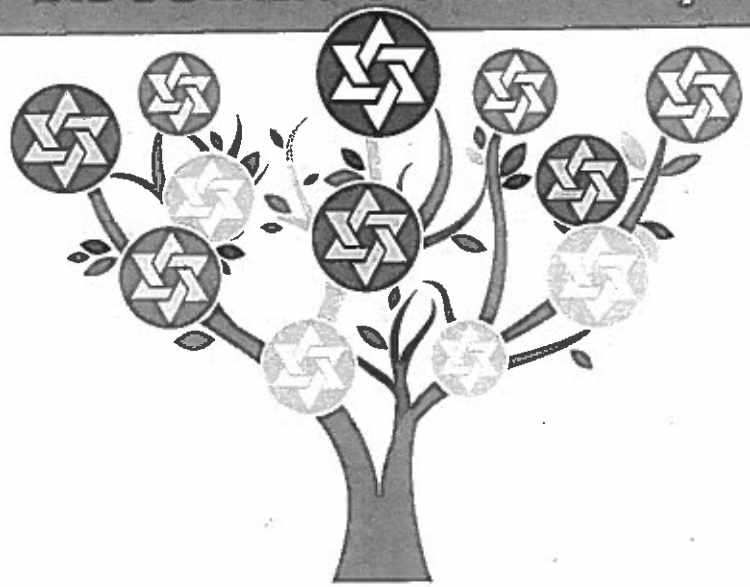
Relational Judaism

Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community



Dr. Ron Wolfson

For People of All Faiths, All Backgrounds

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> How many people seeking to enter Jewish life are never asked to share their story? Instead, they are given brochures touting the organization and what it does … or asked to fill out a form … or begged to volunteer for a committee … or solicited for money. The message is, "We put our programs first. Let us tell you *our* story … and then, maybe, maybe … we'll have the time to listen to yours."
>
> It should be the other way around.

When Rabbi Zoë Klein became senior rabbi of Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles, she was advised by the board to "tell her story" to the congregation. She felt differently:

> *The way people really feel connected to you is not if they know your story, but if they feel you know their story. If the rabbi knows your story, then you feel like you are seen, you matter, you are in relationship. So, I set up small groups in my study—six to eight people—to share a "Sacred Stories Haggadah" experience; we had a little Kiddush, karpas appetizer, we told the story of the congregation, and then I would invite people to add their own stories by answering the question "What was your journey that brought you to this place?" We concluded with a blessing. Some 250 people shared their stories with me and with each other. It was powerful.*

Rabbi Will Berkovitz, an early leader of Jconnect, puts it this way:

> *There are two kinds of conversation we have with young Jews. At a big event, when we meet someone new, we ask them a few questions to get to know them … and then immediately link them with others who might share something in common—Jewish geography, affinity, profession, or interest. This happens in the space of just a few minutes of conversation. Our goal is to link them into a microcommunity, a smaller subset of our larger network.*
>
> *The second type of conversation often happens over coffee. We know that in the emerging adult world, young people ages twenty-one to forty are trying to answer the*

describes offices where employees sit glued to their computers, iPads, and smartphones, texting each other rather than talking together. A sixteen-year-old boy who uses texts to communicate almost everything says wistfully, "Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I'd like to learn how to have a conversation."

As Turkle laments, the move from conversation to connection has reduced "messy and demanding" human relationships to edited postings of who we want to be, not who we really are. "It's a process in which we shortchange ourselves. Worse, it seems that over time we stop caring, forgetting there is a difference." The technologies provide the "illusion of companionship" without the demands of relationship. Turkle argues there is no substitute for face-to-face conversation that unfolds slowly, requires patience, and allows self-reflection. "We think constant connection will make us feel less lonely. The opposite is true." She writes movingly of walking the sand dunes on Cape Cod, where "not too long ago, people walked with their heads up, looking at the water, the sky, the sand and at one another, talking. Now they often walk with their heads down, typing. Even when they are with their friends, partners, children, everyone is on their own devices. So, I say, look up at one another, and let's start the conversation."[6]

Let's create institutions of Relational Judaism that welcome the conversation.

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICES

As exciting as a listening campaign or house meeting can be, it can be challenging to create a culture of empathetic listening. Sometimes someone dominates the discussion, hopes to have individual problems solved, or keeps the story they tell at a surface level. Community organizers suggest the following ten steps to maximize the effectiveness of storytelling:

1. Be clear in the PR/invitation about what will happen.
2. Build in snacks and schmooze time early in the evening to get that level of conversation out of the way.

3. Choose the first storyteller in advance. Work with that person to share a model story.
4. Teach the value of *derekh eretz*—respect.
5. Have a timekeeper, and be willing to cut people off in a gentle way. Be consistent about time.
6. Grant permission not to speak, but encourage people to trust the process.
7. Bring God into sacred time—keep the story rooted in Jewish experience.
8. Create a safe place for sharing real stories about real struggles.
9. Check in with the group to assess agreement to the ground rules of the meeting before proceeding. "Is it okay with everyone that we'll cut you off after five minutes?"
10. Thank people for sharing their stories.

I observed Rabbi Stephanie Kolin train the leadership team at Stephen S. Wise Temple, Los Angeles, in the art of holding a one-on-one conversation. She distinguished what a one-on-one is ... and is not:

> *A one-on-one is not: an interview, chitchat, a monologue, a date, therapy, pastoral counseling, selling, preaching, giving opinions, prying. A one-on-one is: beginning of a relationship, a facilitated conversation, sharing public stories about who we are and what we care about, listening carefully, building trust, enriching for both, finding commonalities, being truly curious about the other, a sacred exchange, asking "why" questions, listening for "self-interest," hearing concerns and worries.*

A good one-on-one lasts between thirty minutes and an hour and, if the person is someone you would like to engage more deeply, concludes with an offer to meet again or join in organizing.

Community organizers are justifiably hesitant to put in writing their approach to engaging people in one-on-one conversations and

listening campaigns. It is difficult to put into words what is essentially a process that can truly only be experienced. Thus, the best way to learn these skills is to participate in trainings and seminars sponsored by the expert practitioners of the art. In the Jewish community, the go-to organizations of organizers are Just Congregations at the Union for Reform Judaism and JOIN for Justice: Jewish Organizing Institute and Network. A good description of the process may be found in *Where Justice Dwells: A Hands-On Guide to Doing Social Justice in Your Jewish Community* (Jewish Lights Publishing) by Rabbi Jill Jacobs.

