

SOURCES ON *THE SOURCE*

Jewish Reflections on BoardSource's Twelve Principles of Governance that Power Exceptional Boards



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INTRODUCTION

“Make for yourself a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend.” (Pirkei Avot 1:5) In this simple line, the power of the learning process emerges. Learning is a collaborative activity, whether with an expert or with one’s colleagues. The text here is delightfully ambiguous—teachers become friends, and vice versa. When we adopt a learning posture, we embrace an openness to discovery, to listening, to new ways of solving perennial problems. At the board level, these qualities are critical for strategic functioning.

In 2005, BoardSource published *THE SOURCE: Twelve Principles of Governance That Power Exceptional Boards*. That slim volume serves as a model for this collection, which partners the “twelve principles” for excellent governance with reflections based on Jewish texts. These reflections—many of which function as Divrei Torah—provide opportunities for boards to ground their critical work within a broad frame of Jewish knowledge.

The pieces in this collection come from twelve thoughtful heads of school representing Jewish day schools across North America and along the denominational spectrum. The brief reflections build on core Jewish texts, and offer insights into strategy, synergy, communications, mission, and vision, as well as the fundamental importance of independence, integrity, and transparency. At the core of many of these reflections is the way curiosity and inquisitiveness enliven a board—modeling the learning process that takes place within a school itself.

Please enjoy this collection as a companion to your copy of *THE SOURCE*. I hope the learning contained in these reflections inspires your work.

RABBI JOSHUA ELKIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

1 CONSTRUCTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Exceptional boards govern in constructive partnership with the chief executive, recognizing that the effectiveness of the board and the chief executive are interdependent.

In Parashat Yitro, Jethro's ability to give advice and Moses' ability to heed it create a perfect metaphor for a constructive partnership between a board and head of school. Together they have infinitely more wisdom, breadth, and knowledge. The board helps the head of school by asking important questions and giving feedback and advice. The head of school carries out the day-to-day implementation. Excellent communication and trust leads to strong partnering, which in turn leads to a more efficient and effective school. It is indeed this collaboration that brings strength to any fine institution. The constructive union between the head and the board "bring essential, complementary ingredients to the governance partnership, that, when combined, are greater than the sum of their parts."

Speaking to Moses, Jethro said, "Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" (Exodus 18:14) If Moses chose not to listen to Jethro and to lead alone, we can be certain that the inefficiency of his system would have led to great frustration on the part of the people waiting to see him. Moses could not have influenced many or accomplished much had he chosen a path of single-minded leadership. Jethro's question helped Moses define his style of leadership. From outside of the system, Jethro observed how Moses served as a leader and how he might be more effective. He taught Moses the art of collaboration.

While Moses saw Jethro as an authority figure who could help him be more successful, eventually Jethro followed Moses. We learn from their relationship that staying open and flexible, knowing when to lead and when to follow, can help us fulfill our mission. Good partners help us accomplish challenging work, especially when they bring new ideas and energy to the school. Both the board and the head of school lend support for each other during difficult times and provide a listening ear in the face of frustrations and disappointments.

By learning from Jethro's question, Moses established a judicial system with shared leadership. Like the men of valor Moses chose to help him, the head and board lead the school by articulating the mission, building momentum, and acting responsibly to ensure its future. Heads can not do this alone. When the partnership inspires continuous learning and growth, greatness can prevail. Rabbi Yossi said, "Give yourself over to the study of Torah, for it does not come to you by inheritance."

JILL KESSLER

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2 MISSION DRIVEN

Exceptional boards shape and uphold the mission, articulate a compelling vision, and ensure the congruence between decisions and core values.

To live a good Jewish life is not merely to “be Jewish” but to “do Jewish”—to perform acts of kindness, follow the word of God, and transmit Jewish values forward to the next generation. But to do so is not a simple task; it is complex and requires constant attention and dedication. Sometimes we err, choosing paths antithetical to this goal, or simply fail to seize an opportunity that is before us.

In Hebrew, such a failure is called a *cheit*—not a sin as it is often mistranslated, but literally, a miss. Because, to sin is to commit an offense while to commit a *cheit* means to miss the target, to veer from the goal only to be offered another chance to try again.

As such, goals drive the Jewish people. From the heroic “to serve as a light unto the nations” to the personal *imitatio dei*, we cherish a life of mission and purpose. Therefore, the sages of the Talmud noted that “Who is wise? The one who foresees the consequences of his or her actions.” (BT Tamid 32a) Every action, then, has a consequence and leads us toward or away from our goal.

