

הידיעון

HaYidion

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Leadership DISPOSITIONS



PRIZMAH
Center for Jewish Day Schools

HaYidion

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ELLIOTT RABIN

LEADERSHIP DISPOSITIONS

This, then, is the leadership lesson of Moses: to know the limits of one's abilities, to know the limits of one's autonomy, and to know the limits of one's authority.

Stephen Garfinkel, "The Man Moses, The Leader Moses"

In the burgeoning fields of leadership studies and leadership development programs, the growing consensus agrees with this lesson that Moses's example taught thousands of years ago. Until recently, leaders were cast in a heroic mold. They were looked up to, as if standing on a pedestal, expected to provide inspiration with every word and gesture. Leaders were to be revered as the decision-makers, the arbiters, unique possessors of an institution's vision, mission, values. They acted single-handedly, relying primarily on their own inerrant judgment. All others were cast as followers, miniature versions of the leader; they were understood to be doing a good job to the extent that they internalized the directions laid down by the leader. The leader presented the organization's sole face, sole voice; people on the outside identified the organization with the leader.

Today's view of leadership could not be more different. The leading model speaks of "distributive" or "collaborative" leadership. Like Moses, the contemporary leader openly admits that he or she cannot bear the burden alone. Given the increasing load of responsibilities incumbent on leaders, in day schools and beyond, this recognition is both true and highly liberating. Today people speak of "leadership" rather than a "leader." Leadership no longer connotes an individual but a team of people, with a range of skills and assignments, who operate collectively. The leadership team has faith that their work will be much stronger together than the work of a lone individual. Members meet as a whole and in groups, formally and informally, in a frequent, ongoing and regular manner, to manage the work of leadership together. Responsibilities, decision-making and the spotlight now can be shared among colleagues.

In various ways, the articles in this issue reflect this paradigm shift of leadership. The authors all reflect upon "dispositions," a catch-all term covering qualities, character traits and commitments, that leaders of Jewish day schools need in order to succeed and thrive, personally and professionally, in this rewarding but challenging environment. What is the special sauce to be a day school leader? Can the ingredients be listed, gathered and packaged? Or instead, are we talking about general human characteristics from which, through some combination of experience, skillful training and coaching, and most importantly, the artfulness of the practitioner, a respected leader emerges?

This issue grew out of a report that Prizmah commissioned from Rosov Consultants, with funding from The AVI CHAI Foundation, entitled "The Learning Leadership Landscape: Experiences and Opportunities for Jewish Day School Personnel." Written by Alex Pomson and Freyda Gonshor Cohen, the report summarizes the literature on leadership into a list of five categories of core capacities that day school leaders require. Capacities, meaning managerial skills, can in principle be taught, and the report surveys programs

currently training day school leaders, identifying needs and opportunities for new kinds of leadership programs.

Alongside capacities, the report provides a list of dispositions vital to day school leadership. For half of the articles in the issue, we presented this list to a number of day school leaders. Each selected one disposition, reflecting upon the influence it has exerted over his or her career. For the other half, we asked people who work in leadership training, for day schools, Jewish organizations or more broadly, to zero in on a disposition (or a few) that they consider pivotal and seek to cultivate in their students. The articles are braided together to draw connections between perspectives that approach the subject from different angles.

To start off, we invited **Pomson and Gonshor Cohen** to frame the subject of dispositions with an explanation of how they discovered their importance and arrived at this list. **Taubenfeld Cohen and Cappell** lay out Prizmah's plan for strengthening lay and professional leadership in day schools. The first pair of articles examine qualities that are equal parts elusive and foundational: **Joel** weighs the centrality of trust in his relationship with different stakeholders; **Brown** considers the elements that compose leadership presence. Next, **Jones** describes the role of creativity in his leadership philosophy, and **Bernstein and Mali** discuss the need for leaders to develop their creative muscles in order to stretch beyond their comfort zone. **Kasper** investigates the nature of her ambition; **Douglas** insists upon the importance for leaders to confront challenging issues directly through conversation, and **Bossewitch** applies a Jewish lens to this approach. Two authors focus on board leadership—**Levy** on visionary strategic thinking, and **Decker** on planfulness for board management. **Oberman** presents the humbling experience of a leader spending a day as a student, and **Cooks** argues that leaders need to be brave by showing vulnerability.

In our spread of short features from schools, we present a range of initiatives developed to cultivate student leadership. The next articles explore the importance of relationships for day school leaders: **Englander** on empathy, **Young** on collaboration; **Stein** on emotional intelligence, **Feiman-Nemser and Loewenstein** on teacher leaders. **Lapidus** explores day school leadership as a Jewish calling; **Cannon** shows how school leaders can be trained to lead Jewishly. The last pair of authors take the long view: **Poupko Klettenik** describes how her passion for Jewish learning led her to day school leadership, which in turn stoked that passion; and **Levisohn** balances the rush for solutions against the ballast of "sustained focus, sobriety, maturity, systematic thinking."

May this issue help you to discover and reflect upon your own dispositions that keep you engaged and passionate for the work that you do, day in and day out, for your Jewish day school.



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FROM THE CEO



PAUL BERNSTEIN

STRENGTHENING THE ECOLOGY OF DAY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

This issue focuses on a topic of critical importance to the field: leadership—and how individual dispositions, strengths, preferences play such a determinative role in a leader's ability to succeed.

In "Lessons in Leadership," Rabbi Jonathan Sacks demonstrates how the Torah places education of our children at the center of the Jewish future. In Parshat Bo, as the Children of Israel are at the end of more than two centuries of exile, "Moses does not speak about today or tomorrow. He speaks about the distant future and the duty of parents to educate their children." Rabbi Sacks anticipates the defining speech Moses might have given, about freedom—akin to the Gettysburg Address, or Nelson Mandela's "long walk to freedom." Instead, as we remind ourselves every Pesach when we read the Haggadah, Moses reinforces how the Jewish people must "explain to your child..." (Exodus 13:8). According to Rabbi Sacks, "What God taught Moses was that the real challenge does not lie in gaining freedom; it lies in sustaining it. ... That can only be done through a sustained process of education."

We believe that thriving day schools lie at the core of the long-term, vibrant Jewish future. Prizmah believes that driving towards a simple yet audacious goal lies at the heart of achieving that vision: *Every school should have an excellent head of school, equipped to succeed.*

The secret to a great education is the teacher with whom each student learns. Indeed, Rabbi Sacks argues that "the highest form of leadership is teaching." Every teacher is a leader of the Jewish future, and every leader needs to take seriously their role as teacher, in order, using Simon Sinek's model, to provide every member of our community with the "why."

Much needs to be done to attract the best teachers and enable them to succeed. Great teachers thrive with and are drawn to top-quality school leaders. We see strengthening school leadership at the heart of that work, and where expanding Prizmah's work on fostering effective leaders, leadership and conditions for success can be pivotal.

When we consider the "ecosystem" of day school leadership, we encounter a system (or lack thereof) where true success seems more like the luck of the draw than the result of coordinated efforts. The pipeline of aspiring school leaders is quite narrow, too many schools change heads too often, and the conditions are not right to enable heads of school and instructional leaders to succeed. Our vision is to change both perception and reality.

Conventional wisdom holds that we can "equip leaders to succeed" by teaching skills and strengthening individual capacities, their knowledge of areas of management—including finance, recruitment, board work, supervision, team building, etc.—they need in order to run a school. Influencing a leader's disposition, on the other hand, shaping their individual style and preferences, is exceedingly difficult. That kind of thinking, however, is part of the pipeline problem in the first place. We need to see more potential in all future leaders, and we need to create environments that enable more leaders to blossom.

From my own experience as a board member at a Jewish day school in London, as the parent of two day school students here in the States, and in my role as CEO of Prizmah the past two years, I have seen promising examples of heads of school who know how to enlist the resources to help themselves and their amazing teams to be effective. Fortunately, in many leadership transitions, I have observed new heads of school identify right from the start what they will need. Even in the interview process, confident and self-reflective aspiring heads inquire how the board will provide the right supports. Whether in the form of coaching, empowerment to hire or create specific positions in order to fill gaps, resources for professional development and more, boards and search committees must be prepared to set up their leaders for success, to stack the deck in their favor.

We are proud of the impact of Prizmah programs and services that enable school leaders to succeed, through programs including the Head of School Excellence Program and YOU Lead, and services such as Board Fitness for lay leaders, leadership coaching, peer-to-peer networking and learning opportunities like those we find in these pages. For Prizmah, we seek to learn what more is possible and necessary to support school leaders and teachers, making sure that day schools have what they need to fulfill their potential.

As we explore in this issue of *HaYidion*, each of us can further develop our capacities and dispositions for leadership. Prizmah's programs and services demonstrate our current *capacities*. Prizmah's *disposition*, who we truly are, lies in our passion and commitment to the future of Jewish day schools of all kinds, a determination to learn, to adjust and grow what we do to better meet schools' needs, and to drive forward in single-minded support of the people and the schools we exist to serve.

FROM THE BOARD

WORKING TOGETHER TO BRING JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS TO THE TOP



JOEL SEGAL

My wife and I are the proud parents of three sons. When it came time for our eldest to start school, we knew we wanted to send him to a Jewish day school. I had grown up in Montreal and had a very positive and formative experience at JPPS-Bialik. I wanted my children to have that same sense of community and strong Jewish identity. My wife and I have an interfaith marriage and are committed to raising our children as Jews. Thus, it was especially important for us that their school environment help us transmit Jewish culture and traditions to them.

Ultimately, we settled on Akiva School. With my business experience and passion for Jewish education, I was asked to join the school board. Around that same period, I was lucky enough to attend a PEJE conference, where I found a whole universe of people who were struggling with the same issues as Akiva, and approaching the challenges in interesting ways. That conference was a pivot. It permanently altered the way I looked at fundraising and tuition assistance, and changed my trajectory.

Even then, 10 years ago, there were signs that Jewish identity was changing. My kids' generation had so many more choices than mine did, and Jewish experiences were competing with all kinds of secular opportunities. At the same time, a major shift was taking place in the field of philanthropy. Instead of just writing a blank check, donors wanted to be involved with organizations they cared about. They viewed philanthropy as a form of personal expression.

The Generations Fund was born against this backdrop. The problems facing Montreal's Jewish day schools were extremely complex. So a group of young leaders in the community, including myself, sat around a table to try and break the issues into manageable parts. Under the professional leadership of Natana Shek, Federation CJA invested \$1 million to pilot several communitywide programs, including what we now call the CAPS program.

CAPS stands for Creating Excellence-Promoting Success and, is a model focused on transparent, multiyear, dignified

affordability for Jewish day school parents. Many Jewish day schools at the time were stuck in a Catch-22: They didn't want to raise tuition and price out any students, but they also didn't have the funds to bring the schools to their full potential, thereby opening the door for full payers to leave for elite preparatory schools.

It was a vicious cycle that we wanted to transform into a virtuous cycle. We realized that by solving the issue of middle income affordability, we could stabilize the Jewish day schools' enrollment and invest in excellence, which would in turn keep the full payers there, because they recognized the value in our institutions. Believing that this model could create transformative change in our system of Jewish day schools, a small group of donors came together and committed \$10 million each to pool funding, thereby creating a \$50 million endowment fund to serve a system of Jewish day schools.

It wasn't long ago that Jewish day schools in Montreal were in crisis mode and having price wars with each other. Now, they are working together in a culture that promotes continuous improvement. We even have a new, state-of-the-art high school being built on the JCC/Community campus, a separate \$50 million project. It's very rewarding to look back and see how far we've come. I know that the way ahead for all of us engaged with Jewish education is to learn from each other and support each other.

I joined Prizmah in 2016 and was asked to co-chair the strategic planning process, to assist with finding the best ways to help not just a community of schools but the larger field. Prizmah is now developing a fieldwide strategy, which we hope will support and inspire schools in communities across North America and beyond to take on bold initiatives of their own.

Joel Segal is a member of the board of Prizmah.

For information on the Generations Fund, contact Natana Shek at Natana.shek@federationcja.org or 514-734-1397.



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ALEX POMSON
FRAYDA GONSHOR COHEN

Leading with Head, Heart, Hand and Soul

IN SEARCH OF A COMPASS

What distinguishes the most effective heads of day schools? How is it that at a moment when about half of Jewish day school heads and principals stay in position for three years or less, some individuals do so well that their schools don't want to see them leave after 10 years or more? What do we know about these people? How much is their success about *who* they are? How much is it about *what* they know how to do?

These questions, and others like them, were provoked during the course of a study the Rosov Consulting team recently completed on behalf of Prizmah, with the support of The AVI CHAI Foundation. The study was published as *The Learning “Leadership Landscape: Challenges and Opportunities for Jewish Day School Personnel.”*

At a time when there are more programmatic opportunities than ever for Jewish day school heads and principals to learn leadership, the study was inspired by the following questions:

What leadership learning opportunities exist for Jewish day school leaders? What are their key features? To what extent are they likely to achieve their goals?

Are there leadership development needs specific to Jewish day school leaders that are currently going unmet?

Our first challenge in answering these questions was to navigate the bewildering number of assumptions about what it takes to lead a day school successfully. For example, a search for the term “school leadership” on Amazon yields 14,736 books on concepts including mindful leadership, collaborative leadership, renegade leadership, human resource leadership, ethical leadership, change leadership and more, just on the first screen. In similar fashion, programs to develop school leaders are shaped by widely varying assumptions about the abilities and personality traits needed to lead schools, let alone about how such competencies or characteristics can be developed.

To enable the comparison of programs conceived in often radically different ways, and to make possible the analysis of how day school

leaders think of their own capacities and functioning, our team needed to bring some kind of compass to this study. We needed a conceptual framework of Jewish day school leadership to help us pick our way through different ideas about the learning needs of leaders and the roles that leaders perform.

This article concerns a special insight about the ingredients of school leadership we uncovered in the course of developing such a framework. We explain why we believe this insight can be of great value to the day school field. It brings into focus the dispositions of school leadership and the importance of cultivating such dispositions.

WHAT CAN LEADERS DO?

After a review of the literature on school leadership, we found that there are four capacities extensively discussed across the conceptual and empirical literature on school leadership, and a fifth, less widely considered, but especially relevant to the day school sector:

Vision or direction-setting. Being able to develop, communicate and model Jewish and educational priorities.

Personnel development and empowerment. Developing and sustaining the capacities of staff, providing them with critical feedback, and creating a trusting environment where people will be ready to take risks.

Organizational management. Organizing, scheduling and coordinating operations, administration and finances, supporting and managing change and other complex projects.

Instructional leadership. Promoting rigorous content and curriculum, modeling best practices in teaching, learning and assessment, supervising and mentoring teachers, and enabling educators to impact Jewish lives.

Community-building. Building a culture of care and community in the school, promoting the school within the community, managing expectations of it, and navigating the politics and the interests of stakeholders.

THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE

Pleased with our efforts to distill a flourishing literature into a set of five common categories, our next step was to test this framework with senior scholars and practitioners in the school leadership and day school leadership fields. This, though, is where we encountered a surprise. None of those with whom we talked disputed the categories we had developed. They appreciated their expansiveness and focus. Yet each interviewee expressed a sense that there was something missing. We had carefully, even comprehensively, depicted the mechanics of school leadership, but they argued that we had overlooked the soul of school leadership: the difference between being a competent leader and being an exceptional one.

The most experienced school leaders explained to us that in order to be successful as a head of school, it wasn't only a matter of being able to *do* certain things, one has to *be* a certain kind of person, too. One has to approach the world in certain kinds of ways. As they experienced it, there were *dispositions* of leadership that were no less important than the *capacities* we had delineated.

The dispositions they had in mind (and that others started to call to our attention) included, among other qualities, self-awareness and reflectiveness, curiosity and creativity, honesty and empathy, and a calling and commitment to the Jewish people. The list proved quite long, but it became an important pillar in the conceptual framework we developed to guide our work (Figure 1). The common denominator in all of these dispositions is that they express who a person is, and his or her readiness and interest to take certain kinds of action. The capacities, by contrast, express an ability to take action.

THE DIFFICULTY WITH DISPOSITIONS

Of course, scholars are aware of these dispositions, but they are not front and center in most practice-oriented literature on school leadership. They also don't tend to be an explicit focus of leadership-development programs. They're not ignored or dismissed by programs, but for reasons we'll consider below they don't tend to be curricularized in the same way as the capacities are. Their cultivation is rarely identified as a central programmatic goal. Perhaps this is because it is assumed that, unlike the capacities, the dispositions can't be taught, or, if they can be taught, they are not easily measured. Either they must be developed through experience, or they're instinctive. It's difficult to know how to cultivate them in group settings as opposed to one-on-one coaching relationships. To express these issues in metaphorical terms: Dispositions seem a kind of wild card. A bonus if you possess any or many of them, but not a deal breaker if you don't. It's tempting to think of them as the expressions of leadership that originate on the right side of the brain, along with creativity, spirituality and artistry. Over on the left side of the brain is where the capacities of leadership originate, the site of logical thinking and rational problem solving.

We think the dispositions deserve a different, more systematic look. In fact, the dispositions may be more important as components of successful school leadership than any of the capacities. As dimensions of leadership, the capacities can be distributed across different members of a senior team. One team member might be a superb organizational manager, another an exemplary instructional leader. Dispositions can't be distributed in the same way. One person cannot excel in honesty but fall short in terms of humility, another modeling curiosity but not so much integrity. Dispositions must all be present in a school leader. They're essential and integral to how heads or principals function as leaders. They determine how a leader leads and is perceived.

JEWISH SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: A PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Vision / Direction-setting	Personnel Development and Empowerment	Organizational Management	Instructional Leadership	Community Building, Inside and Out	DISPOSITIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Setting vision / prioritiesSetting and maintaining cultureActing as role model for this visionCommunicating the visionInvolving others in visionVision is tied to the "Jewish" aspect of the school (knowledge of Jewish language, values, culture, etc.)Assessing the efficacy of the vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Developing the capacities of othersProviding opportunities for growthGiving critical feedback to staffCommunicating with staffCreating relationships of trustCreating opportunities for collaborationEmpowering othersFostering an environment for risk-taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Managing school operations and administrationOrganizing, scheduling, coordinatingManaging complex projectsSupporting and managing changeBuilding and implementing organizational structuresBudgeting / financial management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Promoting rigorous content, curriculum and best practices in teaching, learning and assessmentSupervising, mentoring, coaching teachersCreating culture of teaching and learningEnabling educators to impact Jewish livesExemplifying model-teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Being the face of the school and the vision in the communityPromoting the school within the communityIntegrating the school within the community and its institutionsBuilding a culture of care and community within the schoolManaging community expectations in the schoolNavigating politics and the interests of stakeholders / managing conflictPromoting the well-being of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Self-awareness /reflectionHumilitySelf-managementTime managementStrategic thinkingCuriosity—inquiry stanceLifelong learningCreativityAmbitionLeadership presenceHonesty—trust buildingIntegrity—ethical / moralEmotional Intelligence / empathyClear communicationCalling and commitment to the Jewish people

A DISPOSITIONAL TYPOLOGY: HEAD, HEART, HAND AND SOUL

We propose that there are four kinds of leadership dispositions:

Intellectual. These dispositions express a readiness to think more than one move ahead, to see beyond the present moment and to de-center, that is, to see things from other points of view. They signal self-awareness and a willingness to think critically about oneself, indicating a readiness to learn more and to be ready to do things differently.

Emotional. At the core of these dispositions are the facets of emotional intelligence, to be comfortable in one's own skin especially when under assault, and at the same time to be sensitive to others or empathetic, being aware of how one presents oneself as a leader.

Ethical. There is, in a moral sense, a right and wrong way to lead. Ethical leadership expresses integrity and honesty, and thereby builds trust. It presumes humility and a capacity to set aside one's own ego in the service of a larger cause.

Practical. The dispositions of self-regulation and time management are no less critical even if they seem mundane. They are key contributors to resilient leadership. These dispositions might be a key contributor to the longevity displayed by those exceptional heads we mentioned above.

Our informants identified one more disposition not incorporated in this generic typology. It can't be subsumed under other dispositions and is surely a vital element in exceptional Jewish day school leadership: **a calling and commitment to the Jewish people.** This disposition, existential in quality, reflects an appreciation that one's work is part of something larger; that whatever its challenges, it has a larger purpose and value, one that relates to the place of the Jewish people in the world. In a day school context, in any Jewish communal context really, this disposition has a different valence from the other dispositions. It is particular rather than universal. And, it can't be reduced to other categories.

One doesn't have to be a head of school who's Jewish to feel such a calling, but, we imagine, it helps. Day school leadership is both exquisitely challenging and rewarding. A sense of calling to the Jewish people helps heads of school face down the hardest challenges, and it also deepens the rewards in their work when seeing the difference their efforts make to the lives of children, parents and educators, and to the Jewish community. This calling infuses all of the dispositions: one's capacity to look beyond the present moment, one's relationships, one's humility and even one's readiness to maintain oneself physically. In a sense it is the soul of Jewish leadership—its neshamah. The soul, in this sense, breathes life into the acts of one's head, heart and hands.

For sure, these dispositions are found not only in leaders. But when enacted by heads of school and principals, they make a profound difference to their leadership capacities. That's what makes them so important, especially in the day school context. To take an example—one that takes us to the distinctive heart of the day school enterprise: Our review of leadership development programs found that few programs invest attention in the capacities associated with building community within and beyond the school. This capacity barely figures in the broader literature on school leadership. Yet for day school stakeholders, this capacity is one of the most critical dimensions of day school leadership, especially in smaller communities where the day school can be, and often is, at the heart of Jewish cultural and social life.

Enacting this community-building capacity is one of the most challenging dimensions for day school leadership. We surmise that the dispositions of empathy, emotional intelligence and commitment to the Jewish people can make a profound difference to a head of school's community-building capacities. They transform a leader's capacity to cultivate relationships among the different circles of individuals touched by a school. In this instance, and in others too, select dispositions decisively facilitate the enactment of the capacities. They do not exist independently of them. They sustain and enhance them.

DEVELOPING THE DISPOSITIONS

Our study reported that "leadership learning programs, whether or not under Jewish auspices, focus almost exclusively on developing capacities rather than dispositions. It seems that the design of programs is predicated on the notion that dispositions can't be taught, no matter how critical they are to the effectiveness and endurance of school leaders." We found that, although leadership learning programs are interested in cultivating dispositions, they rarely express this interest as a programmatic goal, and they rarely make the cultivation of dispositions a prominent or explicit part of their curriculum. In the best cases, they're an implicit part of what they do, especially within mentoring and coaching relationships.

We believe that it's a mistake to view the dispositions in this way. They may be personal, but they have profound professional consequences. And just as personal coaches can help individuals become more self-aware, more empathetic and more inclined to adopt an inquiry stance, whatever their personal or professional context, there is good reason to consider how, through coaching and other interventions, school leaders can be helped to develop these dispositions, especially those that enhance the building of community in schools. In fact, we wonder how the conversation about day school leadership might be changed if the dispositions became a more explicit feature of leadership development programs too, if they were explored in public settings, and not only in one-on-one coaching conversations.

The dispositions, we believe, constitute the soul of Jewish day school leadership. They should be named and nourished.

USEFUL BOOKS ON LEADERSHIP

Bolman, Lee and Deal, Terence E. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*.

Coles, Robert. *Lives of Moral Leadership: Men and Women Who Have Made a Difference*.

Collins, John. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't*.

Heifetz, Ronald, Grashow, Alexander and Linsky, Marty. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*.

Leithwood, Kenneth, Seashore Louis, Karen, Anderson, Stephen and Wahlstrom, Kyla. *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*.

Sergiovanni, Thomas. *Moral Leadership*.

Spillane, James and Diamond, John, editors. *Distributed Leadership in Practice*.

JANE TAUBENFELD COHEN
ILISA CAPPELL

Prizmah's Leadership Academy Addresses the Needs of the Day School Field

Prizmah seeks to strengthen the ecosystem of day school leadership. We believe that schools with strong lay and professional leadership are in a better position to focus on critical strategic issues facing their communities. We believe that when trust is a governing force between lay and professional teams, schools are well equipped to deal with the challenges and opportunities that come their way. We believe that leadership doesn't have to be lonely and that there are skills, capacities and dispositions that can be learned. And we believe we can help. We outline here the steps we have taken to accomplish our ambitious goals and the ways in which our vision is evolving as we learn more about the needs of our lay and professional leaders.

This year, we have undertaken two major initial initiatives to strengthen day school leadership: We commissioned a study to inform our work, and we assembled Prizmah's leadership offerings, both ongoing and newly developed, under the umbrella of our new Leadership Academy.

THE LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE

Prizmah commissioned a report entitled "The Learning Leadership Landscape: Challenges and Opportunities for Jewish Day School Personnel," written by Alex Pomson and Frayda Gonshor Cohen of Rosov Consulting and generously funded by The AVI CHAI Foundation. Through their research, the authors identified four conditions of Jewish day school leadership:

It's hard, high-stakes work. Lead professionals are held accountable for all that happens in the school. Day schools are often unstable in their finances and enrollment. In addition, "high-stakes" refers ultimately to our sense of the day school's mission. Professional and lay leaders are perceived to be ultimately responsible for the Jewish identity outcomes of their students.