There are a number of additional creative strategies for organizations to engage people in conversation: Open Space technology—any participant can list a topic of interest and gather others wishing to discuss the issue; the World Café—small groups meeting around a question; StoryLooms—knitting together tactiles to tell stories; Digital StoryWeavers—on-the-spot video of conversations; Word Cloud of Commitments—a visual depiction of word frequency used in stories; and live texting of responses during conversations, dialogue, and lectures. At a unique Rosh Hashanah "experience" sponsored by The Tribe, Miami's Next *Dor* site, young Jewish adults texted emotions and responses to the event, which were projected onto large screens set behind the pulpit.[7]

3) Learning Together / Doing Together

Margaret Thatcher once famously said to a volunteer group; "True companionship comes not from *being* together, but from *doing* together."

One of the most effective Jewish ways of "doing together" is to invite people to learn together. For centuries, Jews have been gathering in the *beit midrash*—the house of study—to sit in pairs around tables in face-to-face encounter with a text between them, reading the words of a text out loud and working together to decipher its meaning. The very word that describes this pedagogic process—*hevruta*—reveals the core of the relational experience. *Hevruta* comes from the Hebrew root *haver*, "friend." The Talmud famously states, *O hevruta o metuta*, "Either one has friendship, or else one has death" (*Ta'anit* 23a).

Why is the classical model of Jewish study relational? Chancellor Arnold M. Eisen offers his perspective:

> *whatever—our people feel that we care about them. We take people seriously; we validate who they are. The proudest feeling I have about this Reconstructionist place is that we are as self-consciously nonjudgmental as any synagogue could be. Relationships grow out of that kind of attitude. It boils down to one thing: everybody wants a little attention. Care about them, care for them, and they will connect with you forever.*

Connecting to Friends

Richard Address is another rabbi who recently took on a pulpit position after serving in a national organization for more than thirty years. He met some two hundred people in "meet and greets" over the first summer in the job.

> *I asked every single one of them why they belong to M'kor Shalom. Not one said, "Because I am committed to the interpretations of liberal, progressive Judaism as embodied in the Reform movement." They all said, "I enrolled my kid in a preschool, I met some other parents, we became friends, we share our lives together."*

Tzivia Getzug Schwartz conducted focus groups for the Los Angeles Jewish Federation as the leadership considered new initiatives to engage young Jewish adults. "In all the focus groups, it became very clear that everyone is looking for social connection." Consequently, the LA Federation is creating NuRoots, an ambitious citywide effort to engage young Jews.

Some institutions connect people by affinity, people who share something in common. Federations organize their fundraising groups by affinity: women's groups, real estate guys, lawyers, young Jewish adults. Some synagogues have had success with men's groups (Guys Night Out, Brews with Jews), elder adult learners, the usual "sisterhoods" and "men's clubs." Other communities have found affinity groups didn't work. IKAR discovered that the lawyers in the community did not want to be with other lawyers on their "downtime."

Neighborhood groups often work well. As a result of a year-long CBCO listening campaign, Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco,

into the service. When I commented approvingly, the president of the shul said to me, "Ron, you liberated Wes from the bimah."

Rabbi Gardenswartz never learned how to do this in rabbinical school. Nor do Jewish communal professionals, teachers, and educators learn it. But, this is a skill everyone who works within the Jewish community needs to have in a Relational Judaism, both to offer a sincere welcome—the first step in building a relationship—and to model welcoming behavior for the other professionals and lay leaders on our institutional teams.

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICES

Rabbi Alan Silverstein is known as the social networker of his Conservative congregation, Agudath Israel in Caldwell, New Jersey. I asked him how he builds relationships with his congregants and guests ... in the sanctuary itself:

> *My view of the world is this: when somebody comes into my house, I must, to the best of my ability, properly welcome them, make them feel comfortable, and network them to others. This is the* mitzvah *of* hakhnasat orchim. *The congregation is my house. If somebody comes into a shul, they partake of the davening, listen to the sermon, but they don't connect with people, it's a diminished experience for them. So, first and foremost, this is a calling, a mission.*
>
> *I use my vantage point on the bimah to locate people I don't know who have come into the sanctuary and don't seem to be connected to some cluster of guests. Once I spot that person, I motion to my surrogates—the cantor, education director, executive director, membership committee people, and outgoing lay leaders—to come up to the bimah, and I'll say to them, "See those folks in the fourth row from the back on the left? Can you do the* mitzvah *and greet them and find out if this is their first time here? Are they visiting, or are they members of the*

shul who haven't been here in a long time? How can we best meet their needs?" You wouldn't expect someone you don't know to come into the living room of your home and not make an effort to find out who they are. That's the second thing: identify the people who need to be networked.

Third thing: once we identify folks, I have to figure out how to make them feel networked, even while they're in the sanctuary. If I see it's a young couple with little kids, I'll have someone from the same demographic group go over to them, welcome them, and invite any or all of that group who wants to come to Torah Tots, Mini-minyan, or any of the other parallel activities about to happen to come with them so they don't go alone. If they send the kids to junior congregation and they come back into the sanctuary, I'll have people in their demographic come over and say something like, "You know, it's not real comfortable sitting by yourself, why don't you come over and sit with a bunch of us ... and then we'll all go to sit-down Kiddush *together." Some people will say, "No thanks, I prefer to remain here." But most of the time, people say, "Oh, that's really nice." So there's some bonding going on even during the service.*

To the extent we can, we offer a low-anxiety honor—read in English, open the ark—and most people are delighted. We don't give them an aliyah *in Hebrew unless the person walks in comfortably wearing a big tallit, davening up a storm. Bottom line: make people feel comfortable. Even so, some will say, "I came to be left alone and meditate, and all these people are bothering me ..." But I would rather err on the side of our value of* hakhnasat orchim *than on the side of indifference.*

Fourth thing: when the service ends, we have a Shabbat virtual community format every week. We don't allow the Bar Mitzvah to upend our communal

After a one-hour family service, kids adjourn to classrooms organized by grade, while parents gather for an adult learning experience. Many of the parents did not know each other when they joined the program. One of the parents suggested a camping weekend, which has become a much-anticipated annual experience.

