LEADERS MENTOR MORE LEADERS

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Many years ago, we worked with a clergyman who revealed to us that the behavior of one female member of his congregation was so abhorrent to him that he would cross the street to avoid any contact with her. We had contact with this woman earlier at congregational meetings. Her behavior then, not to exaggerate or be unkind, was outlandish, invariably distracting or disruptive, some might say nutty, even deranged.

Not long after our conversation about her with the clergyman, we had the opportunity to visit with her in her home. To our complete surprise, she eventually revealed herself not only to be sane and articulate, but the lifelong victim of some of the most punishing experiences one could imagine. There was an obvious change in her speech and affect during the hour we spent together, seemingly in response to our sympathetic listening to the story of her life. By the end of our visit, she had dramatically altered her attitude and behavior.

We later saw that, following some leadership development initiatives on our part, there was also a transformation of her behavior at congregational meetings—she became a formal leader shortly thereafter. It took more than a year, however, before the clergyman could acknowledge to us that she had leadership qualities he could never have imagined at the outset. And that mentoring her development as a congregational leader was entirely beyond his wherewithal. She represented a potential change in the congregation's environment that he was not prepared intellectually or emotionally to understand or accommodate.

Sine Qua Non of Effective Leadership

Accommodating the inevitable changes in congregational life presents myriad challenges to leaders. The iron law of organizational development dictates the need for continual adaptation to changing conditions in the "field of action." Leaders who are unresponsive to changing conditions in the internal and external environments of their congregation—especially the loss of leaders and the need for mentoring new leaders—typically experience a long-term decline in their congregation's strategic assets, primarily people and money. Lacking a stable corps of committed and competent leaders, they often find themselves in a "power bind," a situation in which the congregation's ideological definitions of succeeding and failing, allies and antagonists, good and evil, etc., are so massively contradicted, and thus shattered, by circumstances beyond their control, they are unable to make strategic decisions on the congregation's behalf.

The hallmark of effective leaders is their mentoring of more leaders, a commitment and competence to widen the circle of both formal and informal leaders. Thus, the capacity of leaders to adapt policies and practices to accommodate changing patterns of leadership stands as a prerequisite of leadership that trumps all others.

It's common in the early life of contemporary congregations, however, for the most significant change in the leadership pattern to be a contraction rather than expansion of participation in *formal* decision-making. This occurs in the transformation from a lay-led to rabbi-led congregation, in which a much smaller, elected board of directors and paid executive director replace an inclusive founding steering or coordinating committee of voluntary members. But this transformation in no way diminishes the importance of efforts generally to widen the circle of congregational leaders.

Moses' Model of Leadership Development

Moses' response to the debilitating conditions of his "judicial administration," which Jethro called to his attention, is a model for approaching the challenges of congregational leadership development. (Exodus 18:14-26)

Circumstances had changed: the people had received the Torah, and Moses had become the exclusive agent of day-to-day judicial administration in mat-

ters large and small, and the arbiter of all judicial appeals. But his role went far beyond deciding judicial issues; he had taken on the burden of answering myriad questions from the Israelites who sought knowledge of and help from God.

Jethro didn't ask Moses how he felt about the situation or whether he was comfortable with it, but he inquired about its effects on the well-being of the *community*—to wit: "What is this thing that you do to the people?" (Exodus 18:14) When Moses replies that he's only acting for the good of the people—to "make known the decrees of God and His teachings"—as if to say, I'm not doing this for my own benefit, Jethro makes clear to Moses that it's certainly not in his own self-interest to monopolize decision-making, that inevitably he will burn out (Exodus 18:18), which obviously would not be in the people's interest.

The heart of the change that Jethro proposed to Moses required that decision-making be more inclusive, that greater numbers should make and own the decisions that would affect the people. In effect, Jethro proposed that Moses undertake a large-scale program of leadership development in which thousands of individuals would begin to share the leadership responsibility and authority with Moses.

Every seventh or eighth man in Israel was to be a judge—an estimated 78,600! (Sanhedrin 18a) Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch (1808-1888), the father of modern orthodox Judaism, teaches that they were not *placed over* a thousand, a hundred, etc., but *chosen out of* them, ". . . nominated by the people themselves, and only confirmed and appointed by Moses. . . ." The Midrash teaches us that Moses asked the people "to propose capable and pious" candidates for him to appoint "as judges and leaders." He explained to the people that, "If a man were to present himself to me as a candidate . . . I alone should not be able to decide . . . ; but you know them, and hence it is advisable for you to propose them." (*Legends of the Jews*) According to Or Hachayim (Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, 1696-1744), Moses would not appoint them ". . . until they also proved acceptable to all the people and the people asked for them to be appointed. . . ." Moreover, Moses named them not only to decide legal issues, but also to teach Torah to the people.

Traditional Qualities of Leaders

The Midrash specifies the desirable qualities of a leader: possessing wisdom (i.e., understanding of what is morally true, right, and lasting), reverence (i.e., profound awe, respect, veneration, and, often, love) for God, modesty, hatred of covetousness, love of truth, love of humanity, a good name (i.e., a reputation for integrity, compassion, and justice), and a devotion to study of Torah and public affairs. (*Legends of the Jews*)

The leaders of the people were to have moral stamina, a willingness to listen to all the people, and sufficient strength of character to resist intimidation by the more powerful members of the community. They would be the ones upon whom the people could rely, and thus the people would follow them. They would reject all forms of personal enrichment gained at the expense of another by threats or actual wrongdoing. According to Rabbeinu Bachya (Rabbi Bachya ben Asher, 1255-1340), "All of this goes to show that the principal quality of a judge [and leader of the people] is not his intellect but his personal virtue."