There is a reality of toxic board cultures. As demographic and financial pressures have increased over the last decade, there is evidence of growing impatience with school change, and ever higher expectations from parents and board

members who want instant gratification and response. There is today an expectation of perfection from the school that many observers believe was not there before. This expectation is a consequence of an unfortunate vicious circle: The more heads of school are paid in order to help make these challenging positions attractive, the more board expectations increase to levels where no normal person can meet them. The result is an ever-shorter cycle of hiring and firing.

Concentrated rather than distributed leadership in schools. Everything that happens in school is assumed to be related to if not dependent on the functioning of one individual. The head is expected to be an able business manager, a skilled instructional leader, a wise steward of human relations, and a forceful communicator who can mobilize the school community around a compelling educational vision.

"It's the Wild West out there." A last, but hardly new, challenge for day school leaders is the lack of widespread norms in this system.

Prizmah seeks to address these conditions through our work in the Leadership Academy, by developing a fieldwide understanding of what healthy Jewish day schools look like. The study has been instrumental in reflecting the needs of the field and is informing our next steps. But even as we base our initiatives on our collective experience and the report's findings, we know that we need to keep learning from the successes and challenges of day school leaders to continue to meet the field's evolving needs. Over the next year, those conversations will continue as we more fully explore the conditions of leadership. We will be meeting in virtual groups, conducting one-on-one interviews, and facilitating in-person conversations where possible to better understand what is true about the school cultures that enable heads of schools and lay leaders to be successful.

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Prizmah envisions all Jewish day schools with an excellent head of school and lay leader working in partnership with one another and equipped to succeed. The Leadership Academy

will support, train and connect leaders and emerging leaders through our own programs and services and through partnerships with existing programs in the field.

We envision a Leadership Academy that provides support for lay and professional leaders at all points along the spectrum of a leadership journey. Our offerings will include:

- Expanded opportunities for peer-to-peer networking through our Reshet platform
- Coaching for individual leaders, as well as for teams
- Cohort-based programs such as YOU Lead and our Head of School Excellence Project
- Content-rich experiences like boot camps to advance a skill set in a particular arena
- Partnerships with leading agencies and organizations across North America that marry the best the independent school world has to offer with Prizmah's expertise in Jewish education
- Research
- Thought leadership
- "Smart Search" services to support schools with leadership placement and hiring
- Consultation on administrative structure in schools
- School Culture Audit and Improvement Plan
- Lay Leader Institutes for teams of lay and professional leaders

One thing we've already heard over and over is that leadership is lonely. We currently offer several cohort-based programs that were designed, in part, to alleviate the isolation leaders sometimes feel. The study supports this approach, noting, "Our interviews with school leaders make clear that they have derived great value from participating in cohort-based programs, especially those led or facilitated by seasoned Jewish educators." It comes as no surprise that a strong network provides for rich opportunity for engagement and support. Alumni of YOU Lead and HOSPEP remain connected to their coaches and to each other; they find these connections invaluable. We are excited that our programming is on the right track in this way, and we hope to expand opportunities for leaders at various points in their leadership journey to benefit.

Today's schools demand a wider range of knowledge and skill than ever before. Leaders need each other and need support, but they also need training. Whether leaders seeking a deep dive into an 18-month program or a three-day boot camp to hone and sharpen their skill set, Prizmah will expand our offerings to engage and teach leaders as they elevate their work.

We know schools need great leaders and leaders need great teams, whether they are just beginning their leadership journey or have been in a leadership role for many years. We believe that boards and professionals can work as partners and have tremendous impact, and that the lay-professional partnership is an area for growth. As the study notes, "It is also vital to develop leadership-learning frameworks in which heads of school can develop their capacities alongside and together with those of their chairs." To cultivate this critical partnership, Prizmah turned to a nationally recognized leader in not-for-profit governance, BoardSource, to create a new initiative: Board Fitness.

We created our Board Fitness portfolio to strengthen the work of the board and its collaboration with the school's head. Schools participate in a Board Self-Assessment (BSA)

developed by BoardSource and customized for Jewish day schools. The results, coupled with consulting from Prizmah BoardSource-certified consultants, help boards more clearly understand areas of strength and identify opportunities for growth. We see this partnership as a model for Prizmah's work—a three-way partnership between Jewish day schools, Prizmah and the best resources from the broader field. In this way, we truly develop a *chut meshulash*—a threefold cord—that has the strength and flexibility to support the growth of our leaders and our schools.

In addition, this year we worked closely with the North American Jewish Day School Strategy Group, representing the 12 largest federations in North America, to strengthen the governance practices of day schools in their communities. Their collaboration and insights were critical in our efforts to support the work of board leadership, and we are excited to learn about the ways in which partnership with federations can continue to enhance Jewish day school excellence.

BUILDING THE FUTURE OF DAY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

You've heard the stories, and perhaps your story is one of them: The board member who knows she could do a job as board president, but doesn't want to take on the role because it feels too overwhelming and she is scared that she won't have the time. The classroom teacher who has taken on tasks on the brink of leadership such as coordinating shabbatonim and running the eighth grade trip to Israel, but hasn't yet thought of himself as a leader in the community. The veteran head of school who has built a wonderful school with a great reputation, who senses that her board's trust in her is waning and seeks a coach to rebuild her capacity to lead.

Jewish day school leadership is growing increasingly complex. We don't mean it is hard simply because it requires so many different skills. It is demanding, because our lay and professional leaders care so much. And we at Prizmah want to help. Through our conversations with lay and professional leaders, our research, evaluations of our services, and input from current participants and alumni of our programs, Prizmah is learning more about the concrete ways we can make a difference. We are excited to partner together with you in this endeavor, to strengthen your capacity to lead your schools into a bright future.

Imagine Jewish day school boards holding reputations as models of good governance within our communities. What if they were the go-to destination to start one's career in lay leadership and an entry point into Jewish communal service?

Imagine a strong leadership pipeline where we are talent spotting within our schools and communities to bring along those who are seeking leadership opportunities and those who don't yet think of themselves as leaders.

Imagine lay and professional leaders working intentionally to develop their professional and board cultures based on shared values, clear lines of communication, mutual trust and common language.

Imagine tending to the garden of leadership today to harvest the fruits for our future. We invite you to join us on this journey.

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AVERY JOEL



TRUST

FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE, WE ARE TOLD PARABLES THAT TEACH THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING TRUST THROUGH HONESTY. THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF TOO MANY TIMES LOST THE TRUST OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE; HE WASN'T BELIEVED WHEN HIS CRIES WERE GENUINE. AFTER ASSURING THAT HE WOULD DO NO HARM, THE SCORPION STINGS THE FOX WHO CARRIES HIM ACROSS THE RIVER, THUS DROWNING THEM BOTH; THE SCORPION'S JUSTIFICATION: "I COULDNT HELP MYSELF; IT'S IN MY NATURE." ADD TO THAT THE NUMBER OF '80s SITCOMS I WATCHED AS A CHILD, WHERE THE PROTAGONIST STARTED WITH A SMALL LIE, PERHAPS TO IMPRESS A FRIEND, AND ERODED TRUST BY ADDING LIE AFTER LIE TO COVER HIS OR HER STORY UNTIL IT ALL UNRAVELED, AND I WAS CONVINCED: BUILDING AND MAINTAINING TRUST WAS A KEY VALUE.

For a school leader, building trust is critical, since it is the bedrock of relationships of all kinds. When people know they can depend on what a person says, trust flourishes. Students, parents, donors and teachers must all feel that they can trust their school leaders. The investments each of these constituents make in our schools—their time, money and children—demand such trust in school leadership.

Over the past three years at the Fuchs Mizrachi School, we have shifted our paradigm of learning in the Stark High School, moving away from a teacher-focused paradigm where students passively received content and regurgitated it on a test. We sought to create a culture of student-focused learning in which the emphasis was on meaningful, active learning; where students took ownership of their learning; and where we highlighted the skills, mindsets, habits and information our students will need for the ever-changing world they will be entering. Through both failures and successes, we learned that while change is unsettling and even uncomfortable, relationships based on trust ensure buy-in and smooth transitions.

TRUST AND OUR STUDENTS

Students need to feel safe in order to grow. If children can't rely on their teachers and school leaders to provide a sense of emotional safety, they won't fully engage in the learning process. How can children grapple with challenging material if they are unsure if their educators truly have their best interests in mind? How can we expect them to put themselves "out there," with all the vulnerability that entails, if they can't depend on teachers to react in a supportive, predictable manner? With trust, our students are more comfortable pushing themselves in uncomfortable ways. And while school leaders don't interact with students to the same degree as teachers do, that relationship still often exists.

When we started shifting how we asked students to learn, many students were anxious—especially those students who had been successful. We were asking them to trust that we had their best interests in mind, and that we would constantly evaluate if our innovations were enabling our students to achieve or not. We established that trust by asking them for feedback and



for their opinions, by reflecting on what they shared, and by bringing them into our thought processes. While every subsequent change brought on the anxieties of change, the students were reassured by the fact that they knew they could rely on school leadership to be thoughtful and have their best interests in mind.

I have found that, in general, students trust me most when I have done the following things:

- Clearly articulate expectations and consistently apply and uphold them
- Take time to show them I am invested in them and their success, by taking time outside of class to connect and by expressing interest in their lives outside of school
- Making it safe to be vulnerable by first making myself vulnerable

TRUST AND OUR PARENTS

Parents trust us with their children, and they need to trust that our school is a safe and supportive environment. Moreover, in order for children to truly incorporate what they learn, there must be a strong partnership between

parents and educators. If one undermines the other, children will receive mixed messages and will not know what path of growth to follow. For the parent-school partnership to flourish, we must view ourselves as a team built on trust.

Further, parents must feel confident that the decisions of school leaders are made with the best interests of their children in mind. If parents believe that school leaders have ulterior motives, they won't support institutional decisions. Specifically, if a school wants to change the status quo or pilot a new initiative, it is important that parents feel that school leaders are approaching the change thoughtfully, with the perspective of parents in mind, and with the best interests of the students as the primary concern.

These were lessons we learned the hard way, with the implementation of a learning platform that we felt would enable our students to better meet their goals. We underestimated the degree to which the change was going to be perceived as a major shift and innovation. Assuming that parents would share our perception that this was just another new tool

we were using, we didn't sufficiently engage the parents and explain our rationale for implementing a learning platform. Parents were left to draw their own conclusions about what we were doing and why we were doing it. We spent vast amounts of time and energy trying to reframe our reasoning and our decisions—time we could have spent supporting students or furthering teacher growth.

Increasingly, I try to invest in parental trust of school leaders by:

- Being transparent: explaining why decisions are made, admitting when I have made mistakes
- Communicating clearly and frequently about our goals and plans
- Listening: making time and creating opportunities for parents to voice their aspirations and concerns

TRUST AND OUR DONORS

Developing the trust of our donors is essential. When making a financial investment and seeking a financial return, donors would not hand their money over to someone they

didn't trust. When making a financial investment and seeking a different type of return, a return of purpose and meaning, the same holds true. School supporters will partner with school leaders they trust and who consistently demonstrate that they are true to their words.

Having recently become a head of school, I have set aside considerable time to meet founders and donors just to listen. I want to know what is important to them, their dreams, their passions, their motivations. Not only does it give me a better sense of the school's history and heritage, but it allows me to develop deep relationships with our supporters.

To build trust with donors, I try to think about:

- Building a relationship based on more than just solicitations: getting to know them and what matters to them
- Being transparent about needs, goals, successes and failures
- Following up when making commitments

TRUST AND OUR TEACHERS

The actual performance of the educators in our schools depends on their ability to rely on us. My doctoral research, based on Tony Simons' studies of the role of trust in organizational culture, focused on perceived behavioral integrity, or perceived word-deed alignment. More specifically, I researched how teachers in Modern Orthodox day schools in North America were impacted by the way they perceived the word-deed alignment of the school leaders.

My research found that there is a significant and meaningful relationship between teachers' perceptions of their leaders' word-deed alignment and job satisfaction and performance. These relationships can impact areas such as teacher absenteeism, teacher retention and teacher performance. As such, the education of our students can be impacted by the degree to which teachers trust their school leaders and perceive that they are consistently "walking the walk."

I try to consciously build trust with teachers by:

- Modeling behaviors consistent with articulated school values
- Sharing thought processes with teachers so they can see how conclusions were drawn
- Following through with commitments made to teachers
- Being direct and specific, even when the conversations are difficult
- Supporting and celebrating teachers publicly

Being a new head of school, I recognize that building trust takes time, and that it takes just a brief moment to erode that trust. The consistency needed to establish these relationships on a foundation of honesty and trust requires patience and mindfulness. But once attained, we, as educational leaders, will be in the ideal position to create school communities in which our students will thrive.

ERICA BROWN

Leadership Presence: The Look of Leadership

MANY YEARS AGO, A FRIEND OF MINE WAS PROMOTED TO A POSITION OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP WITHIN A LARGE ORGANIZATION. WHEN I CONGRATULATED HER, SHE TILTED HER HEAD TO THE SIDE AND SAID, "THANK YOU." HER PHYSICAL GESTURE COMMUNICATED SEVERAL THINGS TO ME: HUMILITY, A TINGE OF BEING OVERWHELMED, AND EVEN A SENSE THAT SHE MIGHT FEEL UNDESERVING OF HER NEW TITLE. THE "IMPOSTER SYNDROME"—THE CONCEPT THAT SOME PEOPLE ARE UNABLE TO INTERNALIZE THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND PERSISTENTLY FEAR BEING EXPOSED AS A "FRAUD"—CAN HIT HARD AT SUCH MOMENTS. MY FRIEND'S BODY LANGUAGE WAS BETRAYING HER NEW POSITION. LEANING SIDEWAYS COMMUNICATES A LACK OF CONFIDENCE. IT WAS TIME TO LEAN IN, MODESTLY BUT PROUDLY. I GENTLY STRAIGHTENED HER HEAD AND SUGGESTED SHE HOLD IT HIGH PERMANENTLY. IT WAS A LESSON IN LEADERSHIP PRESENCE.

Of all the dispositions presented in Prizmah's critical new report on day school leadership, none may be more elusive and hard to define than leadership presence, a relatively new buzzword in the universe of leadership literature. There's no convenient formula to offer for mastery of personal dignity, which undergirds leadership presence and is, in so many ways, ineffable. And yet, even though presence is so much less important in the scale of the other dispositions identified, presence is without a doubt important in helping followers assume and respect competence, skills and educational background. Take one quick look at a leader in an ill-fitting suit, and it's not hard to imagine the thoughts that cross our minds: Does this person take her job seriously? Does he value education? Is she skilled at what she does? Is he leading well? Why don't we pay our educators more? Few are those who look totally beyond the trappings to see the richness within.

As Jews and human beings, we are told "*dan le-khaf zekhut*"—judge everyone with favor—and see beyond appearances. And yet, we also have a category of *mar'it ayin* in Jewish law, being judged by what others see, that encourages us to be at our best at all times because the visual has impact. Consider any optic of unprofessionalism, even if it seems superficial. Lest we think that these measures are unimportant, we find a striking statement in the Talmud (BT Shabbat 114a): "Hiyya bar Abba said that Rabbi Yohanan said: 'A Torah scholar on whose clothes a stain is found is liable to receive the death penalty.'" Harsh as it may sound, this sage believed that people who represent leadership can cause others to devalue it if they are not clean in their bearing.

That the look of leadership matters appears as early in the Bible as Israel's first king. King Saul is described as "an excellent young man; no one among the Israelites was handsomer than he; he was a head taller than any of the people" (1 Samuel 9:2-3). While Saul turned out to be a flawed king who lacked some requisite leadership skills, he had something that made him instantly popular. He looked like a king. We get a similar reaction by followers to a later biblical story. When Mordechai finally dressed in royal garb after chapters in sackcloth and ashes, his ancient brothers and sisters were star-struck by his new leadership presence: "Mordechai left the king's presence in royal robes of blue and white, with a magnificent crown of gold and a mantle of fine linen and purple wool. And the city of Shushan rang with joyous cries" (Esther 8:15). It is as if Mordechai's clothing alone brought palpable relief and enchantment to the entire capital city.

Dress, voice, posture and something as small as slowing down the speed of one's conversation, pausing frequently and responding to a question with measure and deliberation, can communicate authority. The common cadence of an upward lilt at the end of a statement so that it sounds like a question can undermine the strength of presence. Throw in a few filler words such as "like" and "whatever," and a person in a role of authority may instantly seem unpolished for the job.

The magic of presence might best be explained by a fictional character. In the novel *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles, a little girl asks an ousted count what one must do to become a princess. The count tells her that a princess must have manners and good posture. Unsure of what posture is, she inquires if posture is good manners. He answers in the affirmative: "A slouching posture tends to suggest a certain laziness of character, as well as a lack of interest in others. Whereas an upright posture can confirm a sense of self-possession, and a quality of engagement." The count understands that our comportment speaks volumes about ourselves, our attitude towards others

and our commitment to our work, especially for those of us who believe that there is something royal and majestic about education.

Those who write on leadership presence point to qualities that are hard to quantify and describe, even if we know them when we see them. Inspiring. Motivating. Energized. Credible. Focused. Confident. Compelling. These are the words Belle Linda Halpern and Kathy Lubar (in their book *Leadership Presence*) identified that people use repeatedly when describing leadership presence. They drill down on the feelings that leadership presence communicates. Leaders with presence are "compelling individuals who attract your attention almost effortlessly. They have something, a magnetism that pulls others to them. When they enter the room, the energy level rises. You perk up, stop what you're doing, and focus on them. You expect something interesting to happen. It's as though a spotlight shines on them."

Think of someone who has this impact on you. Now get beyond the feeling and describe what that individual looks like. How tall does this individual stand, despite actual height? Does the body language used match the message? Is there a sense of gravitas present? What is this person wearing? Does this person use eye contact effectively?

Sustained eye contact is critical in creating leadership presence. It communicates focus, curiosity, transparency and honesty. Leaders who do not work on sustaining eye contact might find that people fidget in their presence, unsure that the leader is interested in what they have to say, making them feel that either who they are or what they have to say is not valued. In his highly practical guide to communication, *Simply Said: Communicating Better at Work and Beyond*, Jay Sullivan recommends dismissing the advice to scan the room when speaking publicly. Looking at everyone means looking at no one. He advises, instead, to focus each sentence on one person at a time and move the eyes accordingly. Yet at the same time, too much sustained eye contact can also feel disarming and uncomfortable. Leaders achieve presence with their eyes when they identify the sweet spot of engagement in each interaction. It takes time to cultivate that skill.

Some might believe that these skills are far less important than the title on one's business card. Yet leadership presence is not only about the position a person has but also about the way he or she leverages that position in a very personal way. A scholar of organizational psychology makes an important distinction between personal and positional leadership:

Leading...is not primarily about doing something, but rather about being something. The development of leadership is about becoming conscious of both the power within oneself and the power inherent within the position one holds. In a fundamental sense, the challenge of being a leader is about integrating personal power with one's positional power. (David T. Kyle, *The Four Powers of Leadership*)

Leadership presence is like a signature; it's a highly personal style that communicates an interweaving of dignity, warmth and seriousness of purpose. Sheryl Sandberg (*Lean In*) observes, "Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence." Presence has impact. People are not born with presence. They develop it over time with the onset of greater confidence in position. Leaders can expedite the process, however, by identifying and studying those with strong leadership presence until developing a presence that is uniquely personal. Practice might not make perfect, but practice can make presence.

ELIEZER JONES

CREATIVITY

FOR YEARS, ALBERT EINSTEIN'S SAYING "IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWLEDGE" ADORNED MY OFFICE WALL. IT ACTED AS A REMINDER THAT CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM IS CRITICAL TO SUCCESS. I BELIEVE THAT KNOWLEDGE IS FUNDAMENTAL, BUT WHAT YOU DO WITH THAT KNOWLEDGE IS WHAT TRULY MATTERS. I ALSO BELIEVE THAT BEING CREATIVE IS WHAT MAKES US UNIQUELY HUMAN. AS RAV SOLOVEITCHIK WRITES IN *HALACHIC MAN*, "IF THE TORAH THEN CHOSE TO RELATE TO MAN THE TALE OF CREATION, WE MAY CLEARLY DERIVE ONE LAW FROM THIS MANNER OF PROCEDURE, THAT MAN IS OBLIGATED TO ENGAGE IN CREATION."

Creativity is not the exclusive province of dreamers and creators, artists, musicians, actors and authors. It involves problem solving, flexible thinking and approaching challenges in non-routine ways. It is a survival skill, and one that, in our rapidly changing and complex world, is needed more than ever. A 2010 IBM study of more than 1,500 CEOs from 60 countries and 33 industries found that "chief executives believe that—more than rigor, management discipline, integrity or even vision—successfully navigating an increasingly complex world will require creativity." A recent report from the World Economic Forum also found creativity to be the third most essential skill companies seek in 2020, with critical thinking being second and complex problem solving being first.

If our students are to thrive in their world, we must nurture their innate creativity and teach them how to apply it. I have dedicated much of my own life to integrating creativity into education. I have done so as a teacher, educational consultant and principal. I trained teachers in project-based learning (PBL) and utilized PBL in many of my courses to make the subject more meaningful and nurture individual creativity. I developed and taught classes on innovation and design and built a makerspace with my own hands.

But experience has taught me that it is not enough just to be a creative educator. A school must have creative leadership so that

creativity can flourish. An administration can either build many walls for teachers to exhaustingly climb over or build bridges for them to cross effortlessly from original idea to new idea. The educational leaders of a school determine whether creativity thrives or dies. As a new head of school, I know I must have a creative team and be strategic to ensure that creativity thrives at our school. Here are four methods I've used.

HIRE CREATIVE PEOPLE

If you want creative people on your team, hire them. Most educational leaders don't have the luxury of hiring a new staff when they take on a new position, but when hiring opportunities arise, they should strive to hire creative people. It starts with the job posting. Most postings are boring and generic. To attract creative people, write a job posting that is far from generic (read more here: bit.ly/creative-post). Next, find out if applicants have the creative chops you are looking for. Have them read an article that shares your vision and ask what they think of it. I like "Willing to be Disturbed" by Margaret J. Wheatley (bit.ly/mjwheatley). Throw out a few problems you have tackled and ask how they would handle them. Do they illustrate flexible thinking? Ask what they did differently from others in their previous role. Are they curious? When you take them on a tour of the school, do they ask deep questions and point out things that make your school unique? If you like what



you hear and see, hire them and make sure you nurture their creativity so that they can cultivate the creativity of others. Also, never forget the creative people already on your team. If you are fortunate like me to have landed a position with some amazingly creative educators, you must always work hard at nurturing and supporting their creativity.

LET AN IDEA BREATHE

At the inaugural Prizmah conference last year in Chicago, attendees were treated to the wisdom of improvisational theater and how it can apply to our schools. There is no question that many of the "rules" of improv can help cultivate creativity among your staff. For example, the fundamental "yes, and" rule of improv has been instituted in our admin meetings, as explained below.

To support creativity, a staff needs to be encouraged and supported to ask, "What if?" They need to wonder with you and each other. However, a person asking "what if" can feel very vulnerable, as the first "what if" question is likely a very raw idea. That is where "yes, and" comes in. In improv, when an actor begins the scene with an idea, it is the job of the other actors to agree with whatever is suggested and add to it. For example, an actor might start a scene saying, "This grocery has the best selection of gefilte fish," and another actor will respond, "Yes, and they are famous for their all-you-can-eat gefilte fish bar."

Natural agreement, support and contribution are the goals with staff when using this technique, and if they need to start with actually using the words “yes, and,” that is perfectly fine. A staff member might suggest at a meeting, as did one of ours, “What if we had a Chanukah event in a room full of black lights.” Another staff member could say, “Yes, and we can hire LED dancers.” Then another staff member says, “Yes, and we can call it spread the light” and so on and so forth until an amazing event happens for the school. It is a simple yet fundamental technique to give a potentially great idea room to breathe and grow that might otherwise be stifled with a dismissive “yes, but,” or worse, “no.”

CREATE A STRUCTURE FOR IDEAS TO DEVELOP

In order to nurture creativity, you need a system and structure to cultivate ideas. That can be setting aside time for brainstorming and professional development on design thinking, providing micro-grants for new ideas, or, as in our case, creating a schoolwide structure for innovation.

Last summer, driven by a desire to create a sustainable system of innovation in our school and supported by a grant from the Jewish Education Innovation Challenge, Akiba-Schechter began the process of creating the first research and development department in a Jewish day school. Our R&D Department studies, prototypes, researches and scales new teaching and learning approaches, practices and systems that advance relevant learning for our students and the field of education. It is a system that ensures new programs, models and ideas are thoughtfully implemented and sustained. In many companies, R&D departments play an integral role in the life cycle of a product. For us, we believe the R&D Department plays an integral role in the lifecycle of teaching methodologies and in teacher and student learning. Creating this structure for innovation has given us a process to foster new ideas.

If an R&D Department sounds like a tall order, start with an hour a week or month to meet with any staff interested in trying something new. Use the “yes, and” approach to hear those ideas, and see what happens next. For those considering building a new department, I suggest reading *R&D Your School: How to Start, Grow, and Sustain Your School's Innovation Engine* by Dr. Shabbi Luthra and Scot Hoffman, who trained us to get R&D off the ground at our school.

STAFF AUTONOMY

In his book *Drive*, Daniel Pink reports that modern research identifies three key components of job satisfaction: autonomy, mastery and purpose. These factors lead to intrinsic motivation, which is conducive to creativity. I have yet to meet an educator who does not feel the work has purpose. If a school supports ongoing learning for their staff (and they should), mastery should be part and parcel of the educators’ experience. It is autonomy that many schools need to look at more closely.

