

SYNERGY: Synagogue Federation Leadership Conference
Key Learning

Keynote and Responses

Dr. Amy Sales

- The synagogue (or the business side) and the congregation (or the spiritual, communal side) need to be integrated like a turtle and its shell.
- Jewish activity, with the synagogue as a central focus of life, is becoming less central to Jews' lives, but membership remains very important.
- Congregations are diverse — half of the congregants in Orthodox and Conservative congregations grew up in those respective movements; 30 percent of Reform congregants grew up Reform.

Active Core

- Just half of synagogue leadership fell into the active core.
- Dr. Sales found that where you sit within the active core reflects how you view every aspect of your Jewish identity.
- Synagogue change — If you grow the active core, you change your congregation; if you change your congregation, you change your active core.

Engagement and Leadership

- Congregations do a terrible job of using people as resources — very few people are developed.
- The vast majority of synagogue members are not interested in being leaders in the synagogue, but they could be used for their expertise and skills.
- The issue of governance is the great divide between the synagogue and the congregation because synagogue leadership is not seen by most as “holy work.”

Dr. Todd Jick

- Congregations seeking to change can learn from business. Despite the perception of uniqueness, there are more similarities than differences between business and congregations and among congregations.
- Successful organizations intermesh “business” with a “mission or higher purpose.” Values-based management means doing good to do well.
- All organizations — businesses and congregations — need to create energy and engagement among employees and congregants. Engagement is defined as a state of emotional and intellectual commitment, not simply satisfaction. Congregations can apply measures to congregants (and clergy and staff) that businesses use to measure engagement:
 1. I would not hesitate in recommending this workplace to a friend seeking employment.
 2. It would take a lot for me to leave.
 3. I tell others great things about my experiences here.
 4. I rarely think about leaving.
 5. This place inspires me to do my best work.
 6. This place motivates me to contribute more.
- Change, whether for corporations or for congregations, is both difficult and necessary, and there are guidelines on making interventions successful. Change is a

slow and cumbersome process. Corporations underestimated the resistance they would face, the constituents affected, and how long it would take; the only thing they overestimated was the clarity of their vision. Change is better facilitated when what won't change is also articulated.

- There are ways to blend business purposes and higher purposes, there are ways to have highly engaged congregants, and there are ways to balance traditions with adaptation and flexibility.

Rabbi Edward Feinstein

- Low expectations for synagogues on the part of Jews is damaging to their ability to fulfill their potential. People don't come to synagogue and expect to find God. Synagogue transformation projects raise expectations.
- There is no academic field or training in social psychology for synagogues, even in rabbinical schools! Such knowledge is absolutely critical for clergy leaders, who will envision and write the map for the journey of change ahead.
- "Every generation gets the synagogue its parents dreamed about." Since the '50s, change has been profound: from hierarchical to participatory worship, including music; from a transcendent deity to an imminent God; from a focus on maintaining cherished values to an orientation for seekers; from homogeneous congregations of first-generation, American thirtysomethings with kids to nondenominational, diverse congregations.
- Challenge: we are birthing the first indigenous, American synagogue culture. Will this be a live birth or a stillbirth?

Q&A

- The synagogue the baby boomers create will not serve the needs of Gen X. We need to create synagogues that will blend the generations.
- Some ways to manage resistance to change are to look for readiness and experiment with changes while keeping the old in place.
- Synagogues need to program effectively for those who are not in the active core, as well as for those who are.
- Synagogues do not need to be all things to all people; network with other community agencies.

Afternoon Workgroups

Lay and Clergy Leadership: Effective Partnerships for Renewing Congregations

Facilitator: Lyn Light Geller

Presenters: Dr. Carl Sheingold, Executive Vice President, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation; Rabbi Elliot Schoenberg, Rabbinical Assembly; Rabbi Peter Rubinstein and Alfred Youngwood, Central Synagogue, New York

Synopsis of Presentations

Dr. Carl Sheingold

- In discussing the readiness for change in a congregation, the first conversation should address the lay-professional relationship between the president and the rabbi.