The Doveiv Meisharim (Rabbi Dov Ber Beidenfeld, a Hasidic rabbi 1879-1965) offered another insight into this Talmudic statement—that foresight can also refer to one’s ability to recognize an emerging situation, one that is already present but appears to others as if it is far off in the distant future.

Therefore, a wise person not only can envision the possible detours from achieving one’s goals, but also possesses the ability to change and correct course, to remain congruent to one’s goal and mission.

The Hebrew word *va'ad* is often translated as a board or committee. Interestingly, the word *va'ad* is derived from the word *ya'ad*, which means destination. Therefore, an effective board is one that recognizes its destination, understands the consequences of its actions, and has the ability to correct its missteps and shoot directly toward its target.

Yogi Berra is purported to have said: “If you get up in the morning and don’t know where you’re going, you might not get there.”

But if you get up in the morning, know your mission, and act wisely, you will most assuredly reach your destination.

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3 STRATEGIC THINKING

Exceptional boards allocate time to what matters most and continuously engage in strategic thinking to hone the organization's direction.

What is strategic thinking? It's planning now, long in advance, for future events; it is being prepared now for those unwanted eventualities that may or may not ever take place, but *oy va voy* if they take us by surprise.

Though we think of it as the language of modern commerce, strategic thinking is actually as old as—well, as old as Torah.

Strategic thinking is about looking not one or even five years ahead, but fourteen years ahead, as Joseph did. This allows the school to take maximum advantage of the years of plenty, so they are ready should the years of famine follow. The board of trustees can do as Joseph did and make detailed contingency arrangements for any possible eventuality, to make it manageable if and when a crisis arises. Does the demographic evidence suggest the school's enrollment will be plentiful or heading into a time of "famine?" What impact will a "famine" have on the "corn" of tuition fees and the "silos" of staffing levels? What if? Has the board asked all the possible "what ifs?"

Now therefore let Pharaoh find a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint overseers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land in the seven years of plenty. (Genesis 41:33)

Who else is this man, if not the head of school? Who else are those overseers, if not the members of the board?

Strategic thinking is about listening to the advice of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, explaining that a head of school can't do everything alone. A school needs 613 policies, one for every facet of the institution's life—how to address a lockdown, an anaphylactic attack, a parent who misbehaves, the criteria for admission, special needs' provisions. The school needs a tribal structure—administration, board, sub-committees, parents' association—in which all the players know their roles and obligations, and elders who can manage both people and tasks effectively.

The system needs a mechanism with which to identify and nurture future leaders—people to play the priestly role, providing wise counsel, nurturing the morals and ethics of the institution, and ensuring its mission is accomplished. This role is shared by the school's rabbi and board—the rabbi offers spiritual guidance, the board due diligence. Professional administrators take the Levitical role and, because they are trusted and competent, they are allowed to carry out their tasks without interference. A proper plan for the succession of leaders is essential—and time to train Joshua so he's ready to take on his role.

As Rabbi Tarfon famously remarked (Pirkei Avot 2:21): “It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task. Yet you are not free to desist from it.” The key to successful school leadership is effective planning and supported delegation. Then others will ensure the task is finished.

All will not be built today. Maybe in six days, but not today. Because strategic thinking is reflective and self-evaluating, the seventh day is given to cease creating; it is a day to rest, to evaluate what has been achieved, and, hopefully, to recognize that it is good.

DAVID PRASHKER
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4

A CULTURE OF INQUIRY

Exceptional boards institutionalize a culture of inquiry, mutual respect, and constructive debate that leads to sound and shared decision making.

Since Talmudic times, the Jewish people have often remarked that the best response to a question is not an answer, but another question. While this peculiarity has been a source of humor from the Borscht Belt to Hollywood, it might also be seen as the basis for much of what is unique and vibrant within contemporary Jewish culture; it is a culture of inquiry that is at the heart of Jewish tradition.

In the Babylonian Talmud Tractate Eruvin (13b), we learn that for three years the school of Shammai disputed with the school of Hillel. The former said: “The law agrees with our views.” And the latter said: “The law agrees with our views.” Then a heavenly voice announced: “These and these are each the words of the living God, but the law agrees with the rulings of the school of Hillel.” Since both schools’ rulings “are the words of the living God,” why was the law fixed according to the rulings of the school of Hillel? Because the followers of Hillel were kindly and modest. They not only studied the rulings of the school of Shammai, they even mentioned these rulings before their own.