Autonomy is the need to be the driver of your life or work. Satisfaction comes from a degree of control over what one does and how one does it. Autonomy does not mean that accountability is out the window, just that how you reach your goals is a lot more flexible.

Pink advocates for a results-only work environment or ROWE, where employees don’t have schedules and can get the work done how they want, when they want and where they want. In a tech company, where ROWE originated, this makes sense. A school is different because, in most cases, staff needs to be in place at certain times. Nevertheless, there is still room for autonomy as long as your school is not a teach-to-the-test, sit-and-be-quiet-behind-a-desk-all-day, standardized-curriculum-with-formulaic-methods type of school.

At Akiba-Schechter, our methods and models challenge our staff. I don’t mean they are difficult for them, but they require skill and dedication to execute. Our classrooms are multiage by design (read more here: prizmah.org/breaking-age-barrier), inquiry-based learning is at the core of much of the learning, our preschool is Reggi-inspired, and we are pedagogically guided by the principle that we teach children, not subjects. There are general curricular goals to achieve, and our academic expectations are high. Implementing our personalized approach requires great creativity in order to adapt the educational goals and methods for each student’s needs and interests.

Despite our emphasis on pedagogy and individualized learning, we ensure that teachers have the autonomy to pursue their own interests in the classroom as well as employ their individual expertise to reach each child. When a teacher says they would like to teach Mishnah alongside contemporary law, we support it. Bring maker activities into the science or Tanakh classroom? Absolutely! Design an escape room to teach grammar? No one is going to stop you!

Our staff and teachers remind me daily of Robert Frost’s statement, “I am not a teacher, but an awakener.” The key to keeping it that way is to give teachers and staff room to imagine, to create and to shine.



MAYA BERNSTEIN
SARAH MALI

Cultivate Your Range

WHAT IF THE REASON MOSES COULD NOT LEAD THE PEOPLE INTO THE LAND OF ISRAEL WAS BECAUSE HE LACKED THE RANGE NECESSARY TO LEAD THEM? FACED WITH THE STRESS OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL'S WATER CRISIS AND THE UNCERTAINTY OF ITS RESOLUTION, MOSES RESORTED TO HIS USUAL PATTERN. THIS PARAGON OF JEWISH LEADERSHIP HIT THE ROCK RATHER THAN ADDRESSING IT. MOSES HAD BECOME PREDICTABLE. THIS EXAMPLE CAN TEACH US A LOT ABOUT ONE OF THE GREATEST DANGERS OF LEADERSHIP: BECOMING SO ENMESHED IN ONE'S OWN DISPOSITIONS THAT ONE IS NO LONGER ABLE TO HOLD THE ATTENTION OF THE PEOPLE, AND PUSH THEM TOWARDS THE GROWTH AND CHANGE NECESSARY FOR THEM TO ADVANCE AND THRIVE.

Predictability is an important feature of organizational life. It helps us maintain order and identify people's working patterns and expectations. We often become predictable because our patterns and dispositions have, for the most part, served us well. They have gotten us to where we are today. But they can also get in the way of leadership.

The fact of the matter is that there may be no ideal leadership disposition. All you have in any given moment is the capacity to choose the right kind of moves that can mobilize people to do the real work they need to undertake. When the moves end up choosing you, as in the case of Moses, you risk becoming less capable of leading people beyond their own expectations to a place where they have never been before.

It is important, therefore, to develop a wide range of behaviors and emotional aptitudes. It might be helpful to consider this range the way we understand voice, as a kind of tuning that allows us to reach both high and low notes as well as those in between. Range provides us a way to capture and hold attention, generate meaning and inspire action. If we have a range of dispositions at our disposal, we can apply them according to the circumstances, depending on the leadership challenges to be faced.

SELF VS. ROLE

Leadership, as defined by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, founders of adaptive leadership theory and co-authors of *Leadership on the Line*, involves mobilizing people to bridge the gap between their aspirations for their organizations and their current reality. When moving people to tackle tough challenges and grapple with the inadequacies of the status quo, we require acts of leadership that challenge social norms, habits and behaviors. As such, these acts of leadership need to be diverse, disruptive and less predictable than people would naturally expect.

Exercising leadership sometimes requires us to divert from our own default habits and behaviors. When faced with common features of change processes, such as ambiguity or duress, leaders need the dexterity to face current conditions: What right now, in this moment, would leadership look like? What do people need, as opposed to want? If we intervene with minimal range, we are doing the expected, and ultimately become complicit in perpetuating the status quo. The choice to repeat our own patterns of behavior will keep the people around us, whom we are keen to mobilize, stuck exactly where they are. In this way, we sustain the inertia.

We see this tendency to lean towards natural dispositions in our own leadership work. First, there are generalized, sometimes stereotyped, dispositions that are placed upon you, regardless of your natural dispositions. As women involved in a field, leadership education, that primarily has been dominated by older men, we constantly struggle between people's expectations of us to play a nurturing, gentle, kind role, and roles that the work often demands such as seriousness, provocation and distance. We have each been told, on numerous occasions, and in various forms, to "soften our edges," and that the kind of leadership teaching that the founders of the methodology employ "won't work for a woman."

Default patterns frequently appear in the students we teach. As an example, take the tall, bearded man who is quick to insert a joke. His role is somewhat surprising to his peers who, given his appearance, expect someone more stoic. The group enjoys his endearing remarks and his way of lightening the mood when things get too serious. In a short time the group has come to depend on him for their own entertainment and the sense of group-togetherness that his behavior engenders.

Another student is vocal about justice and equality. She sees it as her role to protect every member of the group from harm. She gently

ensures that no voice is left unheard, and that each member of the group feels secure, avoiding discomfort at all costs. She challenges us, the facilitators, if we say something she understands as unfair or too personal. Soon the group depends upon her to ensure that things don't get uneasy and to make sure that all are okay.

These individuals are playing roles that are critical for group life to flourish; both humor and compassionate care respectively help groups reduce stress, bond and look after themselves. The challenge is that leadership often requires us to embody the dispositions that are against type, to move away from giving the group what it wants and focusing on what it might need. The group might need to hold itself accountable to the seriousness of its situation, or might need to tackle a personality in the room head on. It is then that these roles, which have served as a resource, come to hinder the groups' growth, to serve as a constraint. In this changed environment where the group's needs are at odds with the roles that these individuals are playing, these individuals require greater range.

In the absence of the ability to let go of their roles and play with other ones, one of two things will likely occur. These individuals will obstruct the work of the group, and the group itself will fail to make progress, or these two functions become, at least for a while, dispensable and "taken out" by the group. In the latter scenario, predictability is a factor in the rejection of these two roles by the group. Besides hindering the group, the displays of humor and empathy have over time become less effective. The roles are so anticipated that the functions that they serve have become less influential. The disposition that might be natural or comfortable might not be what is needed to make progress.

It is crucial to be able to separate *self* and *role*. Those in a leadership position play a specific role, and this role sometimes needs to be different from who they normally are. Leaders may need to acknowledge that the disposition that is necessary for their leadership work is different from the way they might be in other situations, different even from their sense of self, their self-concept. Leaders may have to remind themselves that they are playing a role in order to achieve a specific purpose: bridging the gap between the group's or organization's aspirations and their current reality.

PURPOSE: DISPOSITION TO WHAT END?

The question that ought to orient our decisions around range is, How might I intervene in this complex system in order to bring attention to the work that really needs to be undertaken collectively here? We want people to be better able to have the freedom to make choices so that they in turn can give the people around them the capacity to make choices in the process of change. We always need to stay focused on purpose: What is the reason we are engaged in leadership work? On behalf of whom and of what cause are we prepared to engage in acts of leadership of this kind? And what disposition does the work demand of us in each phase?

The participant in our group whose natural disposition was towards jest, and who had primarily intervened with humor, at one point got very serious. He made use of his height and physical presence to draw and hold attention to need of the group for emotional gravity, even raising his voice slightly. The language he used was more pointed and his metaphors provocative. The room was silent; people were taken aback, engaged, somewhat alarmed, and they *listened*. He was able to make an intervention in the system, shaking the group out of a pattern of complacency, because he exhibited range. He used an alternate disposition of seriousness because he diagnosed the group as stuck

in its pattern of comfort, and connected to the purpose of forcing the group to see that it was spinning its wheels. He veered from his natural disposition because that disposition was ultimately not going to be helpful to the group at that moment. He "tried on" being stern, for the purpose of helping the group make progress.

THE SEDUCTIVE RIVALS OF RANGE

The twin challengers of range are authenticity and consistency. They are seductive rivals, since they speak to values that we are taught from an early age: to be true to ourselves, at all times. We want to stand by our values and to exhibit those values in each of our actions. We want to matter, and we don't want to let people down, to frustrate the expectations that people have of us. Sometimes, though, leadership work involves disappointing those around us, avoiding the temptation of delivering on the promise of what they have come to expect from us, so that, collectively, we can learn new ways to meet the challenges we face. If you always do what you've always done, as the saying goes, you will get what you've always gotten. We must be willing to let go of the focus on ourselves and the value of being perceived in a particular way, in order to advance the work.

When we inhabit a different disposition, not only are we trying on something potentially uncomfortable, but we are also likely disappointing those groups and individuals who know us as a particular set of dispositions and who have benefited from it. As educators, we're asking our students to do this very thing. When we teach our students, we hope that the understanding they gain will create shifts in their behaviors and values. Even in the most progressive environments, those shifts are going to brush up against norms, behaviors and expectations of other groups to which they belong; we are asking them to re-negotiate their identities. In exploring their new range, they're going to have loss. It would benefit them to see us diversifying our range and exploring different dispositions depending on our purpose.

THE UNEXPECTED SONG

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, psychiatrist Viktor Frankl writes, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." When we are faced with adaptive leadership challenges that require us to help change the behaviors, values and even senses of identities of the people involved, we must pause in that space between stimulus and response. We must carefully decide which disposition, which role, which song will best serve the people we are striving to mobilize. We must be brave enough *not* to sing our best song, the song people have come to expect of us, or even the song that we think is most true. We must sing the unexpected song—the song that will awaken the people to engage in the growth and change that is needed.

We have partly avoided the core question of this volume: What are the dispositions that are critical for effective leadership work? We could argue for the importance of empathy, sensitivity, malleability and courage. For the necessity of flexibility, humility, passion and drive. These, and others, might make some of us more inclined towards leadership. There is no question that we should strive to cultivate the types of dispositions that allow us to weather the storms that leadership evokes: resilience, commitment, compassion and grit.

Our purpose has been to argue for the importance of range. The broader your tuning, the more songs you can sing, the greater your capacity to choose how to deploy yourself in tough situations, rather than letting your usual song do its thing.

SPOTLIGHT ON

ATIDENU

TAMMY KALVARI, ENROLLMENT MANAGER

CATHY LOWENSTEIN, HEAD OF SCHOOL

JENNIFER SHECTER, DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS, VANCOUVER TALMUD TORAH

Is passion for your school and an unwavering commitment to Jewish education enough to build one's admissions pipeline? As we all know, these are necessary but not sufficient. An admissions office must be methodical, proactive and creative in its approach to recruitment, enrollment and retention. Luckily, for the admissions team at Vancouver Talmud Torah (VTT), the experts at Prizmah's Atidenu program provided the guidance, wisdom and experience required to build a robust admissions strategy to serve our school in the years to come. With support from our board of directors, the three of us participated in the 18-month program.

Participating in Atidenu required radically altering the way we do business. First and foremost, we had to become a data-driven organization. While we always used data for basic admissions functions, the team at Atidenu showed us how more detailed data accumulation, particularly on family demographics, can enhance and grow our admissions goals. Tammy eagerly embraced this challenge and received regular support from Elana Alfred and Adele Yermack on how to capture, input and track data. Tammy now meticulously records every detail related to admissions. Various teams in the school (admissions, finance, academic and board) analyze this data to inform planning and decision making. This has been the single greatest shift in our internal operations and has proved tremendously valuable for all involved.

It takes more than numbers, however, to build a successful admissions strategy. Consultant Rebecca Egolf spent two productive days at VTT mentoring both faculty and parents on how to become vocal ambassadors. Even though we intuitively knew the power of word of mouth, under Egolf's tutelage we formalized an ambassador program with almost immediate results. Most transformative was witnessing our teachers providing leads and referrals. While we would expect this from

our (self-selected) parent ambassadors, we were pleased to see our faculty contributing to the collective effort to boost inquiries and enrollment.

Additionally, one unexpected consequence of enlisting parent ambassadors was their proactive involvement online, particularly on Facebook. As we learned from Egolf, millennials rely on social media (and often complete strangers) to help them make important life decisions, such as their children's schooling. This question frequently makes the rounds on local Facebook groups, and when it does, we can always count on an ambassador to voice their support for, and satisfaction with, VTT. This, too, was a new facet of our improved admissions strategy and our effort to create buy-in from different stakeholder groups.

The final piece to building a sustainable admissions plan involved closely working with marketing guru Chuck English. Until we joined Atidenu, our website alone communicated with prospective families. English convinced us to create a (non-digital) viewbook that clearly communicated our value proposition while being substantial enough for families to take home. (The final product can be viewed at bit.ly/2pcowUE.) English also recommended we produce a monthly newsletter (distinct from our weekly general newsletter) exclusively to highlight academic excellence at VTT. The newsletter concluded with a VOTE NOW button soliciting feedback from parents, which has been resoundingly positive. Selling our school is an ongoing effort, and we continue to rely on English's expertise to develop and fine-tune marketing initiatives to attract new families and help retain those we have.

Creativity, which the program cultivated and emphasized, is an essential ingredient for an admissions office in its approach to recruitment. Over the last 18 months, we have initiated the following programs and partnerships to bring more people into our school:

Toddler Tuesdays at Talmud Torah: free monthly storytime and Jewish art program for two- and three-year-olds and their caregivers, facilitated by an established artist and/or PJ Library. This has attracted many new young families.

A partnership with an influential rabbi from the Vancouver Kollel. This rabbi is often the first point of contact for newcomers to our community. In exchange for his support, VTT co-sponsors several of his outreach programs, all of which are held on our campus free of charge.

Frequent Facebook advertising campaigns to build brand awareness and recognition.

Active and regular Facebook engagement on a closed page to build loyalty and enthusiasm with current parents.

A phone campaign to every family (300+) by a member of the academic leadership team to inquire about their school experience thus far. Parents have been pleasantly surprised and gratified by these calls, offering both praise and constructive feedback.

"Bringing faculty into the fold." Every day we email faculty to apprise them of the day's tours, preparing them to meet, greet and welcome all visitors. We also begin every monthly staff meeting with a summary of our activities and the status of our enrollment, including sharing all relevant data. This transparency motivates our teachers to continue supporting our recruitment efforts.

Adding post-tour surveys, formal exit interviews and other mechanisms to professionalize the admissions process.

While passion for Jewish education and for one's school is an essential starting point, the team at Atidenu taught us to incorporate many more established practices and creative ideas to build our admissions pipeline. We are already seeing promising results.



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ANDREA KASPER

AMBITION

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT AMBITION COULD BE A DIRTY WORD UNTIL WELL INTO ADULTHOOD. I WAS FURTHER SHOCKED TO LEARN THAT IT WAS A DOWNRIGHT INSULT IF SAID ABOUT A WOMAN. ON ONE HAND, I WANT TO PUT GENDER ISSUES ASIDE; ON THE OTHER HAND, WE CAN NEVER PUT GENDER ISSUES ASIDE. I REFLECT ON THE NEGATIVE WORDS USED TO DESCRIBE AMBITION: HEADSTRONG, STUBBORN, OPINIONATED, SELFISH. THEN THERE ARE THE MORE POSITIVE WORDS: HUNGRY, MOTIVATED, SMART, GOAL-ORIENTED. AS I WAS GROWING UP, I HEARD MORE OF THE NEGATIVE WORDS USED TO DESCRIBE MY AMBITION, AND IT'S NOT LOST ON ME THAT THE POSITIVE WORDS WERE USED TO DESCRIBE MY BROTHER AND OTHER BOYS AND MEN IN MY ENVIRONMENT.

Infuriating as it is, this kind of pushback didn't stop me nor countless other women from forging their own path toward leadership. Now in the middle of my career, I claim the title *ambitious*. I want to be the best possible head of school, I want to make a meaningful impact, I want to take risks that move our community forward, I want to be at the very top of my game, and I am willing to work hard to do this. I am hungry, headstrong, opinionated, smart and motivated.

Where does ambition stand in the world of Jewish leadership?

A search in our Jewish texts results in negative responses such as this: "Rabbi Eliezer HaKappar said, 'Envy, desire, and ambition drive a person from the world'" (Avot 4:21). I asked text-savvy scholars for their input. One explained, "The thrust of Jewish thought centers around values, which could be construed as opposite to notions of ambition." Our tradition doesn't seem to hold ambition in high regard and doesn't speak of it directly very much.

I find it difficult to square this with notion of the Jewish community and its commitment to education. At least in a modern sense, the pursuit of knowledge can easily be understood as ambition, and certainly the history of Jews in the United States is marked by high academic distinction and upward mobility. Is it not ambition that drives a pursuit of education and good employment? I am at a loss in understanding the Jewish cultural response to ambition and its lack of visibility in Jewish thought. As I look for examples of ambition in the Torah, I think about Moshe who didn't want to be a leader, Yosef who insisted that all success comes from God, and David, perhaps the most ambitious, who didn't get to build the Beit HaMikdash. Yet again, ambition

is not presented in a positive light. Moshe, possibly the least ambitious, is hailed in Jewish thought as the paradigmatic teacher, Moshe Rabbeinu.

Perhaps ambition is best conceived as neutral, objectively neither good nor bad. Rather, the worthiness of ambition is better determined by asking, For what are we striving? What are we ambitious for? For me, the primary question is, Am I ambitious solely for myself, or am I ambitious on behalf of my community? While this dichotomy may sound appealing, it is surely too simple; ambition should be both for oneself and for something larger. Instead, I see ambition falling on a continuum between the individual and community. While it seems clear to me that ambition for myself, alone, lacks moral and ethical grounding, and can lead to pain and suffering of others, it illuminates for me the question of whether one can be ambitious solely for the other, for the community without the self. I am drawn back to Hillel's famous quote, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?" This reminds me to reflect on balancing my personal and communal interests, so that I find the room to include myself in my community's needs.

For me and my work, ambition has been the toggling back and forth between moments of certainty and humbling reflection, between knowing what is right and wondering if I am completely wrong. Ambition forces me to be disciplined and exacting with my own reasoning and goals. My ambition pushes me forward through this discomfort; it opens me up to further listening and collaboration in order to garner wisdom from others.

A recent, significant change engaged all of these aspects of my ambition. Our school just went

through a major educational transformation: We remade ourselves into a progressive, multiage learning school. When I first presented this vision to the board of trustees, I took a particular approach, showing them the future of education, our need to respond to it and what I believed was an inspiring goal. I entered that room with high confidence in both the vision and the presentation. When I finished, there was silence, confusion, then nonstop questions. I had completely missed the mark.

Eventually, I went home as the board continued its conversation. This was the moment of ambition, right between certainty and doubt. The board had committed to coming together for a follow-up presentation. Over the next few days I spoke with several board members, the co-presidents, my coaches and family. I rethought my approach, what was needed from me as a leader and a better understanding of my audience. At the next meeting, I walked in with a new sense of clarity, knowing that I had the right data for the right audience, that my belief in the vision was steadfast, and that because I listened carefully, my chance of success had grown significantly. At the end of the meeting, the board voted, unanimously, for this bold and big change.

Labor organizer Cesar Chavez explained, “We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community. ... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.” In light of how ambition plays a role in my life and leadership, Chavez’s quote rings clear. My first presentation didn’t include the needs of my audience; in that moment that I call ambition (between certainty and doubt), I discovered those needs.

While this was a decisive moment, there have been countless such moments for me as a leader; they happen in daily conversations with faculty, administrators and parents. I have tried tempering going in strong, a vestige of emotion from being called opinionated, stubborn and headstrong. I value the process that brings me to that moment of ambition, when I take the strength of my conviction and grow it to expand and make room for others, so that I can work and fight harder for my students and my community.

I now understand that my ambition was and remains far greater than me. My ambition is to help Judaism evolve, it is to help guide students and families toward a kinder, more welcoming, more inclusive, low-barrier, high-creativity Judaism. I want to help build a school that graduates students who are ready to co-create the Judaism that will be through a lens of progressive, innovative and inquiry-based education. Those are very real and very ambitious goals on behalf of our future. Whether I succeed in any or all of these goals remains to be seen. The only certainty is that without this drive and ambition, I wouldn’t even be trying.

CHRIS DOUGLAS

Leading Successfully in Education: Less Talk, More Conversation

CHANGE CAN ONLY BE SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED WHEN THE PEOPLE INVOLVED ARE ON BOARD, ENGAGED AND VALUED. THE GREAT DIFFERENTIATOR GOING FORWARD, THE PLACE WHERE SCHOOL LEADERS WILL FIND A NEW SUSTAINABLE EDGE, RESIDES IN CONVERSATION—THE WAY TO HUMAN CONNECTIVITY. WHAT GETS TALKED ABOUT FROM THE BOARDROOM TO THE CLASSROOM, HOW IT GETS TALKED ABOUT, AND WHO IS INVITED TO JOIN THE CONVERSATION DETERMINES WHAT WILL HAPPEN OR WON'T.

Conversations surrounding education must be co-constructed by those who will be responsible for carrying out programs and those who are invested and dependent on achieving success. As General Colin Powell said, “Leadership is all about people. It is not about organizations. It is not about plans. It is not about strategies. It is all about people—motivating people to get the job done. You have to be people-centered.”

The work of Nobel prizewinning psychologist Daniel Kahneman underscores that human beings behave emotionally first, rationally second. To implement change effectively, therefore, emphasis must be placed on developing human capital. A focus on data, programs and systems overlooks the human elements and the relationships necessary to make change happen. They overlook the emotional capital that it takes to create real, ground-level change. That emotional capital is built or destroyed one conversation at a time.

Schools, like all organizations, are emotional as well as intellectual enterprises. They need to engage people on a human level. To build emotional capital and relationships that go deep and endure requires “fierce” conversations that engage people on an intellectual and emotional level, creating buy-in that leads to action.

Leadership that commits to creating accountable cultures with the intention of increasing engagement and connectivity

THE POWER OF CONVERSATION

AVI BOSSEWITCH

are the most successful in creating positive cultures. Leaders need to adopt a new view of accountability, eliminating finger pointing and replacing it with encouragement as well as a sense of autonomy and ownership. Accountability is an attitude—a personal, private and non-negotiable choice about how to live one's life. It's a desire to take responsibility for results, and for that reason, it cannot be mandated. It requires a personal bias toward solutions, toward action. Milbrey McLaughlin, co-director of the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, has noted, "You can't mandate what matters." A culture of fierce conversations inspires and instills intrinsic accountability—a desire to want to take responsibility and ownership. Leading is easier and credibility is built when honest feedback is a central part of every conversation.

The simplest definition of a fierce conversation is one in which you come out from behind yourself, into the conversation, and make it real. There are several reasons why people avoid telling the truth of reality as they see it. Perhaps it has destroyed a relationship in the past, or perhaps they have seen someone lose a job or position due to a failed attempt at truthful conversation. Or perhaps, people truly don't believe it is their place to say what they notice or feel.

The problem is that not sharing the whole truth has costlier consequences. If you are out of integrity with yourself or others and fail to disclose your truth, it can lead to even more significant losses, inhibit positive change, and fail to take advantage of opportunities for improvement.

Fierce leaders want to know the truth. And in turn, they also have to share the truth. Fierce conversations interrogate reality, provoke learning, tackle tough challenges and enrich relationships. They speak to the heart of the issues, galvanize the people involved, and become catalysts for sustainable change.

You know you're having a fierce conversation when:

- You are speaking in your real voice.
- You are speaking to the heart of the matter.
- You are really asking and really listening.
- You are generating heat.
- You are enriching the relationship.
- You are different when the conversation is over.

Educational leaders engage in conversations in all directions—with parents, teachers, stakeholders and contributors. Every day, you are having conversations that can change the outcome of a child's life. Leaders need to remain engaged, get in touch with their own courage and focus on building emotional capital in every interaction.

These conversations are not always easy to have, but the cost of not having them is too great to ignore. Being effective with challenging conversations is like any other skill. The more you practice, the better you will be. Start planning the conversations you need to have that will address real issues, increase emotional capital and creating lasting results.

One of the striking ideas in Jewish thought is that the capacity for speech is the most God-like attribute with which humans are endowed. This idea is expressed vividly by Targum Onkelos at the beginning of Genesis. Onkelos translates the phrase **וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לִפְנֵי חַיָּה** (Bereishit 2:7), usually translated as "and man became a living spirit," as **וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לֹויָת מִלְלָיו**, "and man became a *speaking spirit*." *Koach hadibbur*, the power of speech, is what it means to be human. On a metaphysical level, Judaism believes that the world was created through speech and that speech has the power to create or destroy worlds. On a practical and interpersonal level, speech is at the center of all of our relationships, with ourselves, others and even with God. In Jewish day schools, numerous programs address different aspects of *koach hadibbur*. They often underscore the importance of kind words, telling the truth, prayer, and the abstention from defamatory words and slander.