- “At the end of the day, change processes are less about vision and more about people and relationships.”
- Synagogues commonly resist recognizing the political nature of community life and, therefore, reach a situation that is beyond repair with no one in charge.
- One of the most important distinctions about the synagogue (as compared to other Jewish communal institutions) is that the rabbi and president are not real teams. The rabbi is often at the top of a hierarchical power structure.

Rabbi Elliot Schoenberg

- The rabbi’s role and the expectations of him or her are expanding.
- Top priorities in synagogue life need constantly to be reiterated for change to occur, in large measure due to shifting leadership.
- “Appreciative inquiry” should be constantly employed (for example, What are we good at, and how can we do that more often in more places?) There will always be dissatisfaction, which must be set aside to get to the more productive conversation about “What we’re good at.”
- Literature on what works in churches should be brought to bear on this topic.
- “Polarity management” (Barry Johnson) is an idea that can be usefully applied to synagogue leadership. The lay-professional relationship is like the relationship between oxygen and carbon dioxide — one cannot survive without the other.

Alfred Youngwood

- There are many similarities in the leadership of synagogues and leadership in the for-profit sector.
- In business terms, the senior rabbi is the CEO, and the executive director is the COO; the president is the political leader who must “watch the back” of the rabbi.
- The president’s job is to bring any decision along through the executive committee, building support for programs developed by clergy and the executive director and deflecting criticism of the clergy.
- A key factor in the success of leadership at Central Synagogue is the rabbi does not want to stand apart from the social fabric of the synagogue, and leadership is NOT a reward for service; rather, there is an election process.

Rabbi Peter Rubinstein

- In leading, the ISSUE — not the PERSON — must always remain the focus, which means that good people can disagree on issues.
- There needs to always be a shared common vision in a synagogue and in any change process, either through formal or informal strategic planning.
- Each of the above allows for a focus on the future rather than on dealing with various crises. (It is often easier to respond to crisis than to take control of your own destiny.)
- Synagogue leadership should be like a tricycle: there are three wheels, but one is larger and leading. The rabbi’s role must be vision driven.
- Boards should not be peopled with members who simply have the time. The best leaders are developed by selecting people who can accomplish tasks, not those who want to join committees.

- Measuring success — It is not immediately quantifiable, but must be determined by talking to the congregants to find out if they are engaged in the areas identified as synagogue priorities.

Discussion Points

- Leadership development can be accomplished across movements. Most synagogues don't have the resources to train their leadership.
- Leadership training outside the synagogue adds value:
 - a) Leaders gain perspective on their own issues, and
 - b) One of the challenges of synagogue leadership — to build a sense of a larger Jewish community — can be met.
- Rachel Cowan spoke about another model of leadership development: the faith-based organizing model of social action at B'nai Jeshurun, in which effective measures for social justice also enable community building through one-on-one conversations and grassroots leadership development around issues. Now BJ is using the same model to build community and develop leaders in other areas of synagogue life.
- Rabbis and presidents need leadership training together as well as separately. Judy Beck commented that rabbis and presidents do not share an understanding of their respective roles in the synagogue.
- Leadership needs to be experienced as sacred work, every issue needs to be channeled through the prism of Judaism, and leadership development needs to be based in Jewish values. Synagogues are about the effective delivery of religious services.

Brainstorming Suggestions to Federation

- Training and models are needed to build and maintain good relationships between lay leaders and rabbis. Leadership teams should include the education director and executive director, as well as clergy and lay leaders.
- Federation can scan for excellent models of rabbinic and lay leadership and bring them to local settings.
- Leadership consultation with individual congregations, and training and skill building within a larger cohort, are both valuable. Federation funding would be helpful.
- Affinity group meetings of people in lay and professional roles, including the director of education, should be convened on a consistent basis by Federation.