The heavenly voice decrees that the “law agrees with the school of Hillel” not because of the content of their rulings, but because of the way in which the school of Hillel communicated their ideas. One of the key differences between these two opposing houses of study is that the members of Hillel always gave proper respect to their peers—even when they vehemently disagreed. Beit Hillel always approached study with a fundamental respect for alternative perspectives. This led to thoughtful discussion and practical rulings designed to guide Jewish life.

This spirit of lively debate, thoughtful questioning, and open discussion that animated the rabbis of the Talmud might also serve as a blueprint for success for the leaders of our 21st-century Jewish day schools. Hillel is famously quoted in Pirkei Avot (2:6) as saying “a bashful person cannot learn.” In order to effect enduring cultural change in our schools and ensure that our questioning leads to constructive outcomes, it is critical that board members raise questions, probe for understanding, and seek information. If our schools are to become successful learning communities, we must emulate the school of Hillel: Jewish day school board members need to be vocal in their opinions while remaining respectful of alternate perspectives. It is only once boards have built a foundation of trust through this culture of inquiry that they can engage in meaningful debate with the knowledge that they are united, much like Hillel and Shammai, by the common goal of strengthening the future of the Jewish people.

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INDEPENDENT-MINDEDNESS

Exceptional boards are independent-minded. When making decisions, board members put the interests of the organization above all else.

What's in a name? Jewish tradition has always understood that names are not something to be taken lightly or dismissed as irrelevant. Someone's name is their *yerusha*, their legacy; it lives well beyond their lifetime. Abraham was not the name our forefather received at birth. Abraham's given name was Abram. It was God who renamed this worthy ancestor, changing his name from "father of a nation" to "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5). God understood that for Abram to see himself as responsible for more than his immediate family he needed to reinvent his perspective on the world; he literally needed to be renamed and in essence become someone with different responsibilities.

Understanding the power of a name teaches us to reconsider what it means to be a member of a school's board of "trustees." Sitting around the table are people who are "entrusted" with the well-being of a school. No longer are they individual members with individual personal desires; instead they become a collective group whose mission is to bring together multiple perspectives toward accomplishing a greater goal.

The Source states that the "exceptional board is independent-minded," allowing it to tap into the multiple skill sets and varying perspectives that each member brings to the table." At the same time, "when making decisions, board members put the interests of the organization above all else."

Abraham accepted his new name with honor and dignity, and equally as impressive was Sarai's acceptance of her new name "Sarah." Their new names signified new, greater roles and responsibilities. So too, must the exceptional board change its perspective from a personal individual agenda to a collective pursuit, and even more broadly toward a global objective. Personal names and identities need to be left at the door. Around the board table are those who each understand their new name: "trustee."

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6 ETHOS OF TRANSPARENCY

Exceptional boards promote an ethos of transparency by ensuring that donors, stakeholders, and interested members of the public have access to appropriate and accurate information regarding finances, operations, and results.

When Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah replaced Rabbi Gamliel as the Nasi (head of the Sanhedrin), he made a number of changes, including: the guard at the door of the *beit midrash* (study hall) was removed, and many benches (between 400 and 700) were added. Unlike Rabbi Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar intended that the Torah be studied and discussed by many more students, even those who had not yet proven themselves to be worthy. Permission to enter and to study was granted to all students. A greater number of students came, intensified the study, asked many questions, and even resolved longstanding questions and issues of policy and law. Not only did Rabbi Elazar believe that exposing the text to more people, interpretations, and questions would elicit greater answers, but he also believed that more students studying the texts of our Torah could be transformed and become worthy. (Brachot 28a)

The question at hand is how much text to expose and to whom? If we think about our school as the text, we might ask: what do we share, with whom, and in what ways? Does anything need to be concealed either to protect the school or a person? How open can we be, how much can we share with the board, with the head, with the faculty, or with the parents? Much of the answer lies in developing relationships and in believing that individuals and organizations are continuous learners.