A few years ago, while participating in the YOU Lead fellowship, I was introduced to the work of Susan Scott, founder and CEO of Fierce, Inc., and author of *Fierce Conversations* and *Fierce Leadership*. The key idea of her approach is that any single conversation can change the trajectory of any relationship. Scott identified different kinds of conversations, and for each, she developed templates for how to frame and have them. She includes techniques for decision making, collaborating, team conversations and providing feedback.

One of the Fierce frameworks addresses difficult conversations, those that center around one person confronting another about his/her behavior. Imagine for a moment a student who wants to confront a teacher about something that he or she thinks the teacher has done wrong, or a faculty member who wants to address a difficult issue with an administrator. Often these confrontations are avoided at any cost. When they do occur, they often have profound and negative outcomes and move the parties further apart.

One type of confrontation conversation was articulated by Nachmanides. In his interpretation of the prohibition not to "hate your brother in your heart" (Vayikra 19:17), he explains that one is obligated to confront someone and ask, "Why did you do this to me?" While that seems pretty sensible, it is far easier said than done. How does someone navigate a difficult conversation like this? How can we expect our students and children to do this when we as adults have so much difficulty doing it?

While Nachmanides does not provide the answer, Scott does. She includes the following ingredients for difficult conversations: the confronting party identifies and clarifies the issue, describes the current impact and future implications, expresses his or her own contribution to the issue, describes the ideal outcome and a commitment to action. While having such a framework does not automatically improve such a conversation, it does provide a map to follow.

This approach resonated deeply with me, as I considered seminal conversations that I or my colleagues participated in which had a profound impact on our relationships and our school. In addition to developing a framework for adults, Fierce developed a program for students entitled FITS (Fierce In The Schools), to equip them with similar tools to navigate all kinds of conversations and relationships. (Our school, the Hebrew Academy in Miami Beach, is implementing this program, thanks to a grant from our federation.) This is especially vital for students in today's world in which genuine conversations and discourse have too often been replaced by monologues and rabid disagreements.

STEVE LEVY

STRATEGIC THINKING

AMONG THE MANY LESSONS I LEARNED OVER THE YEARS FROM A VARIETY OF BUSINESS EXPERIENCES AND FROM MY VOLUNTEER WORK, ONE STANDS OUT: IT IS ALWAYS BETTER TO TAKE A LONG-TERM STRATEGIC VIEW, ASSESSING OUR COMMUNITY'S CAPABILITIES AND THE CAPACITY OF OUR LEADERS TO ACT, TO ARTICULATE A "BIG VISION" AND STICK TO IT.

In 2005, I had the opportunity to put this strategic-thinking process to work as part of a small team led by visionary benefactors Paula and Jerry z"l Gottesman as well as long-time day school leaders Robin and Brad Klatt (both Paula and Brad are currently members of Prizmah's Board of Directors), and our professional partner, Kim Hirsh, who works for the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater MetroWest in New Jersey. Together, we designed a groundbreaking initiative aimed at making the three (now four) Jewish day schools in our community sustainable. From the start, it was clear that there was no single idea that could carve this path toward sustainability; there was no "silver bullet" that would accomplish our goal.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN

What was needed was a multidimensional strategy that 1) would take years to develop, 2) would require "all hands on deck"—professional and lay leaders from the schools, the Federation and Jewish Community Foundation, major donors and day school supporters from each school and from every generation, and 3) would transform the schools for decades to come. This is, in essence, the definition of strategic thinking. Setting a vision of sustainable Jewish day schools in our community was the easy part. The hard part was developing the breadth and depth of a strategic plan that could enable us to make that vision a reality. By keeping our focus on the overarching goal of sustainability, instead of a simpler goal, like increased enrollment,

we were able to develop a set of comprehensive, adaptive and impactful initiatives that would serve all of our schools and community stakeholders. The vision and planning were all the more remarkable because our three schools had never previously communicated with each other, let alone cooperated on a project, despite a distinct lack of competition among them.

The MetroWest Day School Initiative was officially launched in 2007, with 12 major donors: 11 leading day school families and our Jewish Federation. The focus of the plan was on attaining long-term sustainability through increased affordability and enhanced academic excellence. Over the course of this initiative, our definitions of both affordability and excellence steadily and significantly broadened as we learned which programs worked and which didn't.

Early in the process we figured out that adaptability was going to be another critical success factor. This manifested itself in our first attempt to create a single community fund for the benefit of all three schools. Over about a year of private donor meetings, individual and in small groups, we realized that the only financial support structure that had a chance of succeeding would have to include individual endowment funds for each school alongside a smaller, centrally controlled community fund for all schools. We learned that listening to the schools' leadership, and very importantly, to their major donors (many of whom were current or former board members), was critical, as their perspectives—and their support—would shape this initiative and

ensure its success. It is hard to overstate how important these discussions with donors were to the eventual success of the plan.

The other major lesson we learned early was the importance of good governance. Raising tens of millions of dollars and providing significant financial incentives to each of the schools for participation was great but insufficient. The schools needed oversight, guidance and feedback from a central, professionally coordinated group of passionate leaders who could see beyond "one school" to our whole community of day schools. This need led to the creation of the Greater MetroWest Day School Advisory Council, a volunteer-led group established under the Jewish Community Foundation to oversee all of the initiative's programs and expenditures with significant ongoing support again from our federation and foundation staff.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

More than \$13 million was raised at the initial launch, and some rather narrow initial objectives were established under the "affordability and excellence" umbrella. With an eye toward the goal of long-term financial sustainability of each school, we set our first fundraising target of \$50 million in endowment assets and commitments to be raised in the first five years. Each of the three schools was in a very different situation, but all of them were willing participants spurred on by significant financial incentives, most notably, an incredibly generous multimillion dollar match from the Gottesman Family

Foundation. One of the schools, the then-Hebrew Academy of Morris County, was already a national leader in addressing the critical middle-income family affordability conundrum: families choosing not to enroll because they made too much money to apply for financial aid (or perceived this) and didn't make enough for them feel comfortable paying full tuition. Very quickly the other two schools, with their own funds raised, were able to implement similar programs that were customized for their own situations.

Achieving long-term financial sustainability through affordability was not the sole financial aspect of our strategic plan. An emphasis on building endowment funds was at the core of these efforts. The MetroWest Day School Council also developed a series of programs that encouraged increased annual campaign fundraising capacity and broader support from alumni. Annual goals were set and measured in the first 10 years, and significant improvements at all three schools were accomplished. Interestingly, each of the three schools has since expanded its fundraising capabilities to include major comprehensive capital and endowment campaigns. Overall, we have raised more than \$80 million in endowment and supplemental long-term funds, and well in excess of \$100 million when combined with capital gifts that have transformed day school buildings and campuses.

The objective of enhancing the academic excellence of the three schools was initially narrowly defined. In the first few years, funds

from the community pot were used to pay for programs that ensured all three schools had the latest math, science and Hebrew language curricula. Programs that taught new pedagogical methodologies for differentiated learning were also funded centrally. Underlying all these efforts was an understanding that affordability alone was not a path to sustainability; we needed to provide affordable and excellent educations that would be valued by a growing list of families.

Eventually, our focus on academic excellence shifted into a higher gear with a new program, spearheaded once again by the Gottesman Family Foundation. The Quest for Teaching Excellence brought significant funding for professional development and an entire infrastructure of faculty oversight, evaluation and cooperation. This program touches every member of the faculty, staff and administration at each of our schools. On a biennial basis, we close all our schools so that hundreds of our teachers and staff can learn together and from each other. In total, Quest has led to thousands of additional hours of learning for our community's teachers.

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT: KEEPING US ON TRACK

As ambitious and multidimensional as our plan has been, establishing a strategic plan, and even implementing it over a decade, is not enough. Every plan needs to be regularly evaluated and modified, keeping the vision and long-term goals in mind.

In the eighth year of our initiative, Kim and I, along with Rebecca Hindin, director of the Greater MetroWest Day School Initiative, and Bob Lichtman, the chief learning officer of our federation, began a planned and lengthy assessment process to figure out which of our programs were valued, which were impactful and what areas we needed to address differently. The assessment process included a survey of a few hundred stakeholders. Most importantly, the process resulted in a renewed commitment to our Quest program and a major research effort into identifying new affordability initiatives beyond the middle-income programs now well entrenched at each school. A small group of us scoured the global Jewish day school world looking for affordability ideas that worked and could be adapted to our community. This group worked for nine months and implemented the Tuition Max program, which caps tuition at no more than 18% of income for middle income families. In developing Tuition Max, we recognized that not only was the actual cost of a day school education important, but the visibility and predictability of future tuition obligations was a key hurdle to overcome for many new families.

As our Day School Initiative has matured, we have also been able to work collectively to take advantage of programs that further our schools' sustainability. These include two Prizmah programs: Atideinu, which inculcates best practices in the area of recruitment and retention, and Board Fitness, which builds capacity in governance. Additionally, we



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partnered on a pilot program run by PJ Library, aimed at exposing families that were receiving books from PJ Library to our schools.

Overall, the major lessons we have all learned in the past dozen years have been:

Create a big picture, a strategic vision, and stick with it.

There is no one “solution” to day school sustainability. A multidimensional approach that is flexible to adapt with changing circumstances or deepened engagement is required.

Day schools are much stronger working together, and in partnership with a central organizing entity than they are alone. We have found that having a central Community Day School Fund, and a central body, the Day School Council, to oversee it, has enabled our community to act quickly and efficiently to line up the necessary support, financial and otherwise, to take advantage of these national programs as they arise. We also have the benefit of having a forum to share lessons learned and best practices from these programs, deepening the impact. We share a website (www.njdayschools.org) promoting all four schools, and we jointly attend gatherings outside our community with one voice.

Enrollment is not the only measure of sustainability. Certainly, a school that creates enough demand to fill its classes to capacity—none of our four schools can claim this yet—would be considered sustainable, but that probably takes too short-term a view of success. We are happy to report that this year will be our fifth year in a row of overall enrollment growth, albeit slow and uneven across the four schools.

Each school needed to move at its own speed. No two schools are likely to see the same level of success regardless of the unified programs or incentives. What is important is that all of the schools have been moving in the right direction toward achieving their own sustainability goals.

Update: Our community continues its strategic drive to push the envelope of day school affordability, with two new initiatives.

1. In the upcoming year, the Gottesman Academy is rolling out an even more aggressive approach to affordability, thanks to another grant from the Gottesman Family Foundation. The program lowers tuition for all students and provides a cap on the percentage of income a family will be obligated for tuition to no more than 10%—and it could be as low as 6.5% for families with only one child. The school was using a maximum cap of 15% of income, but it applied only to middle income families with earnings up to \$270,000. This new cap has no limit on earnings.

2. The Joseph Kushner Academy rolled out a program that partners with area synagogues to offer combined discounts of up to \$37,500 for families moving into Greater MetroWest that enroll in the school and join a synagogue. This program is one that was developed as part of the strategic plan but adapted specifically for Kushner's Orthodox community.

SUSAN DECKER

Board Leadership: Dispositions for Success

THE MOST EXCEPTIONAL BOARDS FOR JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS ARE COMPOSED OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE COMMITTED TO THE MISSION OF EDUCATING YOUTH WITHIN A RELIGIOUS FRAMEWORK. THEY PUT PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES INTO PLAY TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE PROVIDING STRONG GOVERNANCE FOR THE SCHOOL. THE COLLECTIVE WILL OF THE GROUP IS DEDICATED NOT ONLY TO HOLDING THE KEYS TO THE PUBLIC TRUST OF THE INSTITUTION BUT TO ADVANCING THE REACH AND IMPACT OF THE MISSION.

The leadership of such a board must likewise be exceptional. Board leaders must be able to plan ahead and think strategically; they are most successful when committed to continuous learning and have a willingness to attempt new things. The best leaders have great questions, not all of the answers. Catalytic questions that may provide strategic direction include: What do you want the legacy of this board to be? What could we stop doing that we are currently doing? In what headline would we like our school's name to be included?

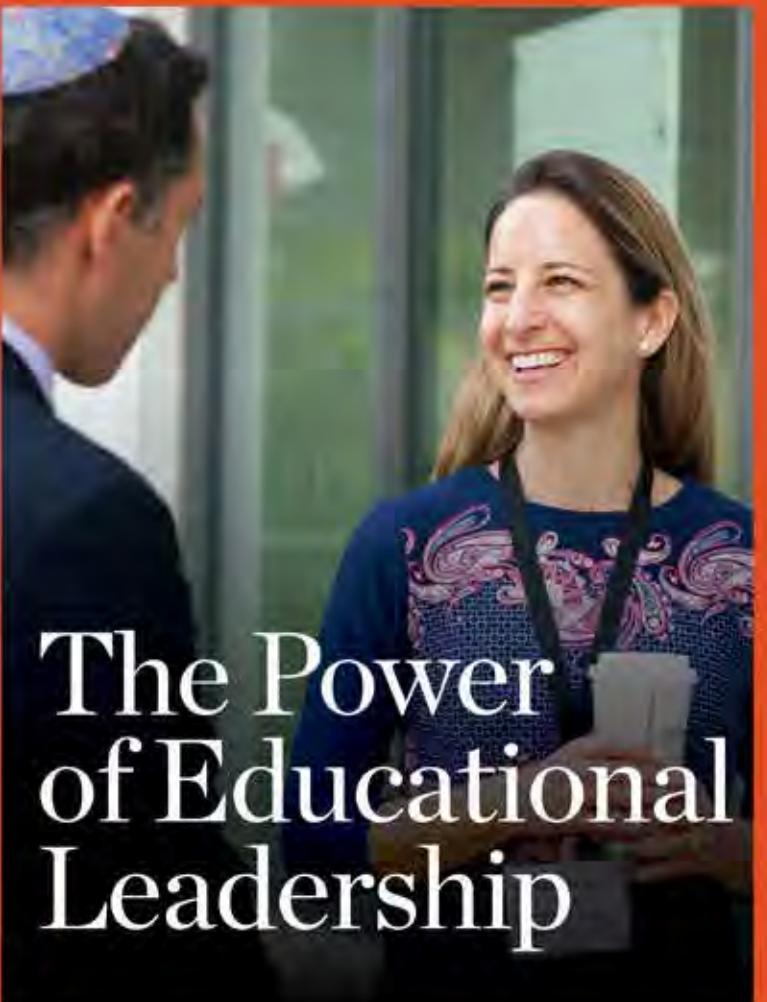
Boards are made up of a set of formal and informal interactions, history and habits. The best boards are able to identify the habits that should become traditions and those which should be left behind. It takes a strong board chair, willing to assess the work of the board and look at things from all sides, to establish this culture of inquiry. According to Nancy Axelrod, founder of Nonprofit Leadership Services, culture determines who makes the decisions, who speaks to whom and in what manner, how the board and head of school relate to each other, and even where board members sit at the board table. A culture of inquiry advances respectful dialogue, encourages healthy debate and does not shy away from complex or challenging situations.

With intentionality, the board chair can tackle challenging subjects while engaging board members, encouraging candor and thoughtful decision making. A strong sense of self and emotional intelligence is required to truly achieve this. Intentional practices include structuring the board to fulfill essential governance duties and to support organizational priorities. Ensuring that all board members participate in a structured orientation and are actively contributing their skills and expertise is a great starting point.

Consider the following example: In a recent board meeting, a board member who often plays the role of healthy skeptic asked a question concerning the impact of a school program on the budget. Because he had questioned the value of the program in the past, other board members marginalized his question and moved on. Later, when a respected veteran board member asked the same question, the board took the time to ask questions and gain more information about the program. Boards need healthy skeptics, so the person who questions concepts, tests new ideas and raises intelligent doubt on issues should be embraced, not dismissed. A skilled board leader will advance the culture of inquiry by appropriately recognizing the healthy skeptic within the context of the full board.

A strong board leader knows where the institution is going and is able to provide clarity to others as well. Understanding the vision, identifying priorities and guiding the rest of the board toward that big picture is a trait of strong leadership. While it is easy to get caught up in high-urgency agenda topics, ensuring that focus is placed on items that are high impact and low urgency allows for a longer runway for good decision making. Taking the time to review previous agendas to determine if time is being spent on appropriate priorities is a task worth undertaking. It is often in hindsight that we can learn if we are focusing our attention appropriately. Questions a board leader can raise specific to the success of the meeting include: How much of our time was spent on operational versus strategic matters? What was the most interesting or engaging part of today's meeting? How could this meeting have been improved?

A strong board leader will establish key objectives for each board meeting. Developing two or three questions related



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to the greater goals of the institution will sharpen strategic focus and help keep the board from delving into operational issues that are the purview of the head of school. While the board is responsible for the life of the school and is accountable to the public trust, the head of school is responsible for the affairs of the school and is accountable to the board. Clarity of purpose and recognition that the effectiveness of the board and head of school are interdependent can take a school in a very positive direction.

Engaging in a constructive partnership with the head of school is also a sign of strong leadership. It is the board leader's responsibility to frame the partnership in the context of good governance practices, ensuring clarity and understanding between the role of the board and the role of the head of school. Mutual respect, trust and support are the cornerstones of a strong partnership; shared purpose and mission-driven focus create strong context for the good of the institution. This is, however, not an easy task and is a frequent source of conflict. For example, during one board meeting, a board member began questioning the head of school about an operational issue. When the answers did not satisfy the board member, he continued with sharper and more aggressive questions. While the discomfort of others was palpable, no one had the courage to step in and remind the board member that the questions were not really the work of the board nor was his manner respectful.

When we allow disrespect or the blurring of roles and responsibilities, we are not supporting a culture of inquiry. The ability to courageously and sensitively call individuals on questionable or inappropriate actions or behaviors is an indicator of leadership. It can be challenging to fulfill the role of "caller," especially in a setting where friends and colleagues are board members. This critical skill of gently raising the expectations for engagement and holding board members responsible for their actions, if employed with empathy, will raise the level of board effectiveness. This action must be undertaken with a servant's heart and with the goal of improving the institution.

Finally, strong board leaders recognize that connecting with others allows us to have greater impact. Providing time for board members to get to know each other is time well-spent. Questions at the beginning of a board meeting can encourage that sharing: Why were you drawn to serve on this board? What is the greatest skill you bring to this board? What is one way you stood for the mission of this school since our last meeting? What is one thing I could do to make this a stronger board? Boards that have developed shared understandings about purpose, roles and goals have achieved this by investing in their own relationships and their relationship with the school.

Successful boards and schools take time, energy and a commitment to the mission. Clarity of purpose, intentional meeting practices, a constructive partnership, and the building of a culture of inquiry are all tools that strong leaders can utilize to move their boards forward. These skills and tools, when coupled with encouraging board members to engage and participate fully, will assist in the development of future leadership for the institution as individuals will recognize the value of each voice in the boardroom.

COMMENTARY

LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

Gary Pretsfelder, Principal, Solomon Schechter School of Manhattan:

In leading a group through adaptive change, a leader is faced with competing values: loyalty to those who have helped build the organization versus commitment to the successful future of the institution. If relationships are at the core of organizations, and if one of the roles of a leader is to collaborate with colleagues who support a positive and healthy work environment, then potentially undermining those very relationships with adaptive change is both risky to the organization and risky to the leader. At a moment when support for change is so important, generating the disequilibrium required for adaptive change risks damaging those very connections that a leader has successfully built up over time. It is in these moments of truth that leaders are challenged to navigate the delicate balance between trusting relationships and the organization's future. The successful leader has to sensitively communicate the larger message of adaptive needs upon which the future of the institution will be built. Even in this difficult moment, relationships remain at the core.

Rabbi David Stein, Judaic Studies Teacher and Director of Gemara Education, Shalhevet High School, Los Angeles:

As Jewish educators, we bear a foundational responsibility towards the people, traditions and heritage that came before us. At the same time, though, we're tasked with the mission of translating and transmitting that history in order to ensure its future. Walking this tightrope certainly isn't easy, and the potential pitfalls are daunting. If we fail to recognize and adapt to the new social, cultural, technological and communal norms of our world, our values and traditions may be left, God forbid, to fall upon deaf—or distracted—ears. Adapt too much, though, and we risk abandoning the very ideals that we've been entrusted to preserve.

There are no easy answers to this dilemma, and each educator, community and denomination must find their own balance between change and tradition. Yet Heifetz and Laurie have captured here a formula for identifying those "immutable values" that we must hold on to while reorienting ourselves to the challenges of each generation: a relentless, fearless and honest examination of our practices, approaches, pedagogies, institutional structures, curricula, values and biases.

Mobilizing an organization to adapt its behaviors in order to thrive in new business environments is critical. ... Adaptive change is distressing for the people going through it. They need to take on new roles, new relationships, new values, new behaviors, and new approaches to work. ... Rather than fulfilling the expectation that they will provide answers, leaders have to ask tough questions. Rather than protecting people from outside threats, leaders should allow them to feel the pinch of reality in order to stimulate them to adapt. Instead of orienting people to their current roles, leaders must disorient them so that new relationships can develop. Instead of quelling conflict, leaders have to draw the issues out. Instead of maintaining norms, leaders have to challenge "the way we do business" and help others distinguish immutable values from historical practices that must go.

Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie, "The Work of Leadership"

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Ross, Assistant Principal, Middle School, Yavneh Academy, Paramus, New Jersey:

The shift from "stage on the stage" to "guide on the side" has occurred in the boardroom no less than in the classroom. The idea of a "leader as visionary" or "leader as oracle," that the person on the top of the hierarchy possesses a clear view of where the organization is headed and is always ready with the best answer for every question, is simply not reflective of the reality on the ground, and certainly not in situations of organizational change. A leader has to be willing to allow for a certain degree of failure among his or her team, however painful that may be for everyone involved.

Real change rarely has a clear roadmap. The leadership skills necessary to guide an organization through change are the ability to project and instill confidence that the change is necessary (and not back down at the first setback), the flexibility to search for different options when the initial plans do not pan out as anticipated, and the fortitude to withstand some discomfiting moments and to manage the inevitable interpersonal conflicts as roles and expectations undergo sometimes rapid changes. A leader who understands the organization's core principles, and can consistently communicate why and how the change remains faithful to those ideals, is a leader who ultimately will be successful in guiding that organization through an inevitably turbulent process.

Liora Chessin, English Language Arts and Social Studies Teacher, and Director of Communications and Public Relations, N. E. Miles Jewish Day School, Birmingham, Alabama:

Being a leader in a Jewish day school means being a leader of a community based on Jewish values that are relevant and applicable to the challenges our students' face in their lives. By studying our shared history and learning from those who came before us, we have the opportunity to help our students understand their identity and empower them to contribute to society as proud Jewish citizens. Our school communities must engage in challenging conversations about preserving our constant values in a dynamic world. Mobilizing the children and adults in our buildings to act on our shared values in the classroom, in the community and beyond is what makes teaching and learning at our schools unique and gives us the strength to navigate change.



PAUL OBERMAN

HUMILITY

THIS PAST NOVEMBER, I DECIDED TO SHADOW A STUDENT FOR AN ENTIRE DAY, A SHORT FRIDAY, TO SEE THROUGH HIS EYES WHAT A TYPICAL DAY AT OUR HIGH SCHOOL, BEREN ACADEMY IN HOUSTON, LOOKED LIKE. AS TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS, WE MAKE DECISIONS ALL THE TIME THAT WE FEEL ARE IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENTS, BUT DO WE *REALLY* KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A STUDENT IN OUR OWN SCHOOLS? I ALSO WANTED TO SHOW WHERE OUR PRIORITIES LIE. TEACHING AND LEARNING ARE OBVIOUSLY AT THE HEART OF OUR SCHOOLS, BUT WE SPEND FAR MORE TIME AS ADMINISTRATORS IN OUR OFFICES THAN IN THE CLASSROOMS. IT'S TOO EASY TO FORGET THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A STUDENT, ESPECIALLY IN A DUAL-CURRICULUM SCHOOL WHERE STUDENTS OFTEN HAVE EIGHT OR MORE CLASSES, PLUS SPORTS AND PLAYS AND OTHER EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.

I dedicated myself to playing the student role completely. I took all scheduled quizzes and rushed to be on time to classes. The only thing I shirked was homework. I knew, of course, that the teachers were not going to treat me exactly as they did the ninth graders. I also realized that the observer effect was a certainty; my presence in the classroom would affect what I saw. Still, I hoped to emerge from this day a better leader with a more intimate knowledge of what was truly happening in the classes and in my school. As a school leader, I know so much about big-picture items such as budgets and facilities, but in terms of what really happens inside the school, the students are the real experts.

To start my day I attended davening as usual, but pushed myself to lead a part to which I was not accustomed, as we often ask the boys to do. I stumbled twice, including struggling to find the page for Kaddish. As davening concluded, one of the junior boys did a perfect parody of me, letting me know that

my shirt, which was not “hunter green,” was holding the high school back from dress-down days because I was not adhering to the uniform code.

My first class of the day, History, was my weakest subject when I was in school. The class began with a scheduled quiz. True to form, I faced three questions that I couldn’t remember much about, with only 12 minutes in which to generate some memories. I included the word “maybe” multiple times, but felt that there was a chance I had done reasonably well on this quiz.