> *It turns out that eating communal meals together during the weekend or for potluck lunch or dinner Saturday night is critical. The conversations begun in the adult learning continue. And, now, the families see each other socially. Plus, the kids want their Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies to be in the family worship, not during the usual private service. This has become their community, their relationships.*

Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California, has created a two-year "new member engagement" process to follow up their creative covenanting ceremony. In the first year, Our Jewish Home offers small groups of new families four sessions:

1. An initial meeting in a lay leader's home. Personal stories are shared and linked to the "master Jewish story" through a Torah learning experience. Families are given a copy of the *Tanakh* (the entire Hebrew Bible) as a welcome gift.
2. Meeting at the synagogue, families are taken on a physical and programmatic tour of the congregation. The message is "you are needed here" and "we can help you find your place."
3. One of the new member families hosts session three, during which individuals complete a "learning plan" for next steps of involvement in the four pillars of the congregation: *Torah* (wisdom), *Avodah* (spirituality), *Chesed* (care for others), and *Chevre* (social encounters).
4. Session four is a Shabbat morning family service. New families are welcomed into the congregation with a group *aliyah*; the synagogue hosts a luncheon after services.

Year two of the induction process is titled Living a Jewish Life. A small group of families meets with a rabbi monthly over the course of the year in each other's homes, culminating in a family retreat over a Shabbat weekend. The curriculum consists of "big Jewish ideas," how to celebrate holidays in the home, and how to talk to your kids about God. Individuals are encouraged to join an affinity group or volunteer on a committee in order to engage in the life of the broader synagogue community.

During the two years, clergy are on the lookout for potential future leaders of the congregation. Some become mentors/ambassadors to subsequent new members; others eventually become members of the board. The goal is to create strong relationships with the clergy, with each other, with Jewish practice, and with the synagogue community.

Connecting to Young Professionals

When the American Jewish Committee approached its one-hundredth anniversary in 2005, the leadership asked a tough question: what did the organization need to do to reinvent itself, to attract smart young leaders interested in policies affecting the Jewish community? The answer: AJC created ACCESS, a new structure to build relationships with young Jews. In the words of Daniel Inlender, a young ACCESS leader in Los Angeles, ACCESS

> *gives my generation a voice at the table, and, yes, access to the highest levels of debate and policy formation. Participating in these conversations, taking intensive trips to Washington, D.C., and abroad, all help build relationships between members and with the organization.*

By focusing on the needs and interests of young Jews that may, in fact, be quite different from the senior leadership and empowering them to act, ACCESS has "unlocked the magic of creating a structure for young Jews within a traditional organization," according to the review in *Slingshot*, a prestigious annual listing of fifty innovative initiatives in the Jewish community.

Connecting to Teenagers

At Temple Beth Elohim in Wellesley, Massachusetts, there are, count 'em, five full-time Jewish educators who work in some way with a teenage engagement program called *Havayah* (Hebrew for "experience"; www.tbeyouth.org). Laura Hyman, director of *Havayah*, explains:

> *We have a lot of staff who spend time building relationships with kids—take them for coffee, see them at temple, encourage them to go to camp. They come all week long, at different times, and when they are there, someone on staff can connect with them. For example, we have a group called JAWs: Jewish Actors Workshop—twenty-five kids who work with an educator, a graduate of the program, and they love him. We do a lot of building community in small groups. We have kids who like to cook, who do art, a choir, a leadership course, several Rosh Hodesh: It's A Girl Thing groups, several boys' groups (Jew Man Group) ... teenagers are interested in gender-based programming; they want a safe space to talk about their own issues with an adult. We run several Shabbatonim each year, regular youth group events, a teen-to-teen mentoring program, and social action projects. Our senior rabbi, Joel Sisenwine, says, "If the kids know the aleph-bet, but they don't know each other's names, we have failed." Our culture is all about relationships. The key is having full-time staff around all the time; they keep tabs on a lot of the kids.*

5) Experiences

Personal encounters, telling our stories, and connecting people to each other create the foundation for engaging in a Relational Judaism. But, then what? How can institutions move the newly engaged into "action"?

Graham Hoffman makes the startling observation that the "program paradigm" is so strong that it has taken seven years to "change the vocabulary" in the Hillel system:

> *Programming is the only thing young leadership has been trained to do. Beginning in youth group, at summer camps, in synagogues and JCCs, it's all about creating cute titles, setting up seats, ordering enough food, getting the PR out, and hoping people show up. When are these young leaders taught how to do relational work? Almost never.*

The assumption has been that if people come to a program, they will meet others and build friendships. Yet, many participants will say they come to programs and barely meet anybody. Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, comments:

> *Programs don't sustain anything. You can have fancy brochures, all sorts of adult learning, Torah study on Shabbat morning. But, then you walk in and wonder: Did anyone know that I was there? Did anyone care that I was there? Buber is the underpinning. If synagogue is based on fancy-shmancy Judaically closed I–It relationships where it's all instrumentalities—we want to get people in the building to do this or that—it doesn't work. We are deconstructing the programmatic synagogue; I don't know one that has been sustaining, that is not a lot of smoke and mirrors. The synagogues where it's happening are all built on relationships, webs of deep personal relationships. That's the Jewish tradition.*

Rabbi Steven Wernick, CEO of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, understands the importance of a relational community; he has literally changed the language of Conservative congregations from "synagogue" to *kehillah*—community. Rabbi Wernick comments:

> *It's all about relationships today. If "identity" and "affiliation" were the bywords of the past, "engagement" is all about relationships. It's essential for clergy to get out of their offices ... and for* kehillah *leadership to be part of that relationship building. You can't expect professionals to be the only ones to do that. Relationships are all about the trust that people will make the right decisions based on*

shared values. Successful synagogues are doing this. We have to move from membership to meaning and from programs to purpose.

Transforming "programs" into "experiences" is the first "action" task of Relational Judaism. In the field of education, teachers are trained to think of two major goals for every lesson plan to shape the experience in the classroom: *cognitive goals*—what we want students to know as a result of the experience—and *affective goals*—what we want them to feel. We need to add a *relational goal*—how we want our people to deepen relationships, between themselves and others and between themselves and the Nine Levels of Relationship: self, family, friends, Jewish living, community, peoplehood, Israel, the world, and God.

