

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Community and Faith-Based Organizing and Development Resources

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RULES FOR KILLING CONGREGATIONS

By Rabbi Moshe ben Asher, Ph.D. & Magidah Khulda bat Sarah

1. Don't join the congregation, but instead let everyone know how it has to be changed before you'll become a member.
2. If you join, pay your dues as late as possible and pay as little as possible.
3. Don't regularly attend and contribute to services, but insist that they don't meet your needs.
4. When asked why you don't participate, don't give direct and honest answers, enabling leaders to respond to your needs, but instead say that you are "too busy" or have a "disagreement" with someone or something in the congregation.
5. Don't pay attention to important trends in the larger community that might affect the congregation, but instead argue that the congregation should be "self-sufficient" and take care of its own business.
6. Whenever something goes wrong or doesn't meet your expectations, blame the rabbi; but freely express your resentment and resistance whenever the rabbi tries to take an initiative that departs from your view of what the congregation has done in the past or should be doing.
7. When you have disagreements with congregational staff, don't approach them directly to work it out, but do everything you can to "triangulate" members of the board, involving them inappropriately in resolving conflicts that don't directly concern them and that eventually burn them out.
8. Ignore the morale of the professional staff and don't support efforts that help respond to staff problems when they are identified.
9. Always put your own personal needs first and never give a thought to what's needed to strengthen and unify the congregation as a community.
10. When informed about synagogue policies—for example, those governing kashrut or b'nai mitzvah preparation—assume that you and your family should be exempted from them because they are inconvenient or uncomfortable.

11. Insist that things have to be done your way, without compromise, and when others don't agree, treat them with unkindness and disrespect.
12. Assume that, even though you don't have any formal religious education and have not taken the time to educate yourself religiously, your opinion about religious and spiritual matters should be considered of equal value and importance to the opinions of the rabbi and knowledgeable lay leaders.
13. When you have disagreements with other members of the congregation, don't approach them directly in private to work it out, but instead avoid them, hold a grudge, and, whenever possible, gossip about them.
14. Don't refuse to listen to fellow congregants who engage in *lashon hara* (gossip) or *rechilus* (tale-bearing).
15. Don't go to business meetings, but if you go, always arrive late and unprepared.
16. If someone is wasting everyone's time in a meeting, don't speak up to get the discussion back on track.
17. When someone with whom you disagree or someone you don't like is speaking in a meeting, start a side conversation with the person next to you and whisper ridiculing remarks about the speaker.
18. Don't work out ways of dealing with board members who deadweight board meetings or engage in destructive forms of participation.
19. Always wait until everyone else has spoken before you speak at a meeting.
20. If you are a newcomer and ignorant about the congregation and its history, jump in with both feet and tell everyone how things should be done.
21. Don't go along with anyone's plans or proposals without demanding that they be foolproof; in your own mind assume that planning is always "manipulation" and that details will work themselves out.
22. If you have an opportunity to voice your opinion on a subject, make suggestions about the "big picture" for others to carry out, or say you have no ideas; after the meeting say you learned nothing or tell everyone what should have happened.
23. If you're a member of the board, assume that your only role is to make policy decisions that do not require any commitment of your time, energy, or spirit outside of board meetings.
24. As a board member, don't support the articulation of reasonable, clear, and widely understood expectations for the performance of paid staff and volunteers.
25. As a board member, don't provide staff with a non-threatening channel to give candid feedback to the officers and the board on their performance.

26. Don't honor or even acknowledge contractual obligations to staff members that were negotiated in good faith.
27. Criticize fellow board members as "too negative" when they want to consider the possible pitfalls of an important decision the board is about to make.
28. As a board member, focus narrowly on congregational business issues and downplay or dismiss entirely the importance of actively supporting the spiritual and religious life of the congregation's members.
29. Avoid talking about or taking any action on a critical problem that threatens the congregation or one of its programs or activities if it might antagonize a fellow board member.
30. Do everything possible to placate and retain the most destructive members of the congregation, ignoring the membership attrition caused by their behavior.
31. When there is a change in congregational leadership, professional or lay, that affects your role or interests, don't seek out and offer your support to the new leader(s), but become resentful because your role or turf has been reduced and retreat from active participation or quit the congregation altogether.
32. When there's a significant difference of opinion among board members about a critical issue, do everything you can to shut off discussion and bring the issue to a quick vote.
33. When recruiting new board members, don't give them realistic expectations of the responsibilities and demands of the position but, instead, tell them that they'll only have to attend one meeting a month.
34. If you have volunteered or been appointed as the chair of a committee, assume that you have a personal fiefdom; don't bother to recruit other members to work on the committee or, if you do, assume that their role is to carry out your vision and policies; better yet, let the committee languish into permanent inactivity.
35. Never be the first to volunteer to do any committee work.
36. Be critical if you're not a member of the committee doing the work—but if you are a member, make no suggestions; instead, when the committee makes its report, criticize the ideas of the other members and the rabbi.
37. As a committee member, make big commitments but don't keep them.
38. Whenever anyone suggests the need for organizational accountability, reject the idea out of hand as too confrontational.

39. Don't do any of the dirty jobs that need to be done, but when others roll up their sleeves and do their best, complain that the group is a clique run by a bunch of ego-trippers.
40. Decide and act on your own, without talking things over with other members, leaders, and the rabbi.
41. Whenever possible, use the organization's meetings to show off your own knowledge and skill or to promote your personal agenda.
42. Don't bother to get to know other members of the synagogue personally or to become a contributing part of the community, but assume that the congregation is a "religious agency" created to provide services to you in return for your annual dues.
43. Never reach out to new members or include them in congregational activities but, instead, find a small group of people in the congregation, preferably your social and intellectual equals, and socialize with them exclusively.
44. If the congregation goes into decline, say you saw it coming ages before.

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