Connection, Commitment, and Community: Building an Engaged *Kehillah*

Facilitator: Rabbi Deborah Joselow

Presenters: Kathryn Kahn, Director of Outreach and Synagogue Community, Union for Reform Judaism; Rabbi Gerald Skolnik, Forest Hills Jewish Center; Rabbi Les Bronstein and Jesse Krasnow, Bet Am Shalom, White Plains; Dr. Steven M. Cohen, Professor of Jewish Social Policy, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Synopsis of Presentations

Kathryn Kahn

- Synagogues tend to concentrate on recruitment, not on engagement. Engagement in the *kehillah* begins with recruitment and integration of new members and leads to retention.
- Membership chairs are not usually well-prepared for their roles, receive no training, and must recruit their own team or committee.
- Establish a “covenant of membership” — a two-way street with both the established members and the newcomers creating shared expectations together.

Rabbi Gerald Skolnik — Session One

- The rabbi is the CEO of spiritual matters; governance happens outside his domain, though it is of course related to what he sees as his purview; his impact on the corporate side is large, but coming out of his rabbinical training, he does not have the expertise to manage that piece of congregational life; rabbis are not trained on what they actually need to do.
- The work done “between the cracks” is what actually facilitates the creation of the community at large; his best work is done in the “small spaces” with individuals; with day-to-day business, it is hard to feel that impact.
- His two main cohorts within the congregation are the young and the old; they have very little in common and have very different sets of needs; they try to blend them into one imperfect setting while still giving each group some space of their own, like a kibbutz dining room.
- Challenge people, or they will not really be engaged.
- He finds it hard to define his synagogue — there is something “mystical” about how the congregation has survived and thrived, despite being everything thrown out with the *chavurah* movement.

Rabbi Les Bronstein and Jesse Krasnow — Session Two

- There should be many synagogues offering people many different things; denominationalism is a positive, not a negative.
- It is essential for leadership to clearly define core “big ideas,” setting a high standard, rather than simply working on individual programs.
 - Example: Shabbat morning service is really the “heart beat” of the congregation; it could not be taken over by bar or bat mitzvah families, who have only a circumscribed role in the service. This has led some people to choose to not join the congregation, but it has caused almost no one to leave.
- Expanding the core: Through democratized leadership, the “core” has been expanded to approximately half the membership. The rabbi is not unduly glorified (i.e., the *bima* is flat, and they try to avoid hierarchy). The board comprises about 10 percent of the membership. Bet Am Shalom has a culture of inclusion: no reserved parking, open board meetings, and term limits for leadership.

Dr. Steven M. Cohen — Session One

- Sociological literature teaches a great deal about how to grow congregations.
 - The first viewpoint: the “social network” theory claims it is intrinsic to human nature to want to be involved in a congregation and that we need to lower barriers to involvement.

- The second viewpoint asserts that we should build barriers, because more people will actually want to be a part of something elite; you build more engagement if you make it hard to be a part of the group; “Talmud for Tennis Players’ has more appeal than ‘Bible for Everyone.’”
- He believes that obligation should be a basis for involvement — there are aspects of participation that shouldn’t be optional.
- His current focus of study is the next generation and fluid, episodic engagement and hybridity. Given these trends, we should show the “steel” and trust that individuals will grapple with them.

Session Two

- There are many ways to be a member of a community: it can be about yourself, about yourself as a family member, about community, about Jewish peoplehood, or about God.
- There is a need to focus on tactics and skills of engagement, with interpersonal relationships at the center.