Experiential education has emerged in recent years as one of the most effective efforts to engage people with Judaism. "Immersive experiences," such as summer camp, retreats, conferences, trips to Israel, social justice missions, intensive study opportunities, and organic farming, take the Sovereign-Self Jews out of their daily lives and insert them into real, natural, authentic Jewish environments. These experiences share certain characteristics:

1. Content—something is learned
2. Emotion—something is felt
3. Food—something is eaten
4. Role models—someone leads
5. Action—something is accomplished
6. Celebration—some recognition of achievement

Another important aspect of transformative experiential education is the understanding that the participants are full partners with the leaders in shaping the flow and outcome of the experience. "Programs" often feature an educator, a communal worker, or clergy doing something *to* or *for* the participants. In "experiences," the leaders do something *with* the participants. Barry Chazan, philosopher of Jewish education, calls this "person-centered" Jewish education, a curriculum of Jewish experiences and values, taught through an interactive process within a

5. Each store features a Genius Bar for in-depth consultations with trained experts, who work to "rebuild relationships" with those having difficulties.
6. Purchasers of Mac computers can sign up for One to One private counseling sessions, a $99 one-year membership program. Apple understands that the more you understand, use, and enjoy their products, the more likely you are to have a long relationship with the company.
7. The Apple Store teaches its employees to follow five steps in each and every interaction: Approach with a customized, warm greeting; Probe politely to understand the customer's needs; Present a solution the customer can take home today; Listen for and address unresolved questions; End with a fond farewell and an invitation to return. Yes, the acronym is: APPLE.[14]

Imagine a Jewish institution applying these principles in fashioning a model of "quality service experience" for engaging people. It would begin with a clear vision that the goal is to enrich lives with meaning and purpose, belonging and blessing. Every staff member, every lay leader would practice radical hospitality. They would spend time with each and every individual one-on-one, probing politely for their story to understand their needs. The institution would present a wide variety of Jewish experiences that don't stay in the building, but empower people to "take it home." It would begin by focusing on what many Jews already do—Passover Seder, Hanukkah candle lighting, Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations, *brit* and *simchat bat*, weddings, funerals, Yom Kippur break-fasts—and equip them to offer and engage in the experiences with joy, creativity, and meaning. The relationships created would lower barriers to participation and enable people to share their innermost questions and challenges. Everyone would feel inspired and grateful, eager to recommend engagement and affiliation to others. If Apple can do it, why can't we?

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICES

The Playground Minyan Experience

Rabbi Noah Farkas has created an engaging Shabbat morning worship experience for families with young children at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California. In a preschool classroom immediately adjacent to the early childhood center playground, a portable ark and chairs are set up for a fairly traditional Conservative davening. Lay leaders share in the organizing, prayers, Torah reading, and sermons. But the proximity of the playground allows kids free access to and fro, while parents can pray and watch their children through the classroom windows or join them.

In addition, Rabbi Farkas created a safe space for moms and dads to be with the littlest children in davening space. "My vision is a mom holding a baby and reading Torah for her community. Our children learn to be Jewish by watching us be Jewish. The minyan is a sacred space in which a baby's cry is an accepting amen to any prayer."

Bottom line: think "relational experiences," not "one-off programs."

6) Volunteerism

Volunteerism in the Jewish community is in trouble. I hear the complaints from institutional leaders all the time: "People are too busy." "Dual-career households have decimated a key source of volunteer help." "It's easier to get people to write a check than to donate time."

I think there are other issues at play. There are often so few people volunteering to join "committees" that those who do are made the chairperson immediately. And, once on the committee, it becomes a life sentence—you never get off! Neither pleas nor "please" is working.

The institutional approach to recruiting volunteers is in need of transformation. In the old model, people were given a list of committees to join, and the organization's leaders hoped for the best. Even

when individuals checked off something on the intake form, many institutions rarely followed up. The approach is backward. This list of committees emphasizes the priorities and programs of the institution. In a Relational Judaism, the approach to engagement puts people first, not a predetermined list of generalized issues such as "youth committee" or "social justice committee." Rather, individuals are asked to identify their talents, abilities, and passions. Then, and only then, can the institutional leaders link the person with a team or a project-based group to join. This is a far more labor-intensive process than giving people a check-off list, but it has the potential to be much more effective in engaging volunteers.

Time is another problem when it comes to recruiting volunteers. People really are very busy, juggling work, family, and social obligations, especially with the constant pressure of our social networks demanding instantaneous response. One answer is to appeal for volunteers on a time-limited basis. "Are you able to give us three weeks of your help? We have a specific task to do, there will be no long meetings, and when the event is over, we're done." Most people will find the time to respond to this "ask."

Another consideration to improve volunteerism as a path to engagement is to think about how you yourself were recruited to be a volunteer. When I ask people to reflect on this question, the answer I hear most often is, "I was tapped on the shoulder. Someone asked me." The power of personal invitation rests on the foundation of relationship. Asking someone to help out is asking the person to enter into a social contract. If someone you know or respect asks you to participate, the chances of a "yes" are exponentially increased. This is as true in recruiting volunteers as it is in fundraising; personal relationships, knowing someone's passions and concerns, understanding capacity, making the ask, expressing appreciation, following up—these are the critical steps in a relationship-based organization.

Volunteers can be recruited after people share experiences together. Take a mission to Israel, build a Habitat for Humanity house, work a soup kitchen, put on a play, create a quilt, have an adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah … and you are likely to be able to call on people you were with to

help out. Find people who share the same passions and interests, who believe in the same cause, and you can gather support. Look to those in the same life stage—singles, parents of young children, parents of teenagers, empty nesters—and recruit them with engagement opportunities shaped to their interests and needs.

The language of volunteerism needs transformation, as well. Changing the business language of "committees" into the relational language of "teams" and "partners" will go a long way toward creating a different ambience among the volunteer corps.

The experience of volunteering itself will be different in an institution informed by Relational Judaism. Working with others on a project can bind people together, but only if attention is paid to relationship building. We learned this lesson in Synagogue 2000 when we insisted that the leadership team begin every session with "check-in," a brief opportunity for every person in the room to share something about her or his personal life. I am reminded of the power of the quilting bee, when groups of women would join together to craft beautiful quilts, but through sharing the stories of their lives as they worked, they crafted deeper relationships among themselves.

The truth is that people eagerly volunteer to help with those organizations in which they have a vested interest. Rabbi Dara Frimmer of Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles observes:

> *The moms in our preschool will do just about anything we ask them to do if they believe it will benefit their children. And they volunteer for other organizations around town whose causes speak to them. Our task is to make the experience of volunteering so compelling and so meaningful and so rich in relationships that they will want to continue to give of their most precious commodity: time.*

For me, volunteering in the Jewish community is a sacred act. We can apply the lesson of the megachurch, which has successfully convinced their volunteers that, whatever they do, they are doing sacred work. The guys who direct traffic, the women who give up their worship experience to greet people, the teams who operate the food pantry, the teenagers who help out in the Sunday school—they have been

7) Follow-Up

All the engagement efforts in the world will be for naught if there is little or no follow-up. This is a chronic problem in Jewish institutional life. Demographic forms are filled out and collected, even entered into a database, and then no one calls. With the exception of some fundraisers, we do a generally poor job at cultivating and sustaining relationships with our people.