In World Literature, I encountered a list of words including a few that were unfamiliar: *tyros*, *chamois* and *repined*. I was surprised, as I pride myself on my vocabulary. We were asked to write sentences for each word. We then had a structured discussion in groups of three about a video, screened a previous day (which I had not seen), explaining that stress was unhealthy only when it was perceived to be so. The protocol called for each student to add to the point the other was making. This was an interesting exercise because it challenged us to integrate the video, our own point of view and our classmates’ points of view.

Gemara class featured a discussion about whether you need to eat in the location in which you say Kiddush. My student guide helpfully pointed out where we were when I lost the spot in the Talmud. This class centered on a seeming contradiction, which had an intellectually satisfying resolution that my classmates noticed toward the end of the class period.

For our Judaic elective, conversational Hebrew, we watched a movie in Hebrew. My Hebrew is fairly weak, but I enjoyed hearing my classmates comment to each other in Hebrew about the film. After lunch, in a regular Hebrew class we took an unscramble challenge, with the winner receiving a homework pass. We then worked on a 27-question worksheet, on which I knew precisely zero of the answers. The teacher stopped by to help me at one point, but I was surely her worst student. If this were truly a class for me day in and day out, I would have been overwhelmed and depressed, as I truly could not keep up. Granted this would not have been my placement, but certainly there are students who struggle in many of our classes who probably feel this way.

In Chumash class, we discussed a challenging question in the parashah: Why does the Torah spend time discussing the rape of Dinah? Students ventured several answers, and the teacher shared an opinion that part of

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the reason had to do with showing Yaakov's development as a person, where he now disapproved of trickery. This struck me as a good lesson for teens. I enjoyed listening to classmates' opinions and found myself agreeing with many of them.

Students in Biology were divided into two groups and asked to prepare a short presentation for six-year-olds: one explaining photosynthesis, the other on cellular respiration. I tried to be a part of the photosynthesis group but found I had almost nothing to add. After working together to prepare, the groups delivered their presentation. I did not feel like a contributor in this class, though I recognized that I would probably be evaluated as part of my group and not on the basis of my own minimal participation.

At the last session, Algebra II, we arrived in time for a quiz. As I was a math major, this was a class I had been eagerly anticipating. I checked my work carefully, as I would have been embarrassed to make mistakes.

And thus ended my day as a student, as the 3:00 bell rang, dismissing us for the weekend.

My takeaways from this experience:

1. Being a student is tiring. Through no fault of the teachers, I found myself falling asleep toward the end of the day, even during a quiz I was taking! Encouraging students to stand up, stretch or move in some way is a good idea.
2. It's nice to have one subject you feel really good about, especially if there is another subject that makes you feel clueless.
3. Classes where the teacher dismisses the class, rather than the bell dismissing the class, seem more serious.
4. Teaching beyond the bell seems just fine... until you arrive in the next class and are chastised for being late.
5. Getting quick feedback is so helpful. My history teacher texted me that afternoon that I had earned an 85% on the quiz. Since the questions were still fresh in my mind, I could review the material in order to provide stronger answers next time.
6. The teachers who have a system for phones are wise. Asking students to put their phones in a specific location at the start of the class made a big difference in focused attention.
7. Getting students to participate is a

wonderful way to get them invested in the class and makes the time go by much more quickly.

8. Group work is a lot of fun, but it was apparent that some people exercised leadership and others just sat there. It is probably wise to have a component of individual assessment included in the evaluation.

9. This kind of visitation provides a much more thorough way to observe teachers than a five-minute drop-in.

10. Students and teachers enjoy seeing administrators in a student role.

Most importantly, this was a humbling experience. I attended as a student for only a single day, without homework or studying for tests and quizzes. Yet I fell asleep at 7:30 that evening. I didn't have to repeat the experience the next day, and the day after, and the day after that. My grades didn't count or make an impact on my college acceptance or Israel program choice. I did not have any difficult social situations with my classmates, nor did

I have any teachers I thought might hate me. Still, it was an exhausting day and made me appreciate what our students go through on a daily basis.

Students and parents who heard about the shadow day seemed to be most touched by the care. The idea that an educator cared enough about the experience of their children to walk in their shoes for a day was well received. Not a single person questioned whether this was an appropriate use of a "work day." Instead, parents and students have come back to me since then with comments that begin, "You understand because you were in classes that day..."

It also reminded me that almost everything of consequence in a school happens in our classrooms. As head of school, I need to prioritize classroom time, and I need to hear regularly from students about their experiences. Students' perceptions are their reality.

It is also a humbling experience to attend a class that you know is a weak spot for you.

But our students go through it daily. As adults, we generally work from and with our areas of strength; students don't have that choice. We must remember this and not just assume that, if students are not doing well, it's because they are not trying hard enough.

As a school leader, it's not only wise to remain humble, it's imperative. My shadowing experience reminded me that administrators need to recognize their time and skill limitations. Just as I learned in the group experience, tasks should be distributed to those best suited for them, and the leadership of the administrative team can and should shift depending on the focus.

I believe that the experience of shadowing a student is essential for all educators. We must put ourselves in the place of those individuals for whom the entire operation is designed. I plan also to encourage teachers to shadow, and to share their reflections with their peers at a faculty meeting. I think we will all be a little bit humbled and have much to learn from this shared experience.

LEADERS NEVER STOP LEARNING

It is what we believe, and we hope it is what you believe, too.

Prizmah's **YOU Lead** yearlong leadership development program gives **all professional leaders** at **any stage of their career** in **any Jewish day school** the framework to define and strengthen their personal leadership style.

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SUPERVISION & EVALUATION



PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

GALI COOKS

Strength in Vulnerability: Leaders Who Dare to Look Inside

WHO AM I, HOW DID I GET HERE, AND WHERE AM I HEADED? THESE EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS PROVIDE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF OUR INTERNAL COMPASS. THEY GUIDE OUR WAY, GROUND US IN WHAT REALLY MATTERS AND PROPEL US TO LIVE MEANINGFUL LIVES. AND IT IS THESE TYPES OF QUESTIONS THAT LEADERS IN OUR COMMUNITY NEED TO ASK OF THEMSELVES AS THEY NAVIGATE THEIR TEAMS AND OUR INSTITUTIONS THROUGH THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE 21ST CENTURY. *IN LEADERSHIP, SELF-AWARENESS IS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE.*

Yet, too often, leaders skip this essential step of internal reflection and self-knowledge. Who has the time for it, when there are overflowing inboxes to maintain, back-to-back meetings to attend and immediate fires to put out? Being overstretched may not be the only obstacle getting in the way of leaders carving out time for focused, honest reflection. Going inside may elicit uncomfortable realizations. For some, it may bring up insecurities around needing to own missteps or oversights. For others, it may reveal a need to say no and set boundaries that challenge the model of a leader being everything to everyone. And for others, it may lead to a realization that stepping back and letting go of some control will best serve the organization.

Inertia and fear propel us to walk well-worn paths. Yet the strength to explore new frontiers, to stretch ourselves to face precisely these kinds of realizations, are at the core of an effective leader. *An essential quality of an effective leader is the courage to look inside in a deep and honest way.* Great leaders understand that we are all human beings first, with

predictably irrational tendencies, insecurities and vulnerabilities. They adopt a learning posture with regard to everything they do and everyone around them.

For great leaders, learning starts with themselves. When people take the time to reflect upon and understand their own internal experiences—to “know thyself”—they unearth fertile ground that is the bedrock for learning and growth. The more you know about yourself—what drives you, what triggers you, what strengths you have, what weaknesses you struggle with—the better able you are to communicate those factors to your team and surround yourself with people who can complement your attributes, energy and behavior.

The most effective leaders tolerate a degree of personal vulnerability in the service of leading organizations with integrity, authenticity and accountability. Researcher Brene Brown (*Daring Greatly*) has found that “vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity, and change,” and that

“courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.” This stance helps leaders create a culture where growth is the goal, not perfection.

The efficacy of this leadership posture is supported by the research. A recent *Harvard Business Review* article, “Bursting the CEO Bubble,” argues that as you move up the rungs of an organization, there is risk of becoming insulated from the data you actually need to define the future of your organization. When one is perceived as an authoritative, closed person of power, others are reluctant to share unpleasant truths or data that might challenge the leader’s assumptions or the status quo of the work. Indeed, “If you’re a leader, you can put yourself in good-news cocoon.” By contrast, innovative leaders “deliberately put themselves into situations where they may be unexpectedly wrong, unusually uncomfortable, and uncharacteristically quiet.”

The best leaders operate with humility, understanding that innovation and solutions

STRENGTH IN VULNERABILITY: LEADERS WHO DARE TO LOOK INSIDE

BY GALI COOKS

It helps to put systems in place and add layers of discipline, routine and accountability to support leaders as they do the work of self-awareness and modeling strength in vulnerability. Here are some suggestions:

REVIEW & SHARE



Review your Leadership User Manual once a year and share it with your team.



ONGOING FEEDBACK

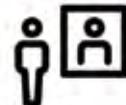
Prioritize semi-structured ongoing feedback check-in meetings within your organization.



THE BOARD

Bring this discipline and practice to the board of directors.

REFLECT



Experiment with Stop-Start-Continue, a forward-looking approach to self-reflection. Ask, "What would you like to **stop, start, continue** doing in the year ahead?"

MULTIDIRECTIONAL FEEDBACK



Conduct review process in which direct reports, peer colleagues, board members, etc. provide and receive feedback from one another.

Andrea Hernandez

to complex problems are forged through multiple stakeholders working together, rather than emanating solely from the top. These leaders create a safe environment for sharing unpopular opinions and take feedback seriously. They acknowledge they don't have all the answers. When leaders dare to lead from humility, from a stance of genuine curiosity, and with a sincere belief in the additive value of multiple perspectives and experiences, it opens up the space for their teams to feel valued and more engaged in their work.

Doing the work of self-awareness and modeling strength in vulnerability are muscles. It helps to put systems in place and add layers of discipline, routine and accountability to support leaders as they exercise these (potentially new) muscles. Here are some suggestions:

- Review your Leadership User Manual once a year and share it with your team.
- Prioritize semi-structured ongoing feedback check-in meetings within your organization to show that growth is ongoing, not just a perfunctory annual review.

- Experiment with the Stop-Start-Continue model of performance evaluation, which encourages a forward-looking approach to self-reflection. The reflective question being, "What would you like to stop, start, continue doing in the year ahead?"
- Conduct a 360-review process in which direct reports, peer colleagues, board members, etc. provide and receive feedback from one another, supporting the value and efficacy of multidirectional feedback. There is a way to do 360-feedback really well and there is a way that this process can be misused.
- Bring this discipline and practice to the board of directors.

Becoming a leader who embraces and models vulnerability is a process. We need to remember to celebrate the small wins and focus on incremental change, while at the same time not forgetting our North Star.

May we all strive to lead with strength in vulnerability.

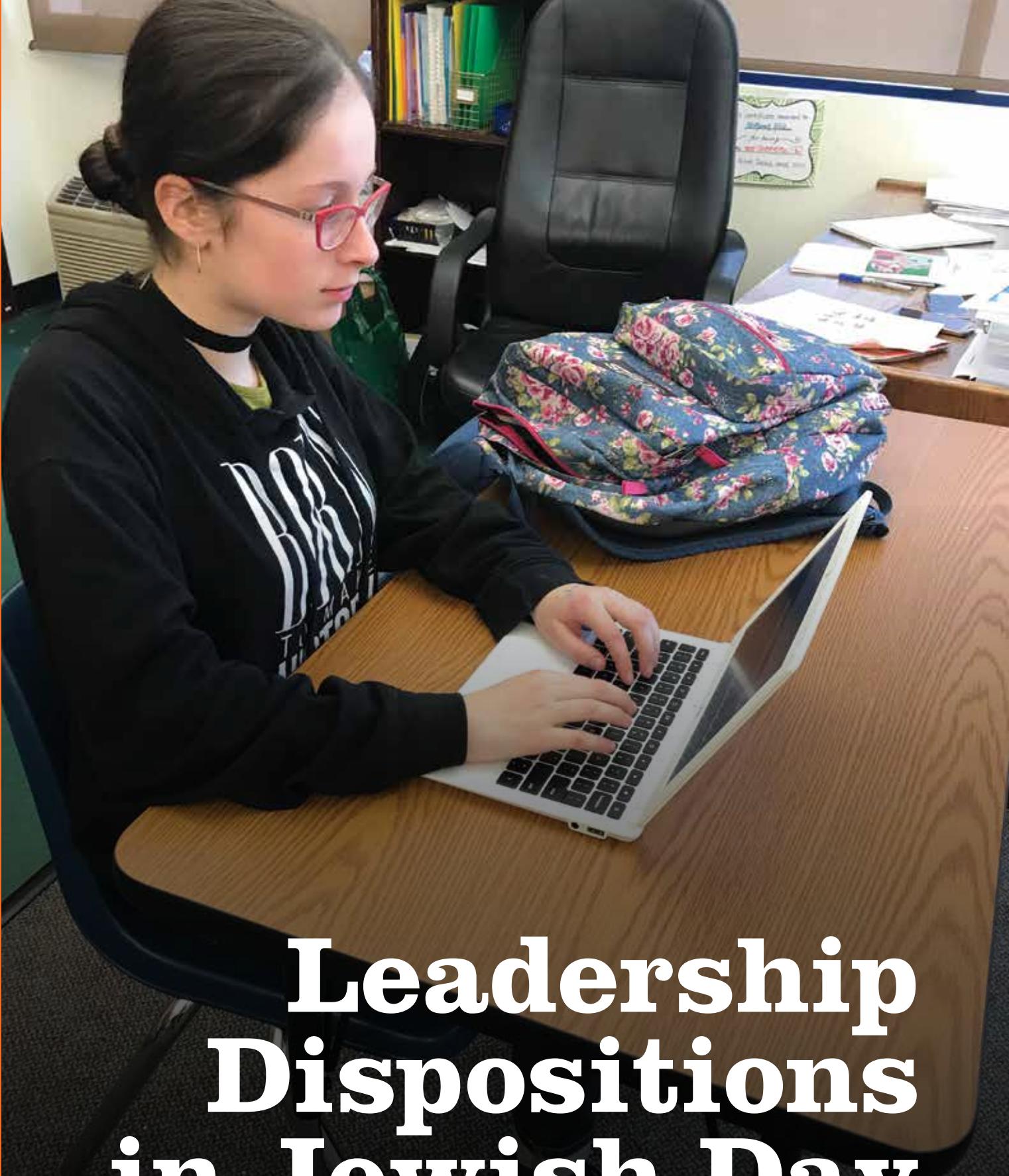
PRO TIP

Get to know yourself. Create your Leadership User Manual.

Framing question: "If you had to write your own personal user manual, what would it look like?"

Take a few minutes to reflect upon the following questions:

- What is your style?
- When do you like people to approach you and how?
- What do you value?
- How do you like people to communicate with you?
- How do you make decisions?
- How can people help you?
- What will you not tolerate in others?



Leadership Dispositions in Jewish Day Schools

JOANNE DAVI

Dean of Student Life and
Fifth and Eighth Grade
Humanities Teacher,
Oakland Hebrew Day School

Recreating Student Council

Like most schools, ours had a student council, but one that did not have a dominant presence in the school or a clear understanding about what a student council was supposed to do. Because so many students had great leadership ability, we set out to form a new model that would provide greater structure and yearlong activity.

We found the solution in a new leadership model we named SPLASH, which stands for Students Promoting Leadership and Strengthening Heart. SPLASH is designed to provide a space for building student leaders and fostering a positive school climate. Instead of an election, interested students submit an application that requires them to reflect on the needs and wants of the student body, and what they can bring to the organization. Additionally, the application requires both a peer and teacher endorsement. The move to an application aims to reach students who want to be a part of student leadership but might not feel comfortable campaigning for votes. In this our first year, more than 30 students out of 49 students in grades 5-8 attended our informational meeting and took an application. We received 15 applications and accepted 12 based on the completeness and quality of the answers.

We spent our first session crafting our mission statement and learning the difference between being a boss and being a leader. There are no official positions like president or treasurer on SPLASH. Instead, students work together on committees to take on a project of their choice, so all students have the opportunity to learn how to plan an event, communicate with relevant parties, track and budget expenses, and work together on a team. Students engaged in a self-guided discussion to craft the official SPLASH mission statement: "The mission of SPLASH is to improve the experience of being in our school by representing the students and helping

the greater community." Based on this foundation, students created five categories of initiatives that are SPLASH-worthy:

- School/climate improvement
- Fundraiser sales
- FUNdraiser event
- SPLASH-sponsored event
- Chesed/Tzedakah

SPLASH began in late October, and a public launch took place at a schoolwide assembly in January to familiarize with the members and our mission. We also give updates on planned and completed initiatives, such as the following success story, based on the school-improvement plan of an eighth-grade SPLASH member. Room 212 holds six different classes throughout the school day and does not have an "owner." As a result, students and teachers go in and out, leave materials behind, and make this messy room one of students' least favorite place to learn.

This eighth grader assembled a team of equally displeased middle school students, consulted with our business manager, submitted a design plan and remodeled the room. She assembled all of the teachers who use room 212 and requested they sort through their materials; she helped organize the closets and created a color scheme with corresponding bulletin boards. After the remodeling was finished, the other middle school students were astonished by the change. Room 212 has become a positive and comfortable learning environment, and both teachers and students make sure to leave it looking nice and tidy when they leave.

Room 212 still doesn't have a designated owner, but it is now SPLASH-sponsored and kept up by the entire student body. This is just one example of students promoting leadership and strengthening heart: SPLASH!

Leadership Dispositions in Jewish Day Schools

RISE ARKIN

Director of Admissions, The
Weber School, Atlanta

The Student Ambassador Program: Building a School through Student Leadership

Over the past three years, enrollment at our Jewish community high school of 270 students has increased by 25%. We added 35 programs, classes and athletic options in the past four years. We have also expanded our faculty in each subject area. Our work has been guided and inspired by our new head of school, but an essential and most unique driver of our enrollment emerged through the refocusing of our student ambassador program, one that centers upon student leadership development as opposed to school promotion.

Each time I meet with a prospective family, I always ask how they heard of Weber. More and more prospective students and their families are naming Weber student ambassadors who have spoken to them outside of school about their Weber experience and have motivated them to sign up for student visits. As opposed to serving as agents of the admissions office, student ambassadors are my partners in designing and managing Weber admissions. Rather than merely serving as "poster children" for the high school, they learn and practice skills of public speaking and communications, strategic planning, personal counseling and community organizing, skills that both prepare the students for college and careers and serve the school's ambitious goals for student recruitment in an increasingly competitive high school market.

Whereas, in the past, the number of ambassadors was limited, now I accept all sophomores, juniors and seniors who complete an application and commit to a program of preparation and leadership training. Student ambassadors not only have the opportunity to share feedback; they are expected to contribute to our planning and strategy with their creativity and ideas. They understand that they are essential to telling Weber's story through their unique voice and perspective, sharing their experiences while offering school tours and bringing their energy to admissions events and community programs.

Last summer, three rising seniors on the student ambassador team initiated a meeting to discuss ideas for expanding and enriching the program. They worked with me to analyze our admissions strategies and added new elements, most notably a

highly sophisticated plan for leveraging social media applications such as "GroupMe."

A student ambassador's role does not begin and end with a tour of the school or speaking at admissions events. Ambassadors work with me on an ongoing basis, personalizing schedules for each student visitor in a way that addresses each prospective student's interests and passions. Visiting students are hosted by freshman ambassadors in each class that they visit and are then guided from class to class by more experienced ambassadors.

Jewish day schools have always built our reputations upon educational quality and value and the vibrancy and clarity of our mission. Nonetheless, sustainability also requires us to cultivate and empower our students as true school ambassadors, for they consistently serve as the most authentic, passionate and compelling advocates for our program and mission. A robust student ambassador program can help students develop leadership skills, help the school showcase the quality of its education, and help drive significant recruitment success.





MEIRAV KRAVETZ

Middle and High School Coordinator for Hebrew and Foreign Languages, Hebrew Academy (RASG), Miami Beach

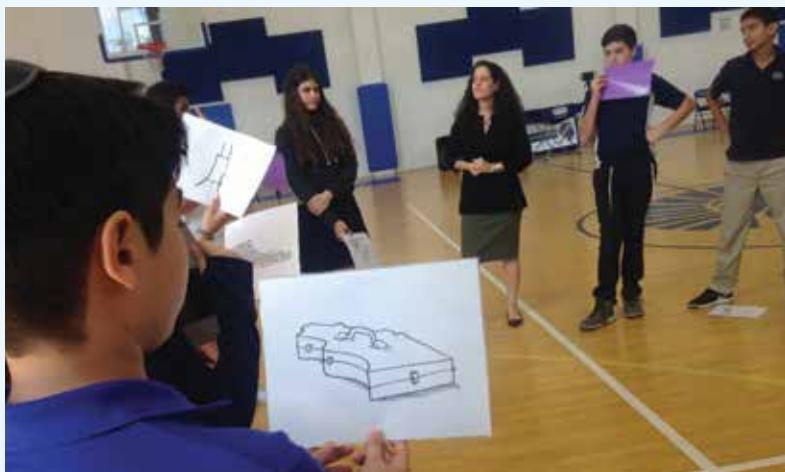
Interschool Student Team Leadership in Hebrew

Pirkei Avot offers a valuable lesson in leadership: "Who is wise? One who learns from every person." Teams in which all members learn from one another cultivate and strengthen leadership qualities for everyone. Team leaders are able to combine the strengths of each team member in order to achieve common goals.

Our school's mission is to inspire each and every child to improve the world. We believe that in order to be a leader, one needs to recognize his or her existing strengths while at the same time fostering new skills and attitudes. While some students are accepted and recognized as leaders in the school, community or home, others have not yet been recognized and therefore have not had the chance to demonstrate their leadership skills. We want to encourage young adults to seek within themselves the potential of their own leadership, and we do our best to create an environment within the school that fosters team leadership, enabling young people to realize their leadership skills and to practice them in a safe and secure environment.

In my role as Hebrew language coordinator, I have created and spearheaded programs aimed at giving students the opportunity to build and practice their team leadership skills while simultaneously using Hebrew as a tool to communicate ideas in a meaningful way. One such program is Young Ambassadors of the Hebrew Language. This program engages 18 students in grades six to eight from three schools in the Miami area, in order to encourage interschool collaboration and strengthen student leadership through the schools' academic and Jewish priorities. The program has been running for three years with much success and is open to interested students who have distinguished themselves with high achievement in Hebrew.

To help them recognize and acknowledge their strengths, the students are required to write a paragraph in Hebrew explaining why they think they should be picked as one of the ambassadors of their school. Selection is based upon Hebrew fluency, initiative, effort, ability to work in a team and evidence of strong focus. Students selected are invited to a



Leadership Dispositions in Jewish Day Schools

daylong retreat, which takes place once a year at the campus of a participating school.

The retreat day is conducted in Hebrew and includes activities, discussions and debates facilitated by Morim Shlichim (emissary teachers from Israel), Bnot Sherut (Israeli women doing their post high school social service) and Ivrit teachers from the participating schools. After a short icebreaker and tour of the school led in Hebrew by the hosting students, students participate in different activities, allowing them to get to know each other better and communicate with each other in Hebrew.

Some activities are created by the students themselves. They work with their peers from other schools, combining one student's Hebrew fluency with another's fun ideas to create games and discussions. All activities incorporate information related to Israel. Fun facts about specific cities and regions, questions about Israeli historical figures, scientific innovations, Israeli music and food are included throughout the day. In addition, the ambassadors learn about current events and debate subjects related to Israel.

During the weeks following the retreat, the ambassadors lead similar activities with students in their own schools.

These students who have a positive connection with peers using Hebrew also take leadership positions in advocating for a stronger connection with Israel and its language. I have noticed that our school's participating students have been able to communicate in Hebrew their activities as ambassadors and have gained more respect among their peers. In the past three years, the program has gained popularity, and students are asking to have it at the high school level, too. Other schools have shown interest in joining.

The main goal of the retreat is to create leadership opportunities for young adults while increasing the use of Hebrew language as a tool of communication among teenagers from different schools and backgrounds. Another objective is to form a group of young people who support Israel, know the facts about current issues and are able to lead others in the same direction. Team leadership is a model that promotes growth. The Young Ambassadors program takes 18 students and empowers them to go back to their schools and strengthen the other students' knowledge and connection with Israel while encouraging them to improve their Hebrew skills.





SUE SHACHAR
LIDIA TURNER

Teachers, Jewish Studies and Israel Education Departments,
Milken Community Schools, Los Angeles

Innovation Nation: Building Student Leadership Through Models of Israeli Innovators

Clusters of eighth grade students are situated around the classroom, some working on desks while others gather at glue-gun stations on the floor. A potpourri of materials is used to construct models of sustainable structures for an Israeli kibbutz situated on the Arava Desert. This is Innovation Nation: Israel's Contributions to Global Innovation, a seventh and eighth grade course at the middle school.

Inspired by Dan Senor's book *Start-up Nation*, Innovation Nation is an investigation of Israel's path to becoming a center of global innovation. We reimaged how a course about Israel could align with Milken Community Schools' goal of cultivating students' creative thinking, entrepreneurial skills and the innovator's mindset while tapping into their interests in the startup world. Senor identifies Israeli innovators' key traits that have propelled them to success, including *empathy, teamwork, persevering past failure, problem solving and questioning authority*.