From Rabbi Hirsch, we learn that the qualifications for those appointed leaders over thousands were different than those appointed over hundreds, and so on. The organization proposed by Jethro required "different ranks of competence for each level of judges." We might imagine the qualifications of the leaders as such that the "rulers of thousands" would be those who could extend their vision and commitment to klal Yisrael (the whole people). The "rulers of hundreds" would be those who could teach and apply the law while respecting the uniqueness of each group or faction within the community. The "rulers of fifties" would be those who could balance the requirements of both order, which requires upholding the decisions of lesser judges, and disorder, which results from confirming unjust judgments. The "rulers of tens" would be those who could judge and teach face-to-face every member of the community. And, presumably, every level of leadership would have the qualifications of the levels beneath it.

Principles of Leadership Development

Paralleling the Torah's wisdom, we have a saying from our experience in the field of community and congregational organizing: Whatever the problem, whatever the solution, *do leadership development*! In effect, whatever the challenges presented by the action-field of the organization, maximize its leadership resources in response—whether for workgroup leadership, supervisory leadership, administrative leadership, managerial leadership, juridical leadership, or religious and spiritual leadership.

Notwithstanding the historical lessons of our people and the insights derived from community organizing theory and practice, given the day-to-day demands and pressures we face it's not surprising that most congregational members, left to their own devices, do not want to pay the price of leadership—they overwhelmingly reject the demands of participation on their time, energy, and spirit. They know that the path of least resistance is to abandon personal responsibility for making congregational life relevant to the day-to-day pressures and hopes of its members, choosing instead to privatize their wants and needs and the means to satisfy them.

How are the small bands of leaders to mentor more leaders under these circumstances? What are the principles by which they are to produce a surplus—if such a thing is possible—of competent and committed leaders, both formal and informal?

In our society, we typically describe leaders as "born that way." We often regard as leaders those who "speak well" in front of others—that is, they are good at making speeches. We mostly do not regard as leaders those who do not speak well and, maybe more importantly, they do not think of themselves as leaders.

Moses had this problem. He didn't believe that he was a leader. He reacts to Adonai's challenge—"Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10)—with quaking confidence and self-deprecation: "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the people of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11) In the next chapter, Moses says, "I am not eloquent, neither yesterday nor the day before, nor since you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." (Exodus 4:10)

How is it, then, that Moses then goes on to lead the people—out of bondage, to Mattan Torah (i.e., the giving and receiving of the Torah) at Mt. Sinai, and to the Promised Land?

Moses learns to be a leader in a *relationship*. He is neither born a leader nor programmed by his upbringing to be the leader he becomes. His transformation occurs through Adonai's tutelage. The unique character of their relationship is that God speaks to Moses "as a man speaks to his friend": *panim el panim* (פנים אל פנים), face to face (Exodus 33:11); *peh el peh* (פה אל פה), mouth to mouth (Numbers 12:8); and *ayin b'ayin* (עין בעין), eye to eye (Numbers 14: 14). They communicate directly. Their relationship shows the proximate character of all relationships for effective leadership development: they are face to face.

The importance of the face-to-face relationship between Adonai and Moses is apparent when we examine what Adonai does to help Moses build his confidence to confront Pharaoh and rally the people.

Adonai's first response is support: "Certainly I will be with you." (Exodus 3:12) What may be less apparent is the role that Adonai's challenge plays in building Moses' confidence. God challenges Moses to do something that he has not done before. Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak, 1040-1105) teaches that it took God seven days to convince Moses to act. (Midrash Rabbah, Numbers 21:15) To Moses' arguments that he does not speak well, Adonai responds: "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Is it not I Adonai? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say." (Exodus 4:11-12)

When Moses next calls out to God, he has already confronted Pharaoh, only to see the people's burden increased. (Exodus 5:23) Although he has in fact met the challenge, Moses feels himself to be a failure. God's response is in the form of *accountability mentoring*, an accounting of Moses' performance in response to the challenge, and mentoring as appropriate to the outcome, whether successful or failed—in this instance to buck up the messenger's morale for the challenges yet to come. Moses learns who he is dealing with and what will happen next—Adonai, who appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, announces that He will raise a mighty hand against Pharaoh, and bring the Hebrews out of Egypt and to a promised land (Exodus 6:1-8), presumably with Moses leading them.

Summarizing Guidelines

We've learned that good leaders are not born or found, but developed by other leaders. Following the model of our tradition, when identifying potential leaders, we especially pay attention to qualities of character, which are always more important than knowledge and skill. Character deficiencies can have devastating consequences, while we can acquire knowledge and skill.

The first step in leadership development is to build neighborly relationships within the congregational community, not unlike those that existed 50 or 75 years ago between neighbors who knew one another's day-to-day pressures and hopes. The second step is to create or identify roles and situations that offer opportunities for leadership development.

But then how do we accomplish the third step, how do we get people involved? How do we overcome their fear of failure, their fear of burdensome demands, and their fear of unending commitment?

We create ever-widening circles of congregational leadership through face-to-face relationships, the hallmark of which is leaders thoughtfully offering support, challenges, and accountability mentoring to potential leaders.

Our first rule of leadership development is not to try to convince someone to become a leader; instead we ask the person to do a specific, limited job that requires and inculcates leadership capabilities. People rarely come to understand their potential for leadership through talk or intellectual information, but almost always by engaging in action.

If we want to test the efficacy of this leadership development model, we may ask: How many leaders, not previously considered leaders, have current leaders supported, challenged and mentored this past year?

And how many leaders are they developing?

The import of these questions is numerical, for if leaders develop other leaders, who themselves develop yet more leaders, then there is a potential multiplication

of the number of leaders—which is the most significant
variable in congregational survival and success.

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