Lisa Colton comments on how most synagogues track their members:

> *In most cases, the databases we are using (and the ways in which we use them) are designed to track contact information, attendance at events, and perhaps donations history. Rarely are we using such tools to track, manage, and deepen relationships. As organizations seek to align their work for success in this connected age, we need to focus on strategy, tactics, and culture. Once you have a strategic direction, don't neglect the next two very important steps. Which database do you need, how will your staff use it, and what values and behavior do you need to model to pivot to a relational, connected culture?*

A key component of a relational approach to building community is tracking relationships. In an earlier time, organized professionals kept files on each person with whom they had built a relationship. "He has a great Rolodex [a physical card system]" was a common accolade for someone with many contacts. The best of the best at maintaining relationships would use these files and Rolodex cards to keep in touch with the people they met. Today, we have lists of "contacts" on our smartphones, "friends" on Facebook, and "circles" on Google+. Not so long ago, if I wanted to remember someone's birthday, I needed to look for a notation on the person's Rolodex card on my office desk; today, I get an automatic e-mail sent to me a week in advance reminding me that so-and-so's birthday is on such-and-such date. And yet, I yearn for a more personalized response. For Jewish professionals and lay leaders, personal phone calls, handwritten notes, and anything but a form letter or generic e-mail blast can make a huge impression.

therapists keep detailed accounts of each session with clients. The payoff is a better understanding of your people and a more effective way to follow up with the relationships you are creating, which is, of course, the reason for the data collection in the first place. The bottom line: the leaders embracing Relational Judaism have a wide array of technologies to assist in tracking, maintaining, and building relationships. It takes discipline to enter the data after an encounter, and it takes commitment to follow up to maximize the capability that the era of big data promises.

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICES

Some organizations do a good job following up with alumni. At Camp Ramah, Rabbi Ami Hersh is spearheading the development of a smartphone app, Ramah365, designed to keep the thousands of former and current campers connected to each other and to the institution.

8) Transition Points

We do well in our comfort zones. Many of us focus on one area of our institutional work. The early childhood professionals are engaged in the preschool at the JCC and have little connection to the teen youth educators. The synagogue-sponsored day school educators have tenuous relationships with the program director. The leadership in the various departments of Federation hardly know what their colleagues down the hall do … or, more important, whom they know. It is very easy to be siloed, to work in our own areas, to lose the forest for the trees. As mentioned earlier, we don't do a great job handing off our people from one institution to the next, from one program to the next, from one stage to the next.

There are six transition points on a family's Jewish journey through Jewish institutional life:

1. From institution shopper to member/affiliate
2. From preschool to religious school or day school

3. From Bar/Bat Mitzvah to high school
4. From high school to college
5. From postcollege to young Jewish adulthood
6. From child rearing to empty nesting

Among the questions our people ask:

- We were blessed with our first child. Where can I find other parents with the same age children to talk about parenting? Mommy and Me / Daddy and Me programs?
- Where do I look for preschool?
- What next after preschool? Day school? Religious school?
- How do I go shul shopping?
- Where do I connect with the Jewish community: Federation, Jewish fraternal groups, Zionist organizations, defense agencies?
- Which Jewish summer camp is best for my kids?
- How do I connect with Jewish role models: rabbis, cantors, educators, communal professionals, teachers?
- How do I connect my teenager to a youth educator?
- What about a trip to Israel with the family?
- Once the kids have flown the coop, how do I sustain connection and community?

I understand that it is challenging enough to organize and implement programs, and most leaders cannot imagine how they would find the time to ensure that their people are well coached to make decisions about their next steps when transitioning between these life stages. Yet, the "tap on the shoulder," the gentle encouragement that animates the question "Have you thought about ...?," the offer to refer and recommend the next "address" for engagement or the next opportunity for a meaningful experience with other Jews and Jewish living—these are fundamental characteristics of a professional and lay leadership working in a relational culture and our best chance at retaining the affiliation of those in our communities.

Transition Guides

As we saw above, the idea of a "concierge" to assist those with young children to find appropriate points of connection has been quite successful. In MetroWest New Jersey, an early childhood consultancy has taught preschools that forging relationships with families begins with their first inquiry. Building social connections and a web of friendships among the families themselves meets their need for community. If the preschool is in a JCC or synagogue, building bridges to the professionals and lay leadership of the institution can increase the chances of keeping the family engaged with the community after the child moves on to kindergarten or elementary school. Preschool directors ought to ask parents about their plans and help them make decisions. Incentives in the form of reduced tuition, free or discounted membership in a synagogue or JCC, free tickets to family High Holy Day services—all can help to increase the chances of continuing a family's affiliation with an institution.

But, the need for such guidance doesn't end at preschool.

We need the linker of silos, the concierge at the resort who knows all the activities, tourist sites, restaurants, and experiences not to be missed. Imagine a real live Yelp / Zagat / Angie's List referral service. Like a high school college guidance counselor who knows both the individual student and the colleges well and can thus suggest potential successful matchups, we ought to invest in transition guides who are available at these key decision-making moments when Jewish engagement can be sustained or end.

Institutions embracing Relational Judaism will have staff or laypeople who have built relationships with their members and stand ready to help them make decisions about next Jewish steps. In a synagogue, this could be the executive director, a community relationship manager, or a relationship director, certainly as valuable a position as a program director. At Shirat Hayam in Swampscott, Massachusetts, there are "synaguides" who help members and guests navigate the options offered by the congregation. In a JCC, it could be a "cross-seller," a benchmark person, or someone like Rachel Brodie, who after seven years directing Jewish Milestones—an outreach effort to guide unaffiliated Jews into Jewish engagement—now works as the CJO, the

10) Relational Space

Doug Pagitt is the pastor of Solomon's Porch, a "holistic missional Christian community" in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It is not "your father's church" ... not by a long shot. Pagitt's father, a big megapastor, took his young son on a tour of his megachurch complex and said, "Someday, son, this will all be yours." Pagitt answered, "I don't want it." Instead, he helped found the Emergent Church, a backlash to the megachurch movement. Along with colleagues Brian McLaren and Tony Jones, Pagitt reinvented "church" by focusing on traditional ritual, serious Bible text study, commitment to social justice, and building relationships. To physically reflect this shift, Pagitt and his congregation renovated an old church by tearing out the pews and installing big comfy couches, small sitting areas, and coffee tables—all designed to look like a private living room. As Pagitt puts it, "Do something with sacred space that aligns with your theology." This is a "relational space," conducive to conversations, face-to-face interaction, and relationship building. An entire wall features a collage of pictures of the diverse faces of people in the congregation.