Discussion Points

- Challenge of diversity
 - We should think about people becoming involved in different ways at different points in their own Jewish lives, moving from serving people where they are and toward a sense of obligation as people move closer to the “core.”
 - Numbers are not the same as quality — if a congregation stands for something, it might need to be smaller and not always focused on growth. When people’s needs change, they should be connected to other pieces of the community where they will engage.
 - We have to recognize the diversity of constituencies as well as the diversity of individuals.
- There should be a committee called “Engagement” that is not just about membership.
- Hire people with engagement skills or training in our congregations — can anyone imagine running a religious school with no expertise in education?
- Reflect *kehillah* in the space of the building with places to socialize or gather informally. There is a yearning for a space in which we can get to know each other.
- Research was conducted by the Cohen Center whereby they talked to congregants and found that no one felt they were part of the core of the congregation, including those who by all accounts were very involved.

Brainstorming Suggestions to Federation

- Provide “rabbi extenders” to provide support to rabbis.
- Subsidize full-day preschools, since they serve as incubators for leadership, especially for diverse families.
- Disseminate best practices for b’nai mitzvah.
- Help congregations figure out their finances when they expand the core.
- Support an annual synagogue conference.
- Support training like this in seminaries and post-seminary education.

- Help synagogue leadership find alternate means to fund themselves beyond membership dues.
- Offer tools to synagogues to help them articulate a vision.

Synagogue Change: Making “the Old New and the New Holy”

Facilitator: Terry Rosenberg

Presenters: Dr. Isa Aron, Professor of Jewish Education, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles; Dr. William Kahn, Associate Professor and Chair of Organizational Behavior, Boston University, and co-founder of Eitzah; Rabbi Felicia Sol and Susan Kippur, Congregation B’nai Jeshurun, New York; Rabbi Richard Jacobs and Lisa Messinger, Westchester Reform Temple, Scarsdale.

Synopsis of Presentations

Dr. Isa Aron

- For change to occur, the perceived cost of change must be less than the product of dissatisfaction with the present state, vision of the future, belief that change is possible, and possible practical first steps. If any one of these factors is zero, the perceived cost is too high and change will not happen.
- Early findings of her current research on congregational change and the ability to sustain that change over time indicate that successful synagogues share the following characteristics:
 - Wisdom about areas that are ripe for change (i.e., sometimes it is better to tackle smaller problems more in need of a fix than to go straight for the larger, deeper problems)
 - Celebration of achievements, while at the same time recognizing “we haven’t done enough”
 - Lay and professional leaders who are not afraid of setting high expectations for congregants

Dr. William Kahn

Three lessons learned from his work with organizations:

- Whenever change happens, a flood of emotions is released, typifying the usual reaction to loss — anger, sadness, etc. — which is really about the *change process itself*. Different groups pick up different pieces of the emotions (for example, children are happy, parents are anxious). Emotions stick around and can’t be buried unless people have a chance to air them.
- Change drives people to tell stories to help make sense of the change and justify the emotions they have. Stories frame our worlds, bringing some things into focus and leaving other things out. It’s hard to connect with people who have other stories (for example, one person is excited by the change and another feels betrayed).
- Factions form quickly, based upon different reactions to the change; intergroup dynamics swirl around a sense of “Who is my ally, and who is my adversary?” The challenge for leaders is to create a change process that brings groups together.

Why does all of this matter? Because it leads to fragmentation at exactly the moment the congregation needs to come together, support each other, and create a collective story. Ways to facilitate change as a consultant include:

- Take on the role of convener — bring people together so they can share emotions and understand that stories can be nuanced.
- Remain a non-anxious presence, so people don't think they have to take care of us or please us.
- Hold people to the task of change and to the vision of what's possible. Don't let them get distracted by gaps between the stories.

Rabbi Felicia Sol and Susan Kippur — Session One

- Change at B'nai Jeshurun is taking place in the midst of fast growth and shifting demographics. (Ten years ago, 60 percent of congregants were single; now, 60 percent are families.)
- Example of change: Erev Shabbat service was becoming less intimate, and people began shifting to the earlier alternative service, prompting evaluation of the later service. Leaders adapted the community one-on-one conversation model of faith-based organizing to discuss an ideal Shabbat. From this process, three short-term goals were set, to be implemented this year and the next:
 - Celebrate havdalah — the end of Shabbat is as meaningful as the beginning.
 - Offer and publicize Shabbat dinners in people's homes.
 - Place more emphasis on the twentysomethings and thirtysomethings and a junior congregation.