Our day schools are powerful shapers of identity and we can be proud of our product. As organizations committed to learning and improvement, the more we welcome others into our “study hall,” sharing what we know and what we do, the greater will be the understanding and the more helpful the interpretations. Just as Rabbi

Elazar invited in the students and exposed them to the text as it was, so too do we invite in our constituencies—varied as they may be—to involve themselves in the work of the school. This transparency builds a sense of trust between the board and the head, the faculty and the administration, the parents and the teachers. The sharing of information and details, including both successes and failures, allows open and probing discussion with greater assurance that the school's decisions will be based upon a clearer understanding of the state of the school, how it operates, and the realistic goals it has established for itself. Honestly informing the other becomes less threatening when there is a clear and unencumbered understanding of the roles of the board and the professional staff. In fact, often this sharing brings us to a greater understanding of the boundaries between volunteer and professional in a school setting.

Although exposure can create feelings of vulnerability, the board needs an accurate picture of the school in order to function at capacity. Transparency also fosters an environment that nurtures a marketplace of ideas and constructive debate. Transparency works in both directions; it is important also to make clear the board's goals, summaries of closed board meetings, and accurate financial information to parents and faculty. This is critical for developing and maintaining an exceptional school. Behind the ethos of transparency is the belief that individuals can assimilate new information and develop trusting relationships. After all, we are creatures of God, created in God's image.

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7 COMPLIANCE WITH INTEGRITY

Exceptional boards promote strong ethical values and disciplined compliance by establishing appropriate mechanisms for active oversight.

As a head of school—and admittedly, a former attorney—it’s possible that when I read this principle, I tend to focus on different words than a board member might. Specifically, I would suggest that the words “promote” and “appropriate” are of particular importance. And I believe the Torah would agree. Allow me to explain.

There is no question that trustees of an independent school must provide sufficient oversight in order to ensure that the institution’s mission is being fulfilled and its financial condition remains strong. The challenge is how to accomplish these large-scale objectives without becoming improperly involved in daily operations. The construction of the *mishkan* (tabernacle) built by the Children of Israel in the desert over 3,000 years ago can guide and instruct us in organizational behavior today.

As Rabbi Asher Meir has written, although the plan for the *mishkan* was given to Moses in a detailed prophecy, Moses chose to delegate the actual handiwork to people in a way that gave them maximum latitude to make use of their individual talents. According to the text, the chief workmen, Betzalel and Oholiav, were endowed with “skill, insight, and inspiration,” (Exodus 36:2) as were the laborers. All were given great freedom in their work. Moreover, Rashi comments that Betzalel did not do everything that Moses commanded him; rather, his inspiration and insight led him to fulfill God’s original plan even when Moses’ instructions differed slightly. In other words, part of effective oversight is giving the professionals “appropriate” instructions such that they can employ their own skills and talents with room for creativity.

But, in fairness, there is another aspect to the *mishkan's* construction that is relevant to board effectiveness. In Parashat Pekudei, we find detailed accounts of every contribution made to the Tabernacle. Moreover, the Midrash comments that Moses did not do the accounting on his own; rather, he enlisted Aaron's son Itamar to help him—and the Midrash praises him for soliciting this outside supervision (Shemot Rabbah 51). Incidentally, it's worth adding that Moses apparently did omit certain items when balancing the books, and thus needed Divine help to account for all the contributions to the tabernacle (Tanhuma 7). So in some respects—particularly fiscal—it seems clear that our tradition recognizes the value of, and indeed need for, active oversight.

Lastly, the nature of how a board executes this principle is worth considering. In “promoting” strong ethical values and disciplined compliance, trustees must lead by example. Repeatedly, the Torah teaches that lessons modeled by deeds, rather than just through words, are those that are genuinely and deeply learned. For example, Abraham does not merely speak about welcoming the stranger, he actualizes it. Not only did he run to the livestock to choose and prepare the meat so that he, himself, could wait upon the guests, but the patriarch actually left the Divine Presence to do so! So too, boards can exemplify this principle through their own practices, such as those related to conflict-of-interest, attendance, record-keeping, etc. In the end, gentle, appropriate guidance that active trustees can provide will enable a school, an institution, a “*mishkan*,” to help spread consciousness of God's presence and strengthen the Jewish people.

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SUSTAINING RESOURCES

Exceptional boards link bold visions and ambitious plans to financial support, expertise, and networks of influence.