Rabbi Karyn Kedar understands the power of relational space. She and her lay partners at B'nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim in Deerfield, Illinois, have created a spectacularly welcoming environment for building community. At the entrance of the synagogue building, an expansive lobby that looks like a reading room in a modern public library invites members and visitors to interact with each other. There are small sitting areas for conversation, a play area for children, a café, and tall tables for stand-up chats. Key values of the congregation—"Faith," "Courage," "Wisdom"—are inscribed in both English and Hebrew on columns framing the space. One wall features enclosed bins for collecting food, shoes, clothing, and other items for distribution to the needy. There is no library room stuck in the back of the building; the collection of books is sprinkled throughout the lobby on shelves, offering easy access for reading. An oblong alcove in the rear of the lobby contains the memorial plaques, a quiet meditative area for reflection. In the entryway to the building, an unfinished segment of the wall sports a simple Lucite sign: "The world is not completed. We are completing it."

- Wexner Heritage Foundation teaching Jewish studies courses in law offices
- Jewish Outreach Institute's "Mothers Circles," a small-group experience for interfaith moms raising Jewish children, meeting in each other's homes
- American Jewish University's public lecture series at the Gibson Amphitheatre in Universal City, California

An interesting wrinkle in public-space Judaism is the popularity of "pop-up" stores and events. These are one-off or short-term experiences designed to attract crowds that otherwise might not come to the normal bricks-and-mortar building. For example, a well-known gourmet French chef, Ludo Lefebvre, gave up his successful restaurant in Los Angeles to go on the road to cities across America where, in a week's time, he and his wife create a pop-up restaurant called LudoBites, which serves one meal only before moving on to the next community. My son Michael's best friend, Andrew Kessler, created a pop-up bookstore in Manhattan with three thousand copies of exactly one book, *Martian Summer: Robot Arms, Cowboy Spacemen, and My 90 Days with the Phoenix Mars Mission* by, you guessed it, Andrew Kessler. In December 2011, a pop-up 1950s-style record store in the popular Mission District of San Francisco called Tikva Records attracted hundreds of people to listen to and buy Jewish music during the run-up to Hanukkah.

Taking Judaism and Jewish experiences out of institutional buildings to where the Jews are is a powerful strategy to reach the unengaged and under-affiliated.

11) Relational Membership Models

How does a Relational Judaism membership model look different from a fee-for-service model? In the fee-for-service model, I pay dues up front and you—JCC—give me access to the gym, the pool, the library, the classes, the preschool for my kids, the summer camp, and the cultural arts programs. Likewise, I pay dues up front and you—synagogue—give me High Holy Day seats, a religious school for my kids, and a rabbi on call. But in the Relational Judaism model, I am

welcomed into a relationship with others in the community—professionals and lay—who care deeply about me, learn about me, network me, teach me, and are there for me in good times and bad. And once in relationship, I will give back to the community my time and my treasure out of gratitude. The truth is that those who have this level of relationship with a community often give larger donations beyond the normal "dues."

Rabbi Stephanie Kolin relates a horror story:

> *I have a neighbor whose mother died recently. She called a rabbi at a large synagogue in town to ask if he would officiate at the funeral. The rabbi says he's sorry, but the synagogue policy prevents him from doing the funeral: "We can't officiate at funerals and weddings of nonmembers." My neighbor doesn't understand this; she is completely turned off, rejected, bereft. She doesn't know where to turn. Do you think she'll be joining a synagogue anytime soon? And yet, these life-cycle moments are exactly when you can make Jews. Aren't we shooting ourselves in the foot by adhering to policies like this instead of opening our doors when people reach out?*

This relational model of membership must begin at the very beginning of the relationship between institution and individual. The megachurches understand this fully: from the minute you express interest in belonging (not "joining"), you are inducted into a culture of relationships with the people of the spiritual community and with God. In a four-session seminar, you are taught not simply about the benefits of belonging to the church; you are also taught about the obligations and responsibilities of being a member of the church.

Some Jewish spiritual communities are not shying away from this approach; they are openly embracing it.

IKAR

According to Melissa Balaban, executive director of IKAR (http://ikar-la.org), the leadership has steadfastly held to several core values: lower the bar for entrance, raise the bar for participation, offer a warm

welcome, and create high expectations among the community that everything will be done with excellence. She explains:

> *At IKAR, someone can come to services as much as you like and enjoy the sit-down Shabbat lunch, for no cost whatsoever. However, once you decide to join IKAR as a member, you agree to do four things:*
>
> 1. Community building. *We have a bare-bones staff, so we need your help. You can host a house party. You can build our website. You can coordinate High Holy Days. We'll find something for you to do. The first expectation is that you will give of your talents.*
> 2. Learning. *The second expectation is that we expect you to be learning. Everyone is on a learning journey, even if you're a rabbi or rabbinical student. That's the* ikar *("essence") of Judaism.*
> 3. Social justice. *The third expectation is that you will find a way to engage in the sacred work of social justice. We expect you to engage in our* Minyan Tzedek *work—food justice, immigration issues, direct service to those in need. You will receive a "spiritual pledge card" on the High Holy Days to make your commitment.*
> 4. Financial contribution. *Everyone at IKAR gives something. Some give $18, a lot give $180, some give $1,800 or much more. We make recommendations to you for your fair share. We expect that you will value your experience at IKAR so highly, you will be motivated to give generously to support your community.*

Kavana

Kavana (http://kavana.org) is an independent Jewish community in Seattle, Washington, led by Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum. It does not identify with any specific denominational label. Its mission:

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICES

In a widely read piece in *eJewish Philanthropy*, "Scrapping Synagogue Dues," Rabbi Dan Judson, a doctoral candidate at Brandeis University studying synagogues and money, presents the intriguing story of one large Conservative synagogue in suburban Boston, Temple Israel of Sharon, Massachusetts. In 2008, the congregation was facing a significant problem of declining revenue from dues. The price point had become so high that families were leaving. Even though members could apply for "dues abatement," it was clear that the process was embarrassing, so families just left. When the recession hit, things reached the point where a complete rethinking of the dues structure was urgent.