Three longer-term goals were set:

- Provide more guidance in Shabbat observance through the website and a CD to advise congregants on how to study, embrace the music, and more.
- Offer a 24-hour Shabbaton on a quarterly basis.
- Establish a community house where people can eat and study together.

All ritual decisions are made by the rabbis. For example, recently the seating for Friday night services was reconfigured to provide a more intimate, less hierarchical setting.

- Making change requires a balance between *keva* (planned process) and *kavannah* (vision-driven intent).
- Leaders must always consider change — “Even success is not success after a couple of years.”

Rabbi Richard Jacobs and Lisa Messinger — Session Two

Westchester Reform Temple began the transformation process as one of the first Experiment in Congregational Education synagogues more than ten years ago. Insights include:

- Always tell the truth.
- They began the change process with a focus on learning, rather than worship (their ultimate goal), as they knew that people in their community highly value education. It was widely felt that the school was not working well, and they instituted Share in Shabbat, which combines prayer, family, and religious community.
- Learning informs change.

- “Ready, fire, aim” theory — You don’t always know what is going to be required at the beginning; recognize that change can be done in a “living laboratory,” where experiments will be conducted and mistakes will be made.
- When addressing prayer in the synagogue, they invited 40 people to be on the task force, including those who like and those who dislike change, those who adhered to more classical forms of Reform Judaism, and those with a more modern sense. The ground rule: “We will let you weigh in on matters as we go forward, but you have to let us try new things.” Ten years later, they have been able to finally effect significant change in this area.
- It is important to make demands, set expectations, and have a vision.

Discussion Points

- Synagogues must integrate Jewish vocabulary so change feels like an authentically Jewish process.
- A key component of the change process is trust — trust in the leadership and also trust “that some change is really going to happen.”
- The trust factor requires constant communication — in bulletins, letters to congregants, and sometimes directed to special groups with particular concerns.
- As evident in the faith-based organizing model, there must be patience for change; strategies, such as providing “low-hanging fruit,” will help.
- A challenge for congregations is balancing the need for continual change with the need of congregants to feel that their synagogue offers predictability and reliability.
- How do people learn to effect change and tolerate uncertainty, ambiguity, and ambivalence? Through telling the truth, modeling how they can hold the ambiguity; through formal teaching; and by letting people build narratives together.
- Ultimately, the whole Jewish community must try to change and develop systemwide interventions. Rather than individual processes, the Jewish community needs bold statements and bold change and then needs to learn from that change. The movements, seminaries, and federations are all vital change agents.
- Regarding change in synagogues, “growth” is a better image than “transformation.”
- The idea behind “Ready, fire, aim” is that you cannot possibly know all that is going to happen when you institute change, and you will be paralyzed if you try. Assess afterward — as with a community organizing model, fire a lot before aim is identified.
- Synagogues and the new generation — younger Jews are congregating in urban centers in spontaneous *minyanim*; they want to be members of their own kind of institutions. How can synagogues reach out? Through the Temple Israel (Boston) model, where a rabbi is devoted to attracting people who do not have to join the synagogue.
- We need to focus more on how today’s synagogues can accommodate diverse populations — interfaith, gay and lesbian, and diversity presenters should be included.
- We need new ways to express emerging values in the realms of social justice, caring, education, and more.

Suggestions to Federation:

- Provide individual consultations to synagogues and help them define the problems and devise solutions, identify resources, and provide direction.
- Assure that funding for change projects is maintained long enough to support deep change.
- Provide more professional training in how to effect a congregational change process. Support making leadership training part of rabbinical and cantorial educational training.
- Promote partnerships and networking opportunities among synagogues, so congregations do not see themselves as competitors.
- Be savvier about working with individual synagogues (