Before launching any initiative, bold or otherwise, there must be a plan, strategy, and vision that sees the potential and then moves steadily toward the outcome. But it is certainly not enough to envision an outcome without carefully engaging in the analysis and planning so necessary for success. Norman Lamm points out that although a scholar of Talmud is called a *hakham*, a wise person, the term we usually use is a *talmid hakham*, a student of the wise. A *hakham* is one who knows; a *talmid hakham* is one who learns. It is the process and struggle and planning that strengthens the vision and brings it to actualization. There is pain in engaging in a process, especially the process of learning: “according to the pain is the reward.” (Pirkei Avot 5:26) There is pain, but reward, in planning; pain, but reward, in researching; pain, but reward, in resolving issues. The reward, the outcome, is not only in direct proportion to the pain; it is actually enhanced by the planning. Vision without concrete underpinning is no more than fantasy; vision grounded in practical strategy becomes bold reality.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the biblical account of Jacob’s confrontation with Esau, in Parashat Vayishlach (Genesis 32). The Bible describes the scene graphically: 34 years after Jacob receives Isaac’s blessings, Esau’s hatred remains vicious and Jacob finds himself threatened by Esau and his imposing army of 400 men.

How Jacob confronts the challenge—calling upon an expertise he may have acquired during his 14 years of study in the Academy of Shem and Eber (Rashi)—exemplifies a brilliant strategy. (We might call this professional development.) First, Jacob analyzed the situation by doing a needs assessment: “Then Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to Esau his brother.” (Genesis 32:4) Then, he proceeded to attack the problem on several fronts. Although he prepared militarily, he also used his diplomatic talents (sending “tributes” to his brother). “I will appease him with the tribute that precedes me, and afterwards I will

face him.” (Genesis 32:21) While he sent his men to pave the way, he certainly knew that he would be the one to “close the deal,” to face Esau. Ultimately, however, he prayed, knowing that without God’s help even the most careful plans can go awry.

Jacob used both his financial means and diplomatic expertise to co-opt Esau into his network of influence. For this, the Torah portrays Jacob with words not used to describe any other biblical figure: “*vayavo Yaakov shalem*” “Jacob arrived whole,” (Genesis 33:18) his plans well-conceived and well-implemented. His bold vision results in the genesis of a people, the fulfillment of a dream.

As we build and nurture our schools, we too have bold visions and ambitious dreams. The effective leader works hand-in-hand with the exceptional board by expanding the financial base of the institution, widening networks for strategy and planning, calling upon the expertise of the stakeholders—all with the goal of fulfilling those dreams.

ZIPORA SCHORR

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9 RESULTS-ORIENTED

Exceptional boards are results-oriented. They measure the organization's advancement towards mission and evaluate the performance of major programs and services.

Some everyday actions become almost mechanical in nature. While context plays a role in giving our actions meaning, it is the intention behind the action that endows an act with significance, that transforms it from a perfunctory performance. Not all similar actions are equal in value.

Our ancient rabbis grappled with this idea when they asked if our performance of *mitzvot* (religious obligations) required proper focus or if we should be judged solely on whether we perform them or not. The first Mishnah in the second chapter of Brachot addresses a situation where a person is reading the words of the *Sh'ma* from a Torah scroll at the exact time when one should be reciting the *Sh'ma* in prayer. The Mishnah relates that "If he had proper intention (*kavanah*), he fulfilled his responsibility." Does this mechanical reading fulfill the obligation to recite the *Sh'ma*? The plain sense of the text seems to indicate that as long as the reader had proper intention, then the obligation has indeed been fulfilled.

As with most rabbinic texts, there is more to the story than meets the eye. The Talmud digs deeper by asking what exactly this person is doing when reading from a Torah scroll. Rashi assumes that the person was reading to detect mistakes in the scroll and, therefore, was simply reciting word after word. The Tosafot, though, explain that whenever a Torah scroll is read to find errors, it demands attention. How else would someone correct a Torah scroll? The Talmud never comes to a decisive conclusion. Jewish law codes later codified a split decision; laws from the Torah, like reciting the *Sh'ma* twice daily, require intent, but rabbinic enactments do not require intent to be performed fully.

Judaism is a religion of action and the performance of *mitzvot* is central to the rabbis' conception of our religion. Prayer, keeping kosher, giving *tzedakah*, and treating all people with respect are all required of us. BoardSource's ninth principle of exceptional boards focuses on the importance of being results-oriented. Exceptional boards develop key indicators to measure progress toward their strategic goals and continually assess both the quality and efficacy of their organization's programs. It is clear that on a macro-level, Judaism is a results-driven religion that places emphasis on individual actions in the world. On the other hand, the Mishnah cited above and the discussion it fostered should cause us to thoughtfully examine what it means to be results-oriented in the context of a Jewish day school.