The first thought was to move to "fair share" dues, common in many synagogues, requiring 1 to 1.5 percent of the adjusted gross income of the family. According to Rabbi Judson, this was a nonstarter. What they came up with was even more radical; they abandoned dues altogether in favor of voluntary contributions. Members were told a "sustaining amount" each family would need to pay to meet the budget. They were encouraged to give more if feasible, but the message was, "You tell us how much you're going to pay."

Initially, revenue did decline, but at a lower rate (4 percent) than the decline in the previous year under the old system. However, within three years, revenues were actually up, despite the lingering recession. Moreover, the synagogue gained a net of twenty new families, reversing the previous steady decline of numbers. Some disaffiliated families returned to membership. Most important, the voluntary system fundamentally changed the nature of the relationship between members and the congregation. The whole culture of money was transformed from the formerly mandatory system, which often required synagogue leaders to chase down late payers and subject others to the

humiliating abatement process, into a more pleasant voluntary ambience. Rob Carver, president of Temple Israel, concludes:

> *I hear complaints all the time from synagogue leaders that people treat synagogues like a fee for service business. But in fact synagogues don't do anything to counteract this mentality other than complain. We have done something proactive here; we have said that we care about you, that we want you to have a true stake in what we do here.*[20]

See www.tisharon.org/a_unique_dues_alternatives for how the idea is presented.

For twenty-five years in bucolic Vermont, members of the Woodstock Area Jewish Community, Congregation Shir Shalom, have embraced an entirely voluntary financial support policy. According to Stuart and Antoinette Matlins, cofounders of the synagogue, "Participants value the community and its style and want to see it thrive. This approach, combined with a welcoming congregational style, particularly to interfaith families, has allowed many people who no longer participated in synagogue life, and many among them who had the usual complaints about dues/pay to pray, to get over their hurt and hostility and join in our congregation."

Rabbi Jessica Zimmerman, director of congregational engagement for Synagogue 3000, alerted me to the interesting approach of Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation. The synagogue requires dues to join, but it lists two options for religious school costs: subsidized tuition and regular tuition. After presenting the families with a transparent accounting of the real expenses in operating the religious school, often the most expensive line in a synagogue budget, parents can decide to pay "full freight" or a reduced, subsidized amount. In the end, the congregation raised an extra $20,000 by giving members the choice.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

At Shirat Hayam in Swampscott, Massachusetts, the congregation is experimenting with a "revenue revolution." Two aspects of their effort are intriguing. First, they have transformed the generic annual High Holy Day appeal into the *Lev* Initiative, the name derived from the instruction "And Adonai spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the people of Israel, that they bring me an offering; from every man that gives it willingly with his heart, you shall take my offering" (Exodus 25:1–2); the Hebrew word for "heart" is *lev*. Rabbi Baruch HaLevi and Ellen Frankel explain:

> *The Lev Initiative is designated or directed giving.... We make phone calls and sit down with people face-to-face. We discuss investing in areas within synagogue life that they are connected to, utilize, and that they want to see flourish.... With the Lev Initiative, we have far surpassed previous fundraising efforts. We have done so in a way that makes it personal, that connects people with what they use and with what they love.*[21]

Even with their success in adopting the strategy of donor-directed giving, a common practice in Jewish Federations and other organizations, Shirat Hayam has gone a step further in raising revenues. They make transparent what other synagogues know, but rarely admit publicly: the "nonprofit" organization needs to have "profit" centers. At Shirat Hayam, these include a preschool, the Bezalel Academy offering private or group lessons in the arts, a University of Judaism of courses for adult learning, shulcasting funerals, virtual *Yizkor*, and legacy video testimonials. But, perhaps the most radical of ideas is the Zuzzim think tank, an independent group of entrepreneurs and business owners who are committed to creating and implementing business-to-business and business-to-consumer networking to facilitate Jews doing business with one another. When they do, a percentage of profits is donated to the synagogue or another Zuzzim member institution. This is taking the "buy scrip

The middle name of JCC is "community." Joy Levitt, executive director of the JCC in Manhattan, tells staff:

> *Your job is building relationships, not programming. I get this question all the time: "How much time should I be spending on programs?" and "How much time should I be spending on building relationships, listening to what people need?" They think: "I'm a programmer. I've got a schedule. I've got to fill my page. I've got to meet my budget. So, I'm going to come up with a whole bunch of programs, and I'll hope and pray that people will come." Some programs will be good; some not so good. It's a little bit of a hamster wheel. That's different than being available, meeting people when they walk into the building and hearing what they need and want. Almost everything good that we've developed here has come from a relationship with one of our people who has suggested things for us to do, from conversations with people who feel like you know them, you're listening to them, you care about them. Staff need to figure out how to balance their organizational responsibilities and their time on building relationships. If you're so busy that you don't know the people you're working for, you're not doing the right work. At the end of the day, that's actually the job—to put the notion that everyone is made in the image of God in the center of your work.*

Scheduling Time for Relationships

There is no doubt that the lives of Jewish communal professionals and clergy are extraordinarily demanding. For some, it feels like a 24/7 job, 365 days a year. The balancing of personal and professional responsibilities is challenging, often on a daily basis. A healthy community requires healthy professionals; I will be the first to insist on downtime, days off, vacations, and respites for our communal servants.

However, if building relationships is the key to building communities of meaning and purpose, belonging and blessing, then a

SPOTLIGHT ON BEST PRACTICES

Rabbi David Paskin of Temple Beth Abraham in Canton, Massachusetts, has a button on the synagogue web page, Meet with Rabbi Paskin, that enables anyone to schedule a meeting with him during available time slots.

Rabbi Greg Litcofsky, now senior rabbi at Temple Emanu-El in Livingston, New Jersey, got hooked on community organizing while in rabbinical school at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. In his previous position as an associate rabbi of Temple Shir Tikva in Wayland, Massachusetts, Rabbi Litcofsky used his passion for organizing to lead his community. Here's his story:

> *Organizing is a skill set to be a leader, to build community, starting with people, not programs. When I got the job at Temple Shir Tikva, I immediately set about to meet the congregants. I asked my senior, Neal Gold, and the president, Trudy Sonis, "Whom should I meet?" Within the first few months, I had done thirty to forty one-on-one meetings. These were not justice meetings; they were just relational meetings. The meetings were never held in my office, always at the bagel shop, at Starbucks, some open space. People would joke about Greg and his coffees, but for me it was my legacy. I did good programs, but I am most proud of my relational work.*
>
> *During these one-on-ones, I would ask questions to get to know them: "What are you most proud of? Why did you join Shir Tikva? Why did you move here? What are your hopes for the synagogue?" Then, I shared my story with them. At the end of the conversation, I would ask their advice: "I'm thinking about developing*

experiences for young families. What do you think? Am I missing something … or on to something?"