In a Project Based Learning environment, students tackle real-world challenges Israel has confronted over time. They investigate decisions reached among the conflicting early European Zionist leaders, the reinvention of socialist kibbutzim as high-tech centers, the development of cutting-edge water technologies and street artists' creative expression about Israel's controversial issues. The learning process incorporates research, simulations, field trips, artistic and culinary experiences, and communication with experts. To illustrate the process, we have selected a few of the units distributed throughout the semester-long course.

From the outset, early Zionists disagreed about the solution to "the Jewish problem." Students are exposed to the backgrounds of a range of Eastern and Western European Zionists from the early 20th century—some religious and others secular, some assimilated into the larger society while others were isolated in shtetl life. Having *empathy* with the needs and priorities of others was vital to building consensus. Guided by Herzl's leadership model, students debate as members of differing parties represented in the Zionist congresses. They must *empathetically* acknowledge others' priorities to envision the new Jewish homeland's political structure, religious orientation, language and main institutions.

They travel along the wave of the Second Aliyah with the early kibbutzim's idealistic New Jews. As years passed, the early socialist communities began to disintegrate. Students confront kibbutz

member's divided opinions. Teams advocate for differing solutions; some push for reinvention through privatization while others hold fast to the status quo. Recognizing that their kibbutz's survival requires *persevering past failure*, each team develops a plan honoring central community values while propelling the kibbutz forward. Informed by researching historical sources, interviewing current and past kibbutz members, and then debating among themselves, the class utilizes consensus-building techniques integral to effective *teamwork*. Together, they figure out how to construct a new kind of kibbutz centered on green technology. Next, each team plans and builds a model of a structure adapted to the desert climate, using green architectural methods, and suited for the needs of the kibbutz community. Together, they assemble their modernized kibbutz.

Inspired by Ben Gurion's vision of the Negev flowering and by Golda Meir's commitment to help African countries, students become "Israeli water experts" who *problem solve* how to lessen water scarcity in a rural village in Kenya. Groups cluster around computers investigating key Israeli water technologies: drip irrigation, desalination and water reclamation. Each group presents one of the technologies in a jigsaw activity. By *problem solving* at a "Water Conference," the class combines ideas into a multifaceted solution. They recognize that Israel's contributions to resolving worldwide water scarcity has elevated its status among countries.

As they tour the streets of Tel Aviv via a videotaped guide, students view how street artists *question authority* by expressing their views regarding Israeli society's most controversial issues on public walls. For example, Maya Gelfman's mixed-media technique on paper combines colored pencils, embroidery, cutouts and ready-made frames depicting images commenting on war and peace. Gathering similar materials, students create their own artistic commentaries in mixed-media murals throughout the school; they invite other students to engage in the conversation about contemporary issues facing Israel. By emulating Israeli street artists as they confront complex issues, students also *question authority* using creative expression.

Through Innovation Nation's experiences, students emerge with a stronger connection to Israel and grow the same leadership traits possessed by Israeli innovators. Students discover that possessing these leadership traits unlocks the question: Why has Israel, such a small country in size and population, become an incubator of innovation of worldwide proportion?

Leadership Dispositions in Jewish Day Schools

PATRICK VON HAHN

Principal, Richmond Jewish Day School,
Richmond, British Columbia

Service to Multiple Communities

Our school is located on a road where there are several independent and faith-based schools. Administrators cultivate strong relationships among the neighboring schools. They meet regularly; security issues are discussed with local police departments; students work on projects and play sports together. Collaboration is a leadership disposition modeled by all stakeholders among the schools.

Student learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom and into the entire school community. Our senior students are expected to exhibit “active citizenship.” Students volunteer for responsibilities in the school, according to their particular interests. Activities include intermediate grade students eating and supervising in primary classrooms during lunch breaks, making morning announcements on the public-address system of school activities for the day, completing the daily attendance checks, organizing games and activities during breaks, and being socially responsible mentors for younger students.

Recently during our week of Random Acts of Kindness/Chesed (RAC), students partnered with their counterparts from Az-Zahraa Muslim School to learn from each other and assist the less fortunate in Vancouver’s downtown eastside. Our senior students prepared and handed out food parcels. Students saw firsthand the issues of poverty, addiction and loneliness that some members of society confront.

The RAC week included organizing of board games in our gymnasium as younger and older students participated in cooperative play, yoga sessions for both our primary and intermediate students, and a Grandparents Tea with students in aprons serving their elders, culminating in an Israeli dance performance.

Other events this year demonstrating social responsibility included raising money through a flower sale to benefit BC Children’s Hospital, and serving muffins and coffee to parents as they drop off their children. These activities engage students and their families with our school and in turn allow us all to be part of a wider school community beyond the classroom.

A community garden has been a further connection to our school community. Students learn to prepare the soil, seed, water and care for various plants. This garden leads to environmental and ecological discussions as the soil is tilled. The harvesting and food preparation of various food products are further opportunities for engaging students. Our master gardeners have a leadership disposition that inspires others and have brought various generations together as learners.

The organization of these events requires the active participation of staff members, support staff and the parent community. Students learn by example, and this modeling of community engagement builds student engagement. Students see, hear and feel these connections.

Students are part of a wider community beyond their own classroom, as members of the entire school community, and then again as members of society as a whole. A leadership disposition of service to others underlies student leadership programs that reflect the Jewish values that we model, support and learn at our school.





RABBI JONATHAN BERGER

Associate Head of School for Judaic Studies
and Program, Gross Schechter Day School,
Pepper Pike, Ohio

Leading by Relationship

Effective, strong, compassionate leadership requires understanding the importance of relationships. This basic but crucial disposition of leadership develops through the Gross Schechter Day School's Buddy Program. Our students learn that it isn't enough to lead by example; they have to lead by relationship.

Many schools look for opportunities to have older and younger students interact. Eighth graders will read to first graders; sixth graders will join second graders for tefillah. These activities can be exciting, memorable and adorable, but aren't likely to build enduring relationships. At Gross Schechter, we wanted our students to feel a real connection across the grades. So at the beginning of each school year, we match each of our middle school students with one or two children in our Early Childhood Center, two-year-olds through kindergarteners. Once a month, the middle schoolers visit ECC classrooms to get down on the floor, play and talk. At the beginning of the year, the older students write welcome cards to their buddies. They get to know each other and find common interests.

Formal training comes in sixth grade. Besides some basic reminders about appropriate behavior, the older students learn how to respond when their buddy is frustrated, not listening or feeling upset. In seventh and eighth grade, they learn through ongoing observation and coaching. We are also beginning to introduce some special programs, such as a joint Havdalah service, to create more opportunities for leadership and growth.

We don't present the program to the students as a leadership initiative, but the leadership lessons are clear. George, an eighth grader, described how he works to connect: "We have to adapt to how they are. If they're wild, we have to be wild at first, but then teach them to be quiet and talk in a respectful way." To be effective, leaders must first understand the people they are leading, where they are and where they need to go. Through the Buddy Program, George and his classmates learn to do this every time they engage with their preschool friends.

Aidan, a sixth grader, talked about how he first found common ground with one of his buddies: "We both do gymnastics, so I've talked to him about it. I ask him, 'Did you learn any new skills? When is your next practice?' As a result of this connection, his buddy trusted him and shared his worries about

a sister who was ill. The lesson was clear to Aidan: To have an impact on someone, you have to first build a relationship with them. Once you do, you will be seen differently.

The program makes a difference for the preschool children. Instead of being intimidated by the "big kids," they see them as older siblings, greet them in the hallways and look forward to their visits. The real impact, though, is on the middle school students, who come to understand that leadership is based on relationships. They graduate having learned that to be effective leaders, they first need to connect.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH: COHORT OR COACH?



SHELLY SADON

I HAVE BEEN A CLASSROOM TEACHER FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, AND THIS YEAR THINGS ARE FEELING STALE. EVEN THOUGH I UPDATE THE CURRICULUM EVERY YEAR, I FEEL LIKE I AM STUCK IN A RUT. WHAT CAN I DO TO MIX THINGS UP? HOW CAN I CONTINUE MY EDUCATION AND LEARN NEW TECHNIQUES OR METHODS OF TEACHING WHILE BALANCING EVERYTHING ELSE?

It sounds like your career is at a crossroads, and you're looking for some sort of growth or change. Here are some questions to explore: Where do you see yourself in five years? Are you on a path to get there? Do you see yourself as a teacher, teacher-leader or perhaps an administrator?

There are a number of programs available to help you expand your educational knowledge and leadership skills. The programs can be broken up into two main categories: cohort-based learning or one-on-one coaching. The learning environment must be well suited for the learner.

Cohorts enable you to develop relationships with peers as well as instructors and facilitators. Your peers can provide you with different perspectives, problem-solving skills and communication skills. Different perspectives can broaden your worldview and enable you to be a more capable and understanding leader. Observing different behaviors and problem-solving skills can make you better equipped to handle similar issues in the future. Having an audience of peers allows you to put yourself out there and enables you to get comfortable asking questions. Most importantly, it helps create a valuable network that you can lean on when a difficult problem presents itself.

Cohort-based learning is also beneficial since a larger group of learners can attract top innovators in the field and thought leaders, you will develop a network of amazing people who can help you get out of your personal rut.. It can also help establish professional relationships that can benefit professionally in the future for both support and growth.

However, there are disadvantages to this model as well. The student's relationship with facilitators is diluted when there is a large cohort. The curriculum is set by the program and not always tailored to your individual needs. You do not receive the close attention that a coaching relationship can provide.

A coaching relationship can be extremely successful if you are highly motivated and know what it is you want to learn. It is important to note that finding a coach with the right chemistry can be tricky. You should test out a few before you settle and begin a relationship.

Honesty, support and guidance are important factors for growth. A coaching relationship will allow you to focus on your unique issues and talk you through problem solving, or even point you to new resources. A coach can help point out your

blind spots or bring awareness to beliefs or perspectives that may be holding you back. A coach will be radically candid when others might not feel so bold.

A coaching relationship gives you one person's (expert) perspective; a cohort brings the value of many perspectives. Cohorts enable peer networks that are difficult to build on your own, and allow a place for vulnerability and support. Cohorts allow you to learn from others on issues that you are not yet dealing with.

There are both benefits and drawbacks to each learning modality, but both will empower you to shake things up and grow in your position, or to move forward into a leadership position. As an educator dedicated to educating others, you should attend to your own education as well. To quote Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

**Have a question about day schools that you'd like answered?
Submit it to advice@prizmah.org.**

Great Jewish Books Summer Program



Summer 2018

Session 1:

July 22-27

Session 2:

July 29-August 3

Students at Great Jewish Books come from a wide variety of backgrounds, Jewish affiliations, and experiences. We welcome people with multiple heritages, people of color, LGBTQ participants, and non-Jewish participants. Anyone who has an interest in Jewish literature and culture is welcome to apply.

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ADAM ENGLANDER

EMPATHY

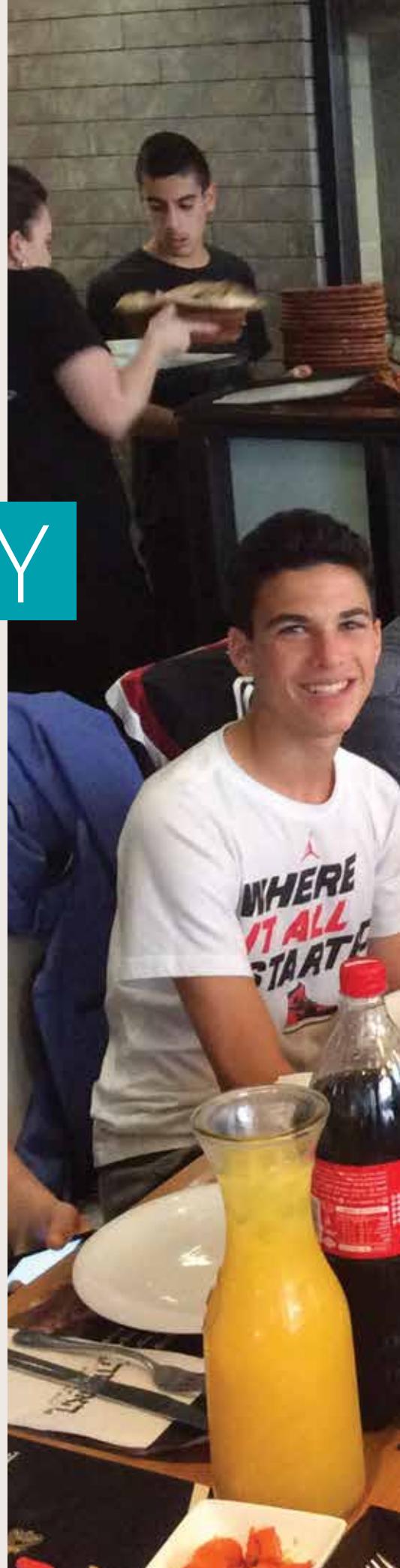
"THERE IS A PATTERN THAT EXISTS IN THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT ACHIEVE THE GREATEST SUCCESS, THE ONES THAT OUTMANEUVER AND OUT-INNOVATE THEIR COMPETITORS, THE ONES THAT COMMAND THE GREATEST RESPECT FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THEIR ORGANIZATIONS, THE ONES WITH THE HIGHEST LOYALTY AND LOWEST CHURN AND THE ABILITY TO WEATHER NEARLY EVERY STORM OR CHALLENGE. THESE EXCEPTIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ALL HAVE CULTURES IN WHICH THE LEADERS PROVIDE COVER FROM ABOVE AND THE PEOPLE ON THE GROUND LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER. THIS IS THE REASON THEY ARE WILLING TO PUSH HARD AND TAKE THE KINDS OF RISKS THEY DO. AND THE WAY ANY ORGANIZATION CAN ACHIEVE THIS IS WITH EMPATHY."

These words close out the first chapter of Simon Sinek's book *Leaders Eat Last*. No leader can be great without having a deep sense of empathy for the people he or she is leading. No matter the type of organization, and certainly no matter the type of school, leaders can only be truly successful if they prioritize the well-being of those around them.

Why is empathetic leadership so fundamental to a strong organization? Leaders exist so that all the others around them grow and improve. This type of growth and improvement occurs most significantly when people feel a deep sense of being cared for and appreciated. And that care and appreciation must be because they are people, not simply as a function of the job they do for the organization. This reality is hard-wired into who we are as human beings. The more people feel this parent-like concern from their leaders, the better they perform. We accept this as a given when it comes to how our teachers interact with their students. It's not much different for adults.

The greatest Jewish leader of all time, Moses, was chosen for his position by God as a result of his proclivity for empathizing with his brethren. The Midrash in Bamidbar Rabbah (1:27) goes into detail about how God called out to Moses from the burning bush only after He saw the extent to which Moses felt the pain of others and tried to ease their burden.

Empathy can be shown in an infinite number of ways. Providing support for a teacher going through a personal crisis.







Going the extra mile to attend that simchah, shivah call or hospital visit. Listening (really listening) to a student even though you are swamped with other pressing matters. Trying to help a teacher improve his teaching schedule even though you think his reason for wanting it is no big deal. Choosing your words carefully when delivering criticism so that you preserve the recipient's dignity and self-esteem. Recognizing why that parent is getting so defensive when you bring up those concerns about her child. In essence, treating others as the good, well-meaning people that they are.

A couple of examples from my own work come to mind. In my first year as an administrator 12 years ago, I recall a meeting I set up with a teacher, also in her first year, to convey criticism about certain aspects of her teaching and classroom environment. I don't remember what the issues were or what I

said in that meeting. I just remember being super nervous that I would crush her spirits and leave her feeling badly. A couple of days later, she initiated a meeting with me. With tears in her eyes, she thanked me for how I handled that meeting. She explained that while it wasn't easy to hear about the things she needed to do better, it was so obvious to her how much I cared about her feelings and that meant so much to her. This teacher is still at our school and is considered a superstar. A more recent example of how our school prioritizes empathy in the workplace is the creation of a fund designated to help teachers and staff get through tough times. This fund, initiated by a parent, gives mostly small-scale, interest-free loans with very flexible terms of repayment. It has been used many times, and we often hear how much it means to our people, our family.

Since empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another,

it's not really something that can be faked. One has to be a good person who actually cares—which is, by and large, exactly the type of person going into school leadership in the first place. When a head of school's or principal's empathy seems in short supply, perhaps he or she is overwhelmed by the volume of work that the position requires. School leadership can be demanding and stressful, and it's common to get overly focused on that to-do list and forget some of the basic needs of the people we are leading.

The first step for a leader to improve the quality and quantity of the empathy he or she displays is to recognize just how important it is for the creation and maintenance of a healthy school culture, one person at a time. The next step is to carve out time on the calendar every week to make this happen. Empathy need not be spontaneous to be sincere; a fixed routine will force a person to think about the actions that need to be taken and the people who need some extra care. If those connections can't be made during that time slot, one should use the time to determine when and how they can happen. In other words, a leader should spend this sacred time asking that teacher about her child who was not well, writing that handwritten thank-you note for the one who went above and beyond, and finding something specific to praise about that teacher or student who has been feeling down.

However, like most things in life, too much of anything is bad. When used improperly, empathy can be a damaging force that can lead to the opposite of what good leaders are supposed to accomplish. In *Radical Candor*, Kim Scott, who held leadership positions at companies like Google and Facebook, explains how leaders often make the mistake of engaging in what she calls "ruinous empathy." In their desire to be nice, *cultivate* relationships, give praise and steer clear of conflict and hurt feelings, too many leaders avoid the candid criticism that their direct reports need. While their intentions may be good, this can lead to people not knowing where they stand, thereby stunting the growth and improvement that should be taking place. Therefore, as important as empathy is, it can't go so far as inhibiting constructive feedback. A healthy, balanced disposition of empathy means not shying away from the uncomfortable conversations that, on the surface, don't feel so empathy-filled.

Empathy is not only one of the important qualities that great leaders display, it is foundational. And if this is true for the modern organizations of today, it is all the more true for our Jewish schools rooted in Jewish values.

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MARK S. YOUNG

Come Together: Inspired Leadership Through Inspiring Leadership

"STEP UP, STEP BACK, INTRODUCE YOURSELF." AS A PARTICIPANT IN VARIOUS JEWISH YOUTH EXPERIENCES GROWING UP, I RECALL THIS CHEER TO BE OFTEN USED AS AN ICEBREAKER. IT WAS ALSO A FIRST STEP IN BOTH BUILDING COMMUNITY AND CULTIVATING A SENSE OF LEADERSHIP OR, AS WE CALL IT, HINENI, STEPPING UP, IN OUR JEWISH YOUTH. REFLECTING ALL THESE YEARS LATER, I WANT TO CHALLENGE THE CHEER. PERHAPS EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP TODAY IS ACTUALLY ABOUT STEPPING BACK TO STEP UP BY CASTING ONE'S SPOTLIGHT ON THOSE AROUND US, RATHER THAN FOCUSING ON OUR OWN TALENTS AND EFFORTS, IN ORDER TO INTRODUCE THEM AND LIFT THEM UP.

At the Leadership Commons, part of the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary, we capture this through a phrase popularized by The Beatles, *Come together*. This phrase transmits to our alumni and our larger field that, as a result of learning with us, they will learn to lead not solely through their own ideas, actions and mantras. Rather, they will cultivate invention, innovation and inspiration in those around them through facilitation. They will also facilitate using the unifying canon of Jewish tradition—the text that is the foundation of our common purpose and work to bring different folks together to create a spirit of collaboration under this purpose.

Facilitation draws inspiration from the constructivist and experiential education philosophy at the core of The William Davidson school. To facilitate is not to dictate; it is to set a framework and environment that empowers others to lead. At the Leadership Commons, we have seven leadership attributes that permeate our various leadership institutes. One is, “Empower leadership in others and cultivate inclusive cultures in the institutions they lead.”

The head of school or Jewish studies department head, the director of a Jewish early childhood center, the executive of a JCC, the director of congregational learning or the camp director does not always have to be the one who is out front “leading” in the traditional sense. Certainly there are instances when the leader does need to be out front. That said, the more any person in these roles can create a working environment that fosters creativity and risk-taking, and that inspires others in their ranks to answer the call of Hineni, the more effective their organization will be and the more desirable their place of work will be for others.

Put another way, we know as trainers of these aspiring executives that we are doing our job well when each participant understands that their role is not about them. They aren’t Moses, who primarily operated on his own with guidance only from God. While there were moments of Moses sharing leadership, most notably with his father-in-law, Yitro, his primary mode of leadership was to do it himself and lead with a top-down approach. He literally lifted up his rod and held out his own arm over the sea to split it, so that the Israelites could march through to dry ground.

Our alumni shouldn’t feel like they have to part the Red Sea, go up to Mt. Sinai and get the tablets, or talk to (or strike) the rock on their own to lead effectively. They are, instead, like Joshua, a facilitator of collaboration. The Talmud says that when God invested Joshua as the leader of the Israelites, God did so with “some of the authority.” The Talmud interprets this text to mean not all of the authority Moses had (*Bava Batra* 75a), suggesting that Joshua was to lead differently. Our alumni, like Joshua, learn to lead by bringing people together to give them the spotlight and the responsibility of exercising leadership.

Of course, we also teach our participants that their leadership *is* about them too. It is about their passion, personal Jewish journeys and career pursuits. It is about understanding and owning both their core strengths and areas of growth as professionals. It is about their recognizing, owning and navigating their own vulnerabilities, anxieties and potential pitfalls. We budget significant time in our programs for reflective practice, and we employ seasoned mentors to work deeply with our participants in order to be sure each “knows thyself.” To be a master at leadership through the disposition of facilitation is to be confident and take advantage of one’s own professional make-up. To know deeply our own areas of strength and weakness allows us ultimately not to make it about us at all, and to cast the spotlight on all

whom we gather to come together: our boards, our students and their families, and of course, our staff and faculty.

Leading through facilitation, however, does not make one’s leadership disposition complete. Leadership must be grounded in something that is bigger than ourselves, our institutions or our communities. A foundation of the learning that occurs in our leadership institutes is the study of Jewish text. Strictly defined, we study selected sections of Talmud, Bible, Midrash, as well as modern texts and commentaries and the lessons each offers as we consider and refine leadership best practices and each participant’s evolving leadership philosophy. Broadly defined, we see each case study that examines a real life institutional scenario, any narrative from Jewish history, and the personal journey of every child as a text to be explored, debated and revered.

Studying text enables our participants to craft their vision for their institution grounded in Jewish history and language, as well as in the lives of the people they lead today. Another two of our Leadership Commons leadership attributes are, “Promote a vision for Jewish education and the Jewish future rooted in Jewish values and scholarship,” and “Commit to lifelong learning and reflective practice in themselves and those they lead.” Both remind us that leadership is best exercised when one is also a constant student, always eager to gain new knowledge and understandings from studying text, the world, oneself and those one is responsible for leading. Guided by their learning, the leaders we cultivate find their authentic voice through the study of texts that are rooted in thousands of years of ancient tradition and the ways in which that tradition becomes palpably relevant today.

Lastly, we teach our participants that their work should not be performed in the vacuum of their own corner office or with just a small coterie of executive staff or board members. To effectively lead through the dispositions of facilitation and text, one must also prioritize coming together. One must foster shared learning, a culture of common pursuit, and a continuous spirit of collaboration.

Throughout the experience of our Day School Leadership Training Institute, one of several leadership institutes of The Leadership Commons, heads of school from across the continent come together for discussions on leadership issues of substance and relevance to each of their work. For example, we recently held a discussion on issues of gender and leadership in our day schools. We facilitated a conversation that empowered all participants to engage, introduced text to support the discussion—the biblical narrative of Hagar—and perhaps most important, fostered the sharing of multiple, different, sometimes conflicting perspectives from the group. We listened and shared ideas openly, honestly and with mutual respect. Bringing our collective wisdom together strengthened our participants’ individual leadership capacities while developing a sense of collaborative leadership for the Jewish day school sector as a whole.

We at the Leadership Commons are only strong if we facilitate the modeling of these leadership dispositions—*facilitation, text and together*—that we hold dear and hope to see in each of our now 500+ alumni and growing.

“Step back, step up, introduce and raise up each other.” It may not be the smoothest of cheers, and I doubt we’ll hear it shouted by children at a day school assembly or summer camp anytime soon. But it is perhaps a better way to exercise leadership in our Jewish institutions today: Exercise leadership by empowering those around us to answer the call of Hineni, being grounded in something larger than ourselves and enabling those around us to come together. That is leadership that can inspire us all.

MARNIE STEIN

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

I NEVER THOUGHT I HAD WHAT IT TOOK TO BECOME A HEAD OF SCHOOL. I HAD ASSUMED STERNNESS, SELF-ASSURANCE AND DETACHMENT WERE REQUISITE QUALITIES, NONE OF WHICH I POSSESSED. THEN I READ DANIEL GOLEMAN'S BOOK *EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE*, WHERE I LEARNED THAT THE MOST EFFECTIVE LEADERS HAVE DIFFERENT QUALITIES: SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-REGULATION, MOTIVATION, EMPATHY AND SOCIAL SKILL. SUDDENLY, WHAT I HAD VIEWED AS A LIABILITY WAS NOW CONSIDERED AN ASSET. EMPATHY, MUCH TO MY DELIGHT, WAS NOT A WEAKNESS, BUT A STRENGTH. THERE WAS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO LEAD AND, GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY, I COULD LEAD WITH MY HEART.

I was initially hired as principal, eventually transitioning to the headship of a school that was at a rather difficult point in its existence, with rapidly declining enrollment and instability. It had lost the confidence of the community, and time was of the essence. The board of directors hired me to transform the school culture, a daunting task. I was painfully aware that real change takes time, but I did not have that luxury. I needed to assess what would have the most impact with the least financial cost. I strongly believed that the key to creating recognizable change was to reinvent the school culture. That involved building relationships, both individually and collectively. But where to begin?

It was essential that my relationship with the staff start off on the right foot. My first authentic interaction with them occurred on the last pedagogical days of June (as is the custom in Canada). I understood that before I could nourish their minds, I needed to nourish their spirit. I asked them to participate in a "chalk talk," a protocol whereby participants reflect or share ideas silently. I asked each participant to take a marker and share their ideas, questions and concerns in writing on the large mural paper on the wall. They were invited to read one another's writings and comment on them, with the one caveat that they could not speak. All communication was to be in writing. Not only did this exercise allow me to gain some perspective on their concerns, teachers later told me that they found it to be both cathartic and therapeutic, allowing them to express themselves freely and safely.

On our third and final professional day, I decided to take nourishment to a literal level. I knew that feeding teachers and injecting some fun into their final working day was a sure-fire way to show individualized consideration. I purchased a cake for each teacher, along with tubs of various colored icing, sprinkles and other cake decorations. With music playing in the background, teachers stood around a large table, decorating their own cakes to take home for Shabbat. This activity put smiles on their faces and let them know that I was a leader who would care for them as people and value them.

I remain deeply committed to cementing interpersonal connections with my staff members, showing genuine compassion and empathizing with their needs. This means taking the time to sit with and getting to know each and every member of my school team. It involves active listening and paying attention to details so that I am able to inquire about their loved ones or particular circumstances that are occurring in their personal lives. It means showing that I genuinely care about them.

Throughout the year, if ever I felt that teachers were acting withdrawn or seemed upset, I made it a point to schedule a time with them and let them know that I was worried about them. Inevitably, the teachers opened up about whatever was on their minds. Beyond this, teachers expressed appreciation for my having taken the time to check in. These individual meetings take an enormous amount of time, a precious commodity for a head of school, but if we



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authentically care about the people we work with, we must make this a priority. We must ignore the pressure of time and commit to being present for those who need us.

I seek to maintain the same kind of relationship based on genuine empathy and caring with my parents and students. However, no matter how hard you work to cultivate these relationships, there are going to be moments when you feel as though the relationships that you have worked so tirelessly to build are all for naught. In those moments, there are two choices: react in anger, ultimately succumbing to a feeling of depletion, or shift your mindset, allowing a new perspective to emerge. That is the true test of empathy. Showing compassion for someone who is visibly struggling is relatively easy. Being kind-hearted to someone who is questioning your integrity and values can seem impossible, but when achieved, will change your leadership practice forever.

In my second year as principal, there was a student who was experiencing significant social difficulties. He often felt victimized, and while his feelings were valid, he failed to recognize his role in eliciting negative

attention. The staff and I worked hard to sensitize the other students to their classmate's feelings and to hold them accountable when they had in fact crossed the line. We also worked on empowering the young man and helping him to develop an understanding that his words and actions were often inappropriate and were causing issues where none had been present. We worked closely with the boy's parents and encouraged them to guide him in seeking out friendships that were not immersed in conflict but were mutually beneficial.

There were steps forward, and steps back. No simple, quick fix was going to make the problem go away. I felt confident that I had a true partner in the parents—until *the email* came. An incident had occurred between their son and another child in the class, and I was accused of being heartless, insensitive and never really caring for their child. I was steaming, angered by the parents' accusations. How could they say such things? I cared so deeply. How dare they? I wanted to respond with rage. After all the time and energy I had spent on helping their child, given with a full heart, how could they spew such negativity?

And then I stopped. I suspended judgment and took control of my impulses. I took a deep breath and shifted my mindset. I recognized that the parents were in defense mode. Their child was hurting, and they were ready to attack. And ultimately, they were hurting, too. Deeply. For they could not fix it and make it right. I picked up the phone and asked the parents to come in and meet with me. And as we sat in my office side by side, I acknowledged how hard this was for them and vowed to continue working, with the two of them as my partners, to help build their son's resiliency and deal with any student who was out of line.

This experience was a tremendous gift. It brought me to a new place as a leader, a place where I could reach a level of empathy in the most challenging of circumstances and try to understand the other person's point of view, regardless of their manner of expression. This lesson has continued to serve me well, and I have drawn upon this experience countless times. At times, pushing past negativity can be challenging and exhausting. It takes time, patience and energy, but the rewards far exceed the costs. My heart guides my work, and I wouldn't want to lead any other way.

SHARON FEIMAN-NEMSER
SHIRA LOEWENSTEIN

Unpacking Dispositions in Teacher Leadership

IN A *PHI DELTA KAPPAN* ARTICLE CALLED "TEACHER LEADER," ROLAND BARTH, FOUNDER OF THE HARVARD PRINCIPALS' CENTER, TELLS OF AN ENCOUNTER WITH A TEACHER IN AN INNOVATIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL. BARTH HAD ASKED THE TEACHER WHETHER SHE HAD ANY LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES. SHE REPLIED, "I'M JUST A TEACHER. IF YOU WANT TO TALK WITH THE LEADER, HE'S DOWN THE HALL IN THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE." BARTH OBSERVES, "IT IS ALARMING THAT THE INDIVIDUALS SO CENTRAL TO THE LEARNING PROCESS SO OFTEN SEE THEMSELVES AS INCIDENTAL TO THE ENTERPRISE WE CALL SCHOOL."

The teacher's response reflects the traditional model of school management in which principals lead and teachers follow. While this pattern persists in many places, an alternative approach views school leadership as a collaborative rather than a hierarchical process. Instead of concentrating leadership in one individual, leadership is stretched across various participants in an organization. This model of distributed leadership provides a rationale for *teacher* leadership.

The idea of teacher leadership recognizes that teachers are key to school improvement. No serious educational reform can succeed without buy-in, learning and change on the part of teachers. And who better positioned to lead such efforts than accomplished teachers, who are respected by peers and administrators for their pedagogical know-how and their skill in facilitating teacher development. Although definitions of teacher leadership vary and the term encompasses a variety of formal and informal roles, at its core teacher leadership is about teachers leading within and beyond their classroom in ways that foster a collaborative culture and improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

Teacher leadership brings many benefits. It keeps talented teachers in the classroom, while tapping their pedagogical expertise, growing their leadership skills and increasing their job satisfaction. It professionalizes teaching and creates vertical career growth for teachers who do not want to become administrators. Empowering teachers as leaders of instructional improvement and school change can also strengthen teacher morale.

The idea of teacher leadership has gained momentum since the mid-1980s when educational reforms advanced the professionalization of teaching. In "What Do We Know About Teacher Leadership?" Jennifer York-Barr and Karen Duke identify three successive waves in the evolution of teacher leadership. In Wave 1, teachers served in formal roles as grade level chairs, department heads and union representatives,

taking on managerial responsibilities that principals could not or did not want to assume. In Wave 2, teachers took on expanded instructional roles, helping to implement mandated curricula, leading staff development workshops, mentoring new teachers. In Wave 3, teachers began to lead professional learning communities designed to foster collaboration, ongoing learning and instructional improvement. Today, in schools around the country, including some Jewish day schools, teachers are filling formal and informal roles related to each of these waves.

But what does it take to be a successful teacher leader? Everyone agrees that the foundation is being a good teacher. Teacher leaders know how to engage diverse students in learning worthwhile content. They enjoy what they do and want to keep doing it. They are also learners, open to new ideas, actively seeking better ways to teach their content and reach their students. Their commitment to student learning and their effectiveness in the classroom give them credibility with other teachers and with administrators.

If being a good teacher is necessary but not sufficient, what else do teachers leaders need to know, care about and be able to do? To answer this question, we examined a set of national standards for teacher leaders. We also reviewed the learning outcomes of a graduate program in teacher leadership at Brandeis University designed for teachers in public schools and Jewish day schools. In keeping with the theme of this issue of *Hayidion*, we paid special attention to dispositional requirements. In both cases, we discovered that dispositions for teacher leadership were either implicit or incorporated into descriptions of teacher leaders' understandings and actions, not separated out as distinct qualifications.

This integrated approach reflects an understanding of dispositions as a combination of will and skill, capacity and commitment. The strong desire to be a teacher leader and the requisite knowledge and skills

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for doing so fortify each other in the practice of teacher leadership. Steven Covey (*Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*) makes the same point when he writes that a habit, another term for disposition, is “the intersection of knowledge, skill and desire.”

In 2010, the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium released a set of model teacher-leader standards. Designed to stimulate discussion among stakeholders of the teaching profession, these national standards outline the competencies of teacher leaders around the following domains:

- Fostering a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning
- Accessing and using research to improve practice and student learning
- Promoting professional learning for continuous improvement
- Facilitating improvements in instruction and student learning
- Promoting the use of assessments and data for school improvement
- Improving outreach and collaboration with families and the community
- Advocating for student learning and the profession

While the descriptions of the domains contain little explicit dispositional language, one can infer some of the dispositions teacher leaders would need to carry them out these responsibilities.

Take the first domain, which calls for teacher leaders to foster a culture of collaboration in support of teacher development and student learning. A large body of research shows that effective schools provide teachers with regular opportunities to share problems of practice, examine student work, study and design curriculum, analyze data, observe each other’s teaching—all in the service of improving teaching and learning in their school. Yet many schools do not provide the conditions that support this kind of collaborative work among teachers.

Picture a grade-level meeting in which teachers discuss samples of student work to figure out what individual students have learned from a recently completed unit, what they misunderstood and what still needs to be taught. What facilitation practices, patterns of talk and norms of discourse would be needed to make this a professional learning experience?

Developing a culture of “critical collegueship,” in the words of researcher Brian Lord, requires a sea change in how teachers relate to colleagues and talk about students, teaching and learning. This is particularly true for teachers accustomed to working alone in the privacy of their classroom. But even teachers who welcome opportunities to learn with and from colleagues may not feel comfortable exposing their practice to others, surfacing questions and concerns, probing colleagues’ comments, hearing and offering constructive criticism.

Helping teachers move from a culture of congeniality to a culture of collaboration is a tall order for teacher leaders, requiring considerable tact and skill. One can imagine some of the dispositions they would need to foster the trust and openness on which productive collaboration depends: patience, persistence, open-mindedness, confidence and a willingness to take risks. Such habits of mind and heart enable teacher leaders to act as agents of cultural change.

The graduate program for teacher leaders at Brandeis frames the curriculum according to four broad learning outcomes: developing an identity as a teacher leader; planning teacher learning opportunities aligned with school improvement goals and principles of effective professional development; facilitating teacher learning with individuals and groups to improve student learning; and using organizational principles and data to think strategically and advocate for school

change. The Brandeis program rests on the assumption that teacher leadership is a professional practice that must be learned and can be taught. What distinguishes the assessment framework is the explicit recognition that becoming a teacher leader requires the development of a new professional identity along with a new set of skills and understandings. For us, that identity is intimately tied to the notion of teacher leaders as “lead learners.”

A professional identity combines outside expectations—what one is supposed to do and be like—with an inner sense of agency and self-awareness. Becoming a teacher leader means coming to see oneself in new ways as well as meeting and shaping the expectations of others. It means expanding one’s professional identity to include being a facilitator of other teachers’ learning and an advocate for their students’ learning.

When teacher leaders are comfortable in their role, they share their classroom successes and challenges with others. They welcome the chance to lead a professional learning community (PLC) or start a mentoring program in their school. They question taken-for-granted ideas about teaching and learning. They accept the inevitability of resistance and the need to work patiently and persistently toward school improvement.

Still, being a teacher leader can feel risky in a flat profession like teaching, where distinctions are mainly based on years of experience, not expertise. That’s one reason why the Brandeis program embraces a view of teacher leaders as “lead learners,” not experts. Another reason stems from the inevitable uncertainties that come with the challenging and complex work of teaching and teacher leadership. By adopting an inquiry stance, teacher leaders invite others to turn problems into questions, seek evidence of learning and be open to new possibilities for meeting the learning needs of their students.

Working with three cohorts of day school teacher leaders in the Brandeis program has underscored the critical role that administrators play in the success of teacher leaders. It is easier to be a teacher leader in schools where teachers have regular opportunities to learn with and from one another. Even when such conditions exist, teacher leaders still need explicit, public acknowledgment and support from school leaders.

By conferring legitimacy on teacher leaders and helping to create the structures and culture that support their efforts, heads of school make it possible to reap the benefits of teacher leadership. No matter where your school is now, teacher leadership is not beyond your reach. Identifying the right teachers, fostering a learning culture, and promoting distributed leadership are within reach for every Jewish day school.

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FOSTERING INNOVATION THROUGHOUT THE FIELD



ANDREA HERNANDEZ

Reshet Innovation is unique among the Reshets in that it is not based on a particular job or lay leadership role nor on membership in a Prizmah program. Any Jewish day school educator interested in innovating his or her school or classroom might find there a connection among like-minded educators. Innovation is a broad notion, open to many possible interpretations and paths; the Reshet is a place to discuss anything that falls under the vast umbrella of innovative practices or ideas. Here are some ideas that have risen to the forefront of late and captivated the interest and imagination of school leaders, teachers and the general public.

One of the innovations that is gaining momentum, support and resources is the Maker movement. Connected to that is the general growth of programs designed to integrate STEAM/STEM into cross-curricular learning in every subject area. Many Jewish day schools are doing innovative, unique and inspiring work in this area: turning unused rooms into inviting Makerspaces, giving students opportunities to learn through repeated trial and error, bringing awareness to all the ways that math, science, engineering, art and technology are part of, and can be used to understand, everything.

It was with this interest and activity in mind that Reshet Innovation convened a webinar called "Torah and Tinkering." The two presenters, Dr. Alexis Soffer from Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland, and Shana Guterman from Martin J. Gottlieb Day School in Jacksonville, Florida,

shared their work using STEAM/STEM and Maker spaces to enliven and support the Jewish studies learning in their schools. The desire to learn from and connect with other Jewish day school educators brought together a large and enthusiastic group, eager to ask questions, share ideas and grow together. The outpouring of interest was especially exciting, as many of the webinar participants are also leading the way with this work in their schools.

From these roots, branches are growing. The presenters were both from K-8 schools, with the bulk of their examples coming from K-5. While it is always possible to adapt ideas to a different age group, there has been much interest in convening a similar webinar focused specifically on high schools doing this work. Stay tuned for details.

Another offshoot of the webinar is the formation of a working group of educators from around the country who are interested in brainstorming, co-planning, sharing strategies and resources, and possibly bringing their students together. The working group details are also in the planning stage, with a first virtual meeting taking place soon.

In a Reshet, participants can not only read or hear about what other schools are doing, but actually be present with Jewish day school counterparts and to form meaningful connections with virtual colleagues. As one participant wrote, "I was struck while watching the webinar by how similar some of our programs are. We really could all be helping each other to move

the field forward, rather than just working in isolation." This sums up the value of Reshet participation: using our own experiences, creations and struggles to enlighten and help others and, by extension, to strengthen the field.



MICAH LAPIDUS

CALLING AND COMMITMENT TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE

BEING A RABBI, WORKING IN A JEWISH DAY SCHOOL AND SERVING THE JEWISH PEOPLE WITH DEEP AND ABIDING DEDICATION CAN DEFINITELY BE SEEN AS A CALLING. EIGHTEEN YEARS AGO, I MADE A LIST OF THE THINGS I WANTED TO DO WITH MY LIFE. THAT LIST INCLUDED THINGS LIKE *PURSUE WISDOM, SERVE OTHERS AND BE A PASTORAL PRESENCE*. WHEN I TOOK A STEP BACK AND REFLECTED ON THIS LIST, I WAS, AT DIFFERENT LEVELS, SIMULTANEOUSLY SHOCKED AND UNSURPRISED WHEN THE ITEMS ON THAT LIST POINTED ME IN THE DIRECTION OF BECOMING A RABBI. THAT MIXTURE OF AMAZEMENT AND FAMILIARITY CONTINUES TO BE A HELPFUL WAY OF DESCRIBING THE FEELING OF BEING "CALLED." TO BE CALLED IS TO BE BOTH CHALLENGED AND AFFIRMED IN ONE'S SENSE OF SELF AND ONE'S CHOICE OF VOCATION.



Over the years, I have experienced the feeling of being called in different ways and in different settings. For example, there are aspects of my job that come naturally and there are aspects that don't. Organizing and leading our annual eighth grade Israel trip comes naturally. So too does leading and coordinating our tefillah program. On the other hand, learning how to be an excellent supervisor to our Hebrew and Jewish studies faculty took some serious work and development. I feel a sense of calling when I intuitively know what to do or how to be in a given situation. But I also feel a sense of calling when I have to engage in difficult growth and learning in order to honor my commitments.

Leaders feel a sense of calling when they find themselves in the right place at the right time or when they know that they have helped create experiences or opportunities that enrich lives. When professional and personal lives merge, when life is experienced in an integrated way, and when our authentic selves are what is needed in any given moment, calling is a kind of homecoming. I feel this kind of integration between personal and professional in a variety of different times and settings. Teaching mindfulness and meditation to fifth graders, dancing during the Mi Kamokha prayer at our weekly Kabbalat Shabbat, writing original Jewish melodies, or documenting how our school lives our core values on the Davis Academy Menschlichkeit Blog that I keep are a few such examples. At these and other times, I feel a sense of calling.

Whether we attribute a kind of spiritual dimension to our life path by relating to it as a calling or not, we all need to refresh and renew our core commitments. This refreshing and renewing is different for each of us. When I think about ways that I have kept myself engaged and able to answer the call with the fullness of my being, a few things come to mind. Professional development and learning more generally are essential. Pursuing an EdD and now immersing in mindfulness training are two ways that I've kept my sense of calling vibrant, both because of the learning itself and the people I've met. Also, finding an outlet for one's talents, hobbies and passions is vitally important. Lastly, cultivating and sustaining a reflective practice is essential. I have done this by blogging, which allows me to both document and make meaning out of the many experiences I've had. All of these strategies are mutually reinforcing and help us stay connected to the feeling of being called.

There's no doubt that my own studies and life experience have instilled in me an abiding love, respect and appreciation for the Jewish people writ large. I feel genuine admiration

for the generations that have come before us, as well as genuine care and concern for the present and future well-being of the Jewish people. At the same time, my primary responsibility is for the people that I am called upon to serve. For the most part, those people are all around me every day. They are the children and adults that make up The Davis Academy. Because what happens to one of us in some way affects us all, I see a direct correlation between serving my community and serving the Jewish people more broadly, and by extension all people. "Commitment" is an idea. I think the idea of "commitment" is best demonstrated through service.

For better or worse, we live in an era of Judaisms rather than Judaism. Lately it feels like the common ground that unites the many faces of the Jewish people is decreasing. I think that our Jewish day schools play a vital role in helping hold that common ground as well as building a cohesive and connected Jewish people for future generations.

The question of whether or not a person feels a sense of "calling" is comprised of a series of other questions. Questions like, Why do we do what we do? What do our actions say about our commitments? and What do we hope to achieve with our precious and limited time on earth? To the extent that our professional life is a response to these questions, then it is clear that our service to the Jewish community writ large, and the Jewish day school community in particular, may rightly be considered a calling.

Strengthening Jewish Leadership Dispositions

EACH SUMMER, I HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF PARTNERING WITH THE AVI CHAI FOUNDATION TO LEAD TWO COHORTS OF DAY SCHOOL LEADERS THROUGH A PROGRAM AT THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION. DURING THE DAY, OUR COHORT ARE FULL PARTICIPANTS IN ONE OF TWO PROGRAMS AT THE PRINCIPALS' CENTER OF THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, *LEADERSHIP: AN EVOLVING VISION OR IMPROVING SCHOOLS: THE ART OF LEADERSHIP*. IN THE LATE AFTERNOON AND EVENING, WE LOOK AT JEWISH PERSPECTIVES ON THE HARVARD LEARNING OF THAT DAY. WE ANALYZE HOW THE LEARNING CAN BE APPLIED TO OUR JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS WITH THEIR OWN DISTINCTIVE CULTURES AND COMMUNITIES. THE WORK IS INTENSIVE BUT HIGHLY REWARDING, AS PARTICIPANTS CONSISTENTLY REPORT THE GREAT VALUE THEY RECEIVE BY FRAMING THE LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF DAY SCHOOLS.

JONATHAN CANNON

While most of our work is planned, some of the most rewarding learning emerges serendipitously. When we first saw the speaker list for the summer 2016 Harvard program, we noticed that Howard Gardner was a speaker. The inclusion of Gardner, best known for his seminal work on “multiple intelligences,” was exciting, both because of his expertise and also because this was the first time that he had spoken at the summer institute. His subject matter was leadership, and much of the content of the talk was based around his book *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*. One assertion that Gardner made resonated deeply with our cohort and unexpectedly came to frame our entire week of learning leadership dispositions through a Jewish lens:

It is important for leaders to know their stories; to get them straight; to communicate them effectively, particularly to those who are in the thrall of rival stories; and, above all, to embody in their lives the stories that they tell.

Gardner highlighted the power of a leader’s authentic story on his or her ability to be effective as an educational leader, and the pitfalls that arise when there is a disconnect between the values of our stories and the dispositions that we demonstrate.

After the lecture, I asked the group about their own leadership stories. Did they have a story? When was the last time they proactively revisited their story? Do their school stakeholders know it? And perhaps, most importantly, did their stories meet the Gardner test of a leader needing to “embody their lives in the stories that they tell”?

The session that followed was one of the most inspiring that I have attended. Each member of the cohort took the time to rehearse the story of his or her path to becoming an educator in a Jewish day school. The group split into pairs that shared their stories, and then two of the 13 members of the cohort told their story to the group. Two things ensued, one planned and one spontaneous. As per our plan, each member of the group considered whether their leadership traits and dispositions were reflective of their personal story, and also whether their school stakeholders were aware of this story. This exercise went to the core of our work as leaders and particularly the relationship between our personal Jewish journeys and the actions that define our leadership.

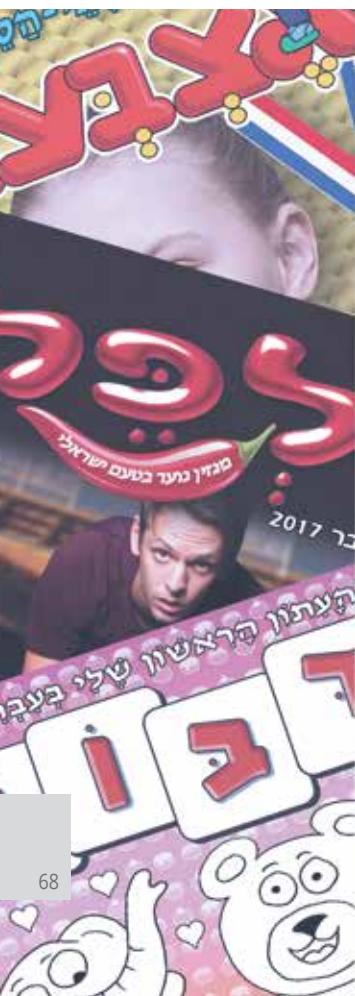
An example best illustrates this. (Some details are changed to protect confidentiality.) One of our participants explained that she grew up in a non-observant Jewish household where there was a strong emphasis on recognizing and celebrating different religious approaches. Her parents were strongly of the view that there was no single authentic interpretation of

Judaism, and that different denominations had equal validity. This woman made a choice after high school to study for two years in an Orthodox Women's Seminary in Israel, after which she returned to the States and received a degree in education at Yeshiva University. She became a Jewish studies teacher and worked her way to the position of head of school of an Orthodox girls high school. In that capacity, she was involved in highly charged deliberations at the board level as to whether the admissions criteria were effective, and there was criticism of the fact that the school was admitting students who were not "mission appropriate," which in this case referred to their level of Shabbat observance.

The head of school concurred with the board's decision to be more rigorous in vetting future applicants so as to ensure a more homogeneous community. That being said, she was finding it more and more difficult to apply it in practice, and was unsure as to the basis for her discomfort. It was not until we did the exercise at Harvard during the summer that the pieces came together for her. Her story took her on a journey from a home that was characterized by respect for different levels of observance, and she was asking herself to do something that contradicted her own story and in her words, to "build a hierarchical structure of authenticity as part of the admissions process." Long story short, she left the school, not because she thought that the school was doing anything wrong but because she concluded that her own authentic priorities did not fit well with those pursued at the school. In the scheme of the Rosov report, this scenario created some tension between the leadership capacities of vision setting and community building on the one hand and the disposition of integrity on the other.

Alongside this planned analysis of each person's individual story, the participants spontaneously requested the opportunity for each member to share their story with the group as a whole. They arranged a schedule for three stories per evening, and the experience of hearing one another's stories, filled as they were with self-reflection, honesty and motivation, was inspirational and transformational. By the end of the week, we were bound together through the closeness that they had built through their willingness to take a risk by sharing their personal and professional journeys. That bond remains in place two years on, with the cohort still in active communication on educational issues, social connections and a welcome dose of irreverent humor. The experience has powerfully strengthened the participants' sense of their own calling and commitment to their work as Jewish educational leaders.

The Harvard program has focused on building skills primarily in instructional leadership, personnel empowerment and organizational management. Over the years, I have seen a welcome increase in the learning that has taken place around community building, with sessions on parent involvement, effective use of communication tools and the impacts of culture on school change. Our work is not to dictate the correct answers or the ways in which the learning must be applied. Instead, we facilitate a process within which our participants absorb the learning of the day, reflect on their personal and institutional goals and motivations, and then bring those experiences together so as to advance the Jewish learning experience and long-term Jewish commitments of our students.



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RIVY POUPKO KLETENIK

LIFELONG LEARNING

IN SECOND GRADE, I DECIDED THAT WHEN I GREW UP I WOULD BE A TEACHER OF TORAH. MR. RUBIN'S CLASS WAS LIVELY. WE USED REAL CHUMASHIM; THE PAGES WERE MARBLEIZED ON THE SIDE AND SMELLED DELICIOUS. AND ONE DAY, I GAVE THE ANSWER. MY HEART SWELLED. I WENT SAILING HOME—WHAT A THRILL! ON THE ONE HAND, THIS WAS NOT A RADICAL DECISION. MY WHOLE FAMILY WAS TEACHERS OR RABBIS. YET IT STILL FELT DRAMATIC AND PURPOSEFUL, AND I KNEW THAT IT WOULD KEEP ME CONNECTED TO THIS, THIS WONDERFUL WORLD OF REAL LEARNING.

By the time I was sitting in my first pedagogy class during my gap year in Israel, I had already formed distinct notions about teaching. It must be engaging. It must invite active student participation. It must focus of animated exchanges. After all, as a student myself, I had much to say. I wanted this endeavor not just for the teaching, but to a large degree, for the learning that I anticipated would be inherent in a life of education. I was banking on teaching to afford me the ongoing delight of continued study.

That first year of teaching high school was rough. As a newbie to the profession, the school and the city, I was assigned the least desirable courses, the most challenging classes and the most abominable time slots (senior boys, Jewish history, last period of the day—I was barely five years older than them!). That said, the delight of the year? Plunking myself down at my dining room table each Sunday and preparing my lessons. A luxurious day of learning.

The single greatest fixed and indisputable perk to working in a Jewish day school is the opportunity to lead a life of learning. It is what drew me in and what keeps me in. The phenomenon of ongoing study is the “predominant prevailing tendency of my spirit, my natural mental and emotional outlook and state of mind, my inclination,” and I suspect that the same is true most others in this chosen noble field.

Many questions need to be addressed and distilled regarding this disposition of lifelong learning. Where does this learning come from? How is it to fit into the endless days of meetings, phone calls and managing? What are the tangible effects of this learning? Is there a distinction to be made between practical learning (how to run an effective meeting, how to lead a powerful conversation, how to ask for an annual gift) and the more ephemeral, soul-satisfying thrill of study for its own sake or even the kind of learning one does to prep for teaching a class, delivering a dvar Torah at a board meeting or leading a staff learning session? And perhaps

most importantly, how might our community become more intentional and deliberate about filling this thirsty need for our educational leaders?

By default, most of my learning occurs out of the need to prepare. At my previous position at our community federation and Jewish Education Council, my supervisor, a beloved mentor to this day, once dramatically jotted down a big fat red NO on Post-it note and stuck it over my desk. She told me if one more person called to ask me to teach anything, I should just say NO. It was an order that came from a place of love; we both knew that I would never fulfill her request. I always say yes. I deeply believe that it is our obligation to share our learning. And coincidentally, by good luck, boy does it feed this insatiable addiction to learning!

I love that metaphors of learning share a common language with hunger and food. It is remarkable and even a bit whimsical that three Hebrew words related to learning have roots connected to the mouth. *Shinayim*, teeth, shares a root with *veshinatam*, “And you shall diligently teach” (in the Shema). *Chanichayim*, gums, share a root with *chinuch*, education. And a third, *sefatayim*, lips, is the word for language, *safah*. There must be a deep philosophical underpinning driving these connections, linking the mouth and learning.

Perhaps it is related to the nuance found in the morning prayer we say as part of Birkhot HaTorah, which frames our hopes and intentions for learning to be sweet in our mouth and the mouths of all of Israel:

And please, Lord, our God, sweeten the words of Your Torah in our mouths and in the mouths of all of Your people, the House of Israel. And may we and our offspring [and the offspring of our offspring] and the offspring of Your people, the House of Israel—all of us—be knowing of Your Name and studying Your Torah for its sake. Blessed are You, Lord, Who teaches Torah to His people, Israel.



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Additional mouth and taste symbolism is reflected in this familiar practice described in the *Book of Our Heritage*, outlining the initiation into learning for our most tender-aged youngsters. I paraphrase:

It is a custom to begin teaching the Torah to children on Shavuot. At dawn, the children are taken to the synagogue. A tablet is brought on which the letters of the alphabet are written as well as individual verses: "Moshe commanded us the Torah," "My faith shall be in Torah," the first verse of Vayikra. The teacher reads every letter, and the child repeats after him. The teacher puts a little of honey on the tablet, and the child licks the honey from the letters. Verses from the Torah are written on a special honey cake made of much milk and honey, and a Torah verse is written on a boiled egg. The teacher reads with the child everything on the tablet, on the cake and on the egg. After the children have finished their lesson, they are given the cake and the egg to eat.

The connection between education and the mouth is further evident in the passage describing the process of Moshe, our greatest of teachers, being instructed by God through the mouth rather than the intellect or the ear, the limb of listening (Bemidbar 12:8):

With him do I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD doth he behold; wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?

Finally, our appetite for knowledge is prophetically cast by the prophet Amos as famine-like (8:11):

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.

We ruminate over ideas, chew over the facts, digest the thought. Why these shared metaphors? Some say because just as we possess an ongoing, insatiable hunger for food, so is our hunger for knowledge voracious.

As a head of school, I see this as a true gift to us in our roles. All agree ours is a position of multiple stresses, complex demands and nimble juggling. I posit here that this disposition of being a lifelong learner is at once a dividend of the job and the very buoy that lifts us up when the day-to-day moves into tenser turfs. For this opportunity to transcend the everyday, to be catapulted back to the thrill of Mr. Rubin's class—for this, I am humbly grateful.

The opportunity to teach the sixth grade Chumash class is a welcome diversion in a day packed with pitfalls demanding to be navigated. Prepare the Dvar Torah for the Board meeting—with joy! The weekly volunteer adult classes in Parshah, Talmud and Navi—bring it on! Learn with our child before their Bar / Bat Mitzvah—of course! Teach at Limmud—yes! To those who might say, Where do you find the time? I reply with the classic story of Rabbi Akiva from the Talmud Berachot 61b in his parable of the fox and the fish:

"For that is thy life and the length of thy days, if we go and neglect it how much worse off we shall be!"

As heads of school, we give so much for this learning of Torah. If not for our disposition of lifelong learning, where would we be?

Leadership Fast and Slow

WHAT ARE THE NECESSARY OR DESIRABLE DISPOSITIONS OR CAPACITIES FOR LEADERS OF JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS? THE LIST IS LONG. A COMMON REFRAIN, HEARD PARTICULARLY WHEN A SCHOOL IS LAUNCHING A SEARCH FOR A NEW LEADER, IS THAT THE HEAD OF A JEWISH DAY SCHOOL NEEDS TO BE "GOD ON A GOOD DAY." OR MAYBE EVEN MORE THAN THAT. WHEREAS THE JEWISH TRADITION TEACHES THAT GOD IS ETERNAL AND UNCHANGING, DAY SCHOOL LEADERS ARE OFTEN EXPECTED TO BE AGENTS OF POSITIVE CHANGE IN THEIR INSTITUTIONS.

JON A. LEVISOHN

In recent years, one of the most powerful frameworks for thinking about change has been “design thinking.” Often associated with the design firm IDEO and with the d.school at Stanford, design thinking is an approach to innovation or change, to creating something new to meet certain needs or solve certain problems. It has a distinctly Silicon Valley vibe. Design thinking is unsentimental about legacy institutions or processes. The criterion of success is whether the innovation solves the problems it is trying to solve, for those human beings whom it is trying to serve, rather than whether it meets some other predetermined standard for what a solution is supposed to look like or what a tool is supposed to do.

Moreover, design thinking emphasizes creativity and intuition over rationality and analysis. This does not mean that design thinking ignores empirical realities. Quite the contrary. Typically, a design-thinking approach will begin with data collection, and will emphasize how important it is to understand the presenting problem clearly and precisely in order to develop appropriate solutions. But design thinking also recognizes that good ideas often flow from messy, unwieldy processes, and that we need to create spaces for those unwieldy processes if we want to generate new solutions.

So what does this have to do with Jewish day schools?

Design thinking is not just a matter of creating a better can opener or a better wallet. Design thinking is really a technology of change, including an approach to organizational change. Good leaders, then—including good leaders of Jewish day schools—are people who are equipped to lead design processes within their organization, helping those organizations adapt and flourish.

This way of thinking about Jewish day school leadership is compelling, it seems to me, for the following three reasons.

First, it's non-technical. When we think about developing leaders within a design-thinking framework, we do not focus on training people in technical skills. Instead, we focus on cultivating capacities or dispositions that are decidedly non-technical: the ability to listen and observe carefully, in order to understand a problem fully; the capacity to generate creative ideas in non-judgmental fashion; the patience to deal with the uncertainty when accepted ways of doing things are challenged. These may be hard to cultivate, harder than technical skills. But that's exactly what makes them so desirable.

Second, this way of thinking about leadership is compelling because it's solution-oriented and client-focused. We want our leaders to be positive people, focused on solutions rather than merely on problems. We want them to be flexible and open-minded, more concerned about meeting the felt needs of human beings than about the correctness of their orthodoxies or even the preservation of their organizations. We want our leaders to be focused on what works, to be pragmatists rather than metaphysicians.

And third, this conception of leadership is compelling because it celebrates creativity over rationality. We want our CFO to be a model of rational analysis. But our CEO? We want that person to be interested in data, for sure, but data-wonkery is not enough. We want more from that person. We need a creative thinker, someone who can do more than just come up with a better delivery system—someone who can imagine a whole new framework. The CFO needs to follow the rules and make sure the information is correct. The CEO needs to tell us the story of ourselves. That capacity, that ability to tell us our story, has to be rooted in the facts, but it should never be limited to the facts. It has to inspire, ignite a spark in our own imagination. That's why it requires the leader's creativity, to imagine possibilities that are not currently obvious.

Those are three strengths of the model, three ways that we might think about design thinking as a paradigm for Jewish day school leadership. This is all helpful to us, as we think about what we want leaders to be and to do. But there are also grounds for critique, and those critiques will help us think about Jewish day school leadership as well.

First, we noted that advocates for design thinking often emphasize its positive orientation, its focus on solutions rather than problems. But at the risk of stating the obvious, you cannot have a solution unless you first have identified a problem to be solved. In other words, those who embrace design thinking refuse to get locked into a negative discourse around problems, and instead find ways to pivot to a positive discourse that generates possible solutions to those problems. But this still assumes that what we see, when we look out at the world, is a field of problems.

I should note that this assumption—the assumption that the responsible thing to do, when looking at the world, is to identify the problems so that we can find the solutions—is not unique to design thinking. It is also closely associated with what is often called “strategic philanthropy,” the movement in the last decade or so away from reactive responses to requests for aid and towards a proactive articulation of problems in order to develop strategic approaches to solving them.

There are good reasons to adopt a strategic philanthropic position, just as there are good reasons to adopt a design-thinking approach. But in education, we know well that there is also a danger here. We know what happens when we frame children as problems to be solved, as “drop-outs” or “children-at-risk.” And the danger doesn’t go away just by focusing positively on the solution rather than negatively on the problem. No child in school wants to be “solved,” any more than they want to be pathologized in the first place. When we look out at a classroom, we don’t see problems sitting in front of us; we see people. We are not trying to solve anything; we are educating.

This is not to say, of course, that there are no problems in educational spaces. Sometimes it is genuinely helpful to articulate a problem in order to work on a solution. But according to the old adage, if all you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail. We at least have to acknowledge the possibility that “solutions” are our hammer and “problems” are our nails. There are problems in education, and we ought to work on solutions. But the business of Jewish education is not about solving problems.

Instead, the business of Jewish education is about building a thriving Jewish community, creating an aspirational shared Jewish future, helping people lead good and meaningful lives.

To reiterate, this point is not about optimism versus pessimism. I am not suggesting that we ignore the challenges. But we ought to notice the danger of pathologizing Jews and Jewish communities, simply because we’re locking into a mindset that says that we need to figure out the problems precisely so that we can be solution-oriented.

Second, I noted that design thinking is admirably attentive to the needs of human beings. The criterion of success for the product that is being designed is not elegance or efficiency or how many extra features it has, but whether it works for the person for whom it was designed. The criterion of success for any solution is whether it solves the problem that the client is facing.

But in nonprofit leadership, who exactly is the client? Sometimes, in direct service organizations, we can think about the clients as the people who are being directly served. If I’m working on homelessness, the client is the homeless population. I’ve got to keep their needs front and center. Many educational organizations are like this as well, at least in certain respects.

On the other hand, readers of *HaYidion* will surely remember the tagline used by RAVSAK, one of our legacy organizations: “Our client is the Jewish future.” The line was instructive, in effect functioning as a declaration of independence from short-term thinking. Relationships with day schools were not meant to be seen in transactional terms, as simply the provision of services for schools considered as clients. The thinking was bigger than that; it was focused on a longer-term horizon. Of course, it was also necessary to listen carefully to the schools in the network, to understand their needs. But if they only listened to the schools, only provided what the schools said they needed, they would not have been fulfilling their mission.

Consider, too, other kinds of institutions. What if I’m building an art museum? Or strengthening democracy? Or doing basic biological research? Then the client is not so clear. Those examples should serve to remind us that, even in schools, we may need to think more broadly about who the stakeholders are.

The third and final critique focuses on the ways in which design thinking is action-oriented. The design-thinking approach says, “Don’t just stand there, do something!” Try something. Adopt an experimental approach. Don’t be afraid to fail, and fail fast, and fail often. You’ll learn more from trying than you will from sitting on your hands while you worry about what to do. The claim is that leaders who are eager to try and fail, and who promote that attitude within their organizations, will be more successful than those who are focused on maintaining the status quo.

There is surely something valuable here. Very often, we do want action, experimentation, learning from experience rather than waiting for the perfect solution to magically appear. But not always. Sometimes, the right counsel is, “Don’t just do something, stand there.” Sometimes, we do not yet understand the situation correctly, we do not yet have enough information, and we have not yet figured out the right way of framing the problem. Sometimes, we need to let our current practice develop, we need to let it bake for a while, before moving on to the next thing. Sometimes, doing something—anything—because of this kind of action-orientation may well have a hidden cost down the road, in terms of institutional exhaustion and dissipation of focus.

In schools, for example, we sometimes see a frenetic embrace of every passing fad. Let’s try it out! Let’s see what happens!

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Why not? But when cooler heads prevail, we realize that the teachers are exhausted and do not have the time to learn from experiment A before we've moved on to B and C. In other kinds of nonprofit organizations in the Jewish world, too, we sometimes see an expectation that every new grant requires a brand-new initiative, a fresh innovation. Some funders seem to have a blind spot on this topic, never asking themselves what the cost might be to good and healthy organizations when the funders incentivize change over constancy. It sometimes seems that we take our best and most thoughtful practitioners and turn them into crazed hamsters on the spinning wheel of innovation.

In these situations, we ought to be cultivating leadership not for action-orientation but for sustained focus, sobriety, maturity, systematic thinking, the ability to stay the course and invest for the long term even when there is pressure to try something new, to fail fast, to show quick results. In the design-thinking literature, data collection is typically a matter of a quick-and-dirty exploration of the needs of a particular target audience. Sometimes, that's exactly the right approach. At other times, though, what we need is a slow-baking process of institutional learning, or of developing an intellectual infrastructure, over the course of several years.

In his acclaimed best-seller *Thinking Fast and Slow*, psychologist Daniel Kahneman identified and explored the ways in

which intuition and hasty judgment (what he called "System 1") often leads to error. We focus on the wrong things, and are deceived by numerous cognitive "effects." Our speed misleads. But this is not inevitable. We can act otherwise. We have a range of techniques for thinking slowly and carefully ("System 2"). When we do, we eliminate errors, bias and misjudgment.

As we think about leadership for Jewish day schools, we ought to keep in mind leadership for calm and reflective deliberation, not just leadership for failing fast.

Leaders well-schooled in design thinking will be admirably attuned to the needs of real human beings, and will have the flexibility and creativity to develop new solutions rather than simply sticking with the status quo. These are important. We are rightfully critical of institutions that focus on their own preservation, rather than on serving genuine needs. But this is not enough for leadership. Something else is needed as well. Beyond facilitating the processes that generate solutions for present-day problems, leaders also have to have the capacity to think about the long term. They need to have the System 2 dispositions of calm and careful deliberation, of developing and executing a long-term plan. If they genuinely believe that their client is "the future," they have to make decisions in advance of knowing what the future will bring—indeed, decisions that will *create* one future, a good and healthy future, among the many possible futures.

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MEET PRIZMAH'S STAFF

RABBI MARC WOLF

Vice President for Field Advancement and Advocacy

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Working with the team of school advocates, the Prizmah knowledge center, conferences and convenings, the Reshet Networks and partnerships, Marc seeks to build and advance the day school field. Previously, Marc served as a vice president at Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, where he remains a member of the North American faculty, and held several major leadership roles at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Marc helped establish the Darkhei Noam community in Manhattan and led a free High Holiday service at JTS that attracted over 1,000 young professionals each year. He serves on the board of the Play Group Theatre, a children's theater company in White Plains, New York, where he lives with his wife, Rebecca Boim Wolf, and their three children.

LYNETTE CAPERS-BELL

Executive Assistant to the CEO

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A native New Yorker, Lynette earned her bachelor's degree in business management from CUNY Herbert H. Lehman College and an MBA in business administration from Capella University.

Before joining Prizmah, Lynette worked for a KFC franchisee in the NYC area as director of operations and office manager for 20 years. In her personal life she loves traveling, cooking, reading, spending time with family, relaxing at home with her husband, James, and her dog, Jace.

PRABHLEEN KAUR

Data and Technology Manager

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Prabhleen has always excelled in the fields of STEM, science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Prabhleen believes that education and health care are two aspects of life that can shape the life of future generations and impact the future of a culture or a country. With a passion in her heart to make a difference, Prabhleen has worked in universities, schools and hospital settings, managing their data and technology.

BRYAN VALERIO PERDOMO

Bookkeeper

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Bryan was born in Honduras and raised in New York City. He earned his bachelor's degree in business administration with a concentration in accounting from the State University of New

York at Potsdam. Bryan gained valuable accounting experience working in various industries including public accounting, nonprofit sectors and retail. He prides himself on developing strong relations through character, work ethic and communication. Bryan looks forward to becoming a key member of the Prizmah community.

DEVENA TOON

Office Manager

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DeVena is Prizmah's office manager. With roots in North Carolina, she graduated from the University of North Carolina with a business degree in marketing. Before Prizmah, DeVena was a branch administrator and volunteer coordinator for the YMCA of Greater Charlotte. She absolutely loves football, especially the Carolina Panthers, and traveling has become one of her hobbies as well.



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Center for Jewish Day Schools

THE KEY RELATIONSHIP

QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS FOR A HEALTHY AND THRIVING HEAD OF SCHOOL – BOARD PRESIDENT PARTNERSHIP?

LISA JERLES

Board Chair
Gordon School
Miami

A strong head of school–board chair partnership hinges on good communication. As a board chair, I appreciate that our day school principal does her best to avoid presenting me with surprises. We communicate regularly—generally weekly, unless there is a situation or special project that requires us to speak more often. We also communicate openly and honestly with an understanding that we are all working toward the school's growth, enhancement and improvement. Because we know our words come from a place of good intentions, we are able to avoid hurt feelings or misunderstandings. Even when our day school principal and I disagree on a particular issue, I always support her publicly while we work on the topic behind closed doors.

CHERYL MILLER

President
Board of Trustees
Denver Academy of Torah

Pirkei Avot 1:2 teaches that the world stands on three things: Torah, service of Hashem and acts of human kindness. To borrow that construct, the partnership between a head of school and the board president stands on three things: open communication, mutual respect and shared focus on positive outcomes for students.

Open communication: The head of school and board president need to be in regular communication, sharing successes and problem-solving challenges.

Mutual respect: Both the head of school and the board president bring numerous talents and immeasurable passion to the work. Yet they each play distinct roles in advancing the mission of the school. Recognize those roles, and provide the space for each party to thrive in those roles. Be sure that the head of school and board president are regularly communicating about those efforts.

Focus on positive outcomes for students: Student success should be at the center of the relationship between the head of school and board president (and the board). Both parties should work together to ensure that all aspects of the school's operations are designed to promote academic, social and emotional success for students. Putting students at the center provides a focus that is bigger than either of the two individuals.

DAVID SLOAN

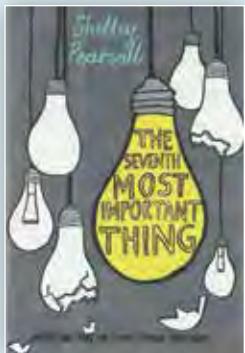
Board President
Berman Hebrew Academy
Rockville, Maryland

Some aspects of this partnership should be well known to all: frequent, open, consultative conversation, clear consensus on goals and expectations, sincere appreciation and candid constructive feedback. Just because they're easy to list doesn't mean that they're easy to do, but you discard any of these at your peril.

A less intuitive key to success is friendship. Among all the other complex roles that we play in these positions—collaborator, supervisor, sounding board, ambassador, parent, therapist, teammate—it's critical to remember that head of school is a human being in what can be a very lonely and isolating position. A board chair should be a friend who is keenly aware of their head's well-being, state of mind, vulnerabilities, preferences and aspirations, and make it a priority to ask after them, their families and their future. Developing a deep friendship is an investment that yields a more effective and enjoyable working relationship.

ON MY NIGHTSTAND

BRIEF REVIEWS OF BOOKS THAT PRIZMAH STAFF ARE READING



The Seventh Most Important Thing

by Shelley Pearsall

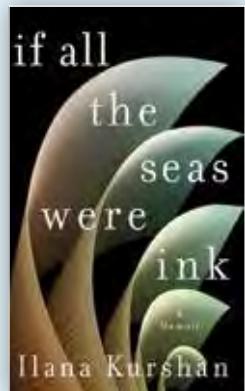
It was a bitterly cold day when Arthur T. Owens grabbed a brick and hurled it at the trash picker. Arthur had his reasons, and the brick hit the Junk Man in the arm, not the head. But none of that matters to the judge...

As a middle school teacher and then administrator, I made it a point to read the same literature as my students, and in particular,

to keep up with the books nominated for the Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award. Now that my oldest child is in fifth grade, I was thrilled that we could begin reading the Caudill books together.

This book raises big questions for those of us who work with children. How do we manage our inherent biases? How do we make sure children have a voice? How do we find value in discarded objects? What about discarded people? Where is the line between junk and art? Pearsall issues a challenge to any of us who have ever made a snap judgement without looking deeper. If you have a child in this age range, this is a great book to read together. If not, pick it up anyway!

Daniel Weinberg



If All the Seas Were Ink

by Ilana Kurshan

In this memoir, Kurshan shares a slice of her life as an American expat in Israel over the seven and a half years it took her to read Daf Yomi, a page a day of the Talmud. After her short marriage ends in divorce, Kurshan finds herself alone and living in Jerusalem, an ocean away from her family. It's at that time that she commits to "the Daf," and the rabbis of the Talmud become her constant companions, traveling with her as she goes about her daily life.

Kurshan, an editor, translator and scholar as well as an egalitarian Jewish woman, weaves a tapestry of personal insights and stories from her unique perspective around the lessons of the Talmud. What made this memoir memorable was the overlapping of Kurshan's warmth and dreaminess with her brilliant academic mind. Her passion for text study shines through the pages, and her book can inspire many of us to rededicate ourselves to serious Jewish learning.

Andrea Hernandez



Home Fire

by Kamila Shamsie

Where do the obligations of family and leadership coincide or diverge? At what length would a son go to please his father (or indeed the memory of his father)? And should exceptions be made where vulnerability and loyalty corrupt?

In this gripping novel, Kamila Shamsie weaves an emotional tale of two socio-economically disparate British families

of Muslim descent whose fates depend upon the compassion and understanding of the other. Shamsie pulls no punches in creating flawed protagonists and reprehensible antagonists who carry swollen hearts, conflicting emotions and treacherous passions, all of which are heartrendingly set against a background of British nationalism and Middle East jihadism. As *Home Fire* demonstrates so sadly and forcefully, leadership is hollow in instances where self-interest and selfishness tragically reign supreme.

Jeffrey Savit



The Celebrity Experience

by Donna Cutting

Customer service, whether good or bad, is experienced in almost everything we do and everywhere we go. Some people may think that creating a positive customer experience is simply a matter of smiling or responding to emails in a timely manner, but to go from good to great can and should mean so much more than that.

Through real-life stories from companies and individuals, Cutting shares why elevating your business's customer experience will have a significant impact on your success. She also presents many ways to stand out from the rest of the market. As schools think about current and prospective families, donors, alumni, and the community, what is the feeling that your school is providing? How do you want people to react when they leave your building? Are you rolling out the red carpet for everyone who enters your school?

Elana Alfred



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