While striving to meet the best practices for nonprofit boards, exceptional boards at Jewish schools should understand that a bottom line emphasis on actions must also take into account *how* those results are achieved. A purely results-oriented board may lose sight of its school's culture and core values. Taken together with the other BoardSource principles, and particularly with the principle of being mission-driven, a Jewish day school board may be truly exceptional by *intentionally* pursuing specific results.

RABBI MITCHEL MALKUS

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10 INTENTIONAL BOARD PRACTICES

Exceptional boards intentionally structure themselves to fulfill essential governance duties and to support organizational priorities.

The Talmud (Ketubot 103b) records the following intriguing debate between two sages regarding the perpetuation of Torah learning.

Rabbi Haninah said to Rabbi Hiyya, You are arguing with me? If God forbid, the Torah was forgotten by the Jewish people, I would restore it through my analytical skills.

Rabbi Hiyya said to him, I will bring seeds of flax and plant them and from the flax I will make nets to catch gazelles, and I will feed the meat to orphans, and then from the skins of the gazelles I will produce parchment, and I will go to a town which has no schoolmaster, and write the five books of the Torah for five children, and I would teach the six sections of Mishnah to six children to each one I will say, teach your section to your friend.

Here we have a remarkable dispute between two giants of the second century, two impressive historic personalities: Rabbi Haninah, the commanding founder of schools, and Rabbi Hiyya, the poor itinerant scholar. This is a dispute about two dramatically different paths through which Torah can be preserved.

I propose that we reconcile the argument between these two sages and get to the heart of the essential difference between the two efforts. Would we ever suggest that one approach is more effective than the other? Or that one is better than the other by virtue of its ivory tower-like posture? Or that the other is more engaging in its accessible realness? I would suggest otherwise. Not only is this not an issue of one being superior to the other, it is also not the intent of this passage to recommend or dismiss either approach. But the disagreement is recorded in order to place both on the table for our consideration.

The Talmud preserves both endeavors; both Rabbi Haninah and Rabbi Hiyya are honored sages. In today's Jewish day schools, I see a parallel: the board is like Rabbi Haninah in its activity, and the head and staff of the school are like Rabbi Hiyya. Rabbi Haninah's insights and intellect provide the vision for and guide the work of Rabbi Hiyya. His snapping-into-action follows on the heels of Rabbi Haninah's introspective analysis. Like Rabbi Haninah, board members guarantee the increase and advance of Torah through their intellectual perspicacity; they strategize, plan, and envisage what it will take to preserve the Torah. I see them around a table as a group of trustees devotedly hashing out the nuances of governance which in turn empower and enable the energetic hands-on exertions of "professionals" like Rabbi Hiyya.

As we consider the distinctions between board roles and the responsibilities of professionals, this passage informs our commitment to make clear delineations in our responsibilities. We must have intentional boards that work within the deliberateness of a comprehensive board structure governed with by-laws. Their efforts are recorded with diligent meeting minutes which become a permanent record of their activities. Rabbi Haninah was all about Torah living on into the future through calculated thinking; he is nothing if not strategic. Committee structures—notably the Committee on Trustees—are an essential element of this analytical thinking; identifying and profiling an appropriate pipeline of leaders is essential. They must evaluate the composition of the board and recruit leaders who are in sync with the strategic plan. Articulated goals and set agendas are the domain of current Rabbi Haninahs. As boards govern they empower and fuel professionals to move forward with their plethora of activities, from making the nets to teaching the Torah.

Consider these two viable and valid approaches to our shared sacred mission, and heartily say yes! Through both of these methods will Torah be preserved and indeed spread. This Talmudic passage teaches us more than anything else that we need both Rabbi Haninah and Rabbi Hiyya if we are to succeed in transmitting our traditions.

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11 CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Exceptional boards embrace the qualities of a continuous learning organization, evaluating their own performance and assessing the value they bring to an organization.

In Pirkei Avot 3:17, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah presents us with two complementary ideas. The first: “*im ein Torah, ein derech erez— im ein derech erez, ein Torah*” (“if there is no Torah, there is no thoughtful conduct; if there is no thoughtful conduct, there is no Torah”). The second: “*im ein kemach, ein Torah—im ein Torah, ein kemach*” (“if there is no flour, there is no study of Torah; if there is no study of Torah, there is no flour”). There is balance, a yin and yang if you will, a sense of interdependence and equilibrium. Many times, in board deliberations, we get caught on one side of the equation. The “flour” side takes over the “Torah” side; we focus too much on the fiscal responsibilities of our trusteeship and put the learning on the back burner. Our retort, “when times are better” or “after we pass the budget” or “when we finish our Capital Campaign...” defies Rabbi Elazar’s warning that worrying about dollars and cents is meaningless if we forget why we are doing the work in the first place.