You know what I realized? My young family leadership team came from these meetings. I wasn't just having nice conversations. I was building relationships with some who evolved into Jewish leaders. I wanted the people to feel they could own it, be part of it, work with me to bring vision to fruition. You can't do that without relationship.

Rabbi Charles Simon, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, has instilled a culture of caring relationship in the Conservative movement's men's organization. He comments:

Building relationships is about trust and taking risks. When I took over the Men's Clubs, the leadership meetings were full of tension and disagreements. The guys didn't really know each other. The culture had to change. So I taught them how to hug. Literally, I would hug each and every one of them. In the first three minutes of engaging them, I would ask them about their lives, their families, their health. It was a personal check-in. Slowly, I taught them by modeling a culture of engagement. My language was being mirrored in action.

Amy Dorsch of United Synagogue Youth says:

I think we assume that the nature of a teenage Jewish youth group is social—that friendships will just form automatically through our programs. That may be true, but what's going to make them come to us? Technology is great, but it is disconnecting us from reaching out to our kids personally. I think we're really feeling the effects of the lack of personal contact. I see the difference between

Rabbi Zoë Klein of Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles comments:

> *For a long time, we clergy would go into the preschool classrooms to tell stories to the kids. We'd go to three classes in a row on one morning; it was exhausting. But, we were still getting complaints from the parents: "We don't know the rabbi." What? What other rabbis are on the floor with your kids? Eventually, the preschool director said, "You know what I think they want? They want you in the lobby to say 'hello.' More than the three hours you tell stories each week, they actually want the fifteen minutes in the morning to say, 'Hi, how are you?'" So, we started greeting people in the lobby … which freed up our schedules … and people felt connected and good. It didn't seem logical at first, but it makes sense.*

Rabbi Noah Farkas of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California, offers a succinct summary of a relationship-based vision of leadership:

> *Leadership is not something you do to people. Leadership is gathering people to do something together. The ability to act comes from organizing people, hearing their stories and concerns, and then agitating them to use their power to change the world. Rabbis can give a good sermon, executives can cast a vision, but that's nowhere near as powerful as building relationships that lead to action.*

Cantor Howard Stahl of Temple B'nai Jeshurun in Short Hills, New Jersey, comments on the role of the *hazzan*:

> *The best part of my job has nothing to do with music. I never really consider myself a musician or a singer. I don't have the personality for it. To me, it's all about relationships. I could be sitting with a congregant, helping*

them through a difficult time, or sitting with a kid—a two-year-old, a four-year-old, even a twenty-year-old—and watching them absorb everything like a sponge. It's communicating with the congregation on a multitude of levels: laughing, crying, sitting over a cup of coffee schmoozing, or really learning.[24]

The truth is that no one leader—rabbi, cantor, educator, JCC director, Federation executive—has the time to build relationships all day. Moreover, leaders of large institutions can never be in relationship with everyone. Peer-to-peer relationships are as important in building community. Thus, the task for the communal professionals is twofold: build personal relationships *vertically*—between staff and many, many individuals—and build relational microcommunities among individuals *horizontally*. "This is the only way to reach scale," according to Rabbi Jonah Pesner. "It took Rabbi Jeremy Morrison two years working full-time at the Riverway Project at Temple Israel of Boston to reach one thousand people, but once he recruited young leaders to build their own relational subcommunities, the initiative really took off." This is the power of relational leadership—it takes the collaboration of professionals and lay leaders to fashion a relational community.

Listen to Rabbi Dan Smokler of the Bronfman Center for Jewish Life at New York University:

My job requires me to engage 180 Jewish students on campus each year. I build relationships with individuals, but I also try to grow microcommunities. If I can get eight couples to celebrate a potluck Shabbat dinner once a month, if I can get ten students to learn together on a regular basis, they will be sharing significant Jewish experiences together that don't rely on a single staff member. My goal is to link an individual to a social and self-sustaining community. Eventually, I'll age out. I don't want to be spending every night meeting one-on-one in coffee shops and bars. I want to be with my own family. More importantly, it is community that has staying power.

2. Just as there is a fixed time for learning on the calendar to study with two *hevruta* partners, schedule one-on-one relational meetings the same way.
3. Protect time away from the building to meet people.
4. Carve out time for the leadership team.
5. Empower laypeople to write and deliver *divrei Torah*.
6. Reduce time reading blogs and article research.
7. Turn Shabbat once a month into a relational meeting.
8. Turn and talk during services.
9. Invest in money for more staff.
10. Invite people to members' homes for Shabbat and holiday meals.

I will add one more suggestion for loosening up time for professionals: excuse them from unnecessary attendance at meetings of lay leaders. A rabbi does not have to be present at every single committee meeting of the congregation. Federation staff members do not have to clutter their calendars with endless meetings. Empower your dedicated professionals to spend their precious time building relationships.

A Word of Caution

I know you, my friends. I know that when you, my lay leader friends, read about this "best practice" or that "strategy," your first inclination is to underline it, Post-It note it, and run to your rabbi or executive director or president and say, "See, if you only did this, or we only did that, we would solve our problems." I know that you, my professional friends, read these "spotlights" by colleagues and think, "Hmm, that's interesting, but my community is so different, it'll never work."

If you are serious about transforming your communities from program-centric to relational, remember two crucial guidelines as you seek to implement change:

1. Think "application," not "replication." Every organization, every community is unique, with its own set of

challenges and opportunities. As you review these many examples of relational best practices and discuss them with your leadership team, consider how to adapt them, not necessarily adopt them. Focus not on the best practice but on the underlying best principle that informs what the organization and their leaders are doing.

2. There are no quick fixes. Please reread the opening chapter of the book. Transforming our institutions into relational communities will not happen by devising and implementing another new program. The whole point of the book is that this moment in Jewish history requires a total rethinking of our goal, our strategies for engagement, and what will count for our success. Success is not more butts in seats at programs; it is more relationships between our people and between our people and the Nine Levels of Relationship with the Jewish experience. We cannot continue to count on programs to engage our people. The fundamental principle of every "best practice" cited here is this: to shift the shape of Jewish engagement, we must put people first—learn their stories, learn their passions and their talents, lead them to a meaningful engagement with Judaism, sustain their engagement throughout their lives, particularly at key transition points, and build relationships with others in a relational community. Do this and you will discover and create your own path toward a Relational Judaism.