Taking Rabbi Elazar’s lead, I want to suggest one additional equation: if there is no passion, there is no expertise; if there is no expertise, there is no passion. Most trustees of Jewish day schools join boards with a strong sense of mission and a great passion for what that mission represents. Passion is an essential condition for success. But board members cannot be completely successful with passion alone; they need expertise to navigate the increasingly complex nonprofit world. Boards must make it a priority to train their members on governance principles, best practices, and responsibilities. Trustees need to be informed of environmental factors such as societal trends, industry standards, and the nature of schools as complex organizations. It is the combination of passion and expertise, plus the skills that diverse board members bring to the table that creates exceptionally effective boards.

Additionally, as skillful educators will point out, no learning process is complete without reflection and assessment. Boards and individual trustees who reflect on their practice and assess their performance are highly effective in their governance. When boards periodically identify new areas of expertise that are needed, they perpetuate the cycle of continuous learning and improvement.

Rabbi Elazar's teaching, *im ein kemach ein Torah*, if there is no flour, there is no learning, is two-sided: we need both flour and learning. Without the specific expertise we need to guide our organizations on the right path and to acquire necessary resources, we will not be able to sustain the vibrant schools we all aspire to bequeath to our children and grandchildren. Torah and *derech erez*, resources and learning, passion and expertise—one cannot flourish without the other.

NAOMI REEM

JEWISH PRIMARY DAY SCHOOL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

12 REVITALIZATION

Exceptional boards energize themselves through planned turnover, thoughtful recruitment, and inclusiveness.

According to a midrash, when Moses reached the top of Mount Sinai he found God sitting and tying little crowns onto the letters of the Torah. Expressing justified impatience—as it turns out, the Israelites were preparing a golden calf—Moses asked God if this delay was necessary. God explained that he was anticipating a certain Rabbi Akiba who, generations later, would derive mountains of legal interpretations from these tiny decorations. “Let me see him,” Moses demands. “Turn around,” says God. When Moses finds himself observing Akiba from the back of his classroom he, the original lawgiver, is bewildered by the rabbis’ legal discussion! Moses’ distress becomes acute until Akiba proclaims, in response to a student’s challenge, “It is a law handed down to Moses at Sinai.” (BT Menahot 29b)

Even Moses, who brought the authority of heaven to the Israelites, learned that his own was not the final voice of authority. The task of our greatest leader and prophet was to construct the foundation. The future always discloses more than does the present.

Early in my career, a head of school told me that he feared more than anything his school becoming arthritic. Faculty and administration need constantly to renew themselves, he said. So does the board. His comment came to mind as I watched a wonderful committee chair’s pain and disappointment at his successor’s changes to the vital board initiatives he had spent years creating. I tried to help him see that every modification testified to his own success, that he had positioned us to step up to more challenging strategies that previously would have eluded our reach. He never understood. To this day he represents to me the dark side of institutional memory, something that is a virtue when animated with a spirit of renewal.

Effective boards try to be judiciously open, valuing their unique level of knowledge and expertise, but working hard to understand the perspectives and ideas of those not on the inside. Without abandoning their rightful authority, effective boards reach out for a range of perspectives, including those of community members not currently school parents. At the same time, an effective board and head are constantly on the lookout for new talent that can enrich the board, thus giving the future a voice and presence.

Change entails both addition and subtraction. Honored board members and less constructive ones alike will need to be replaced—the former after long service, the latter as early as possible. Effective boards have ongoing mechanisms that predictably bring on these transitions with a minimum of controversy. Wise boards actively seek human talent that will both preserve and expand the ideals of the school.

Commenting on the verse from Isaiah 40:31 “Those who hope in God will renew their strength,” the medieval commentator Radak creates the image of a tree that grows a new branch where one has been cut away. “The point,” Radak says, “is renewal.”

Effective boards remain vigilant for opportunities to renew their strength, thus ensuring for future generations the vibrant transmission of the joys and life-direction to be found in a Jewish day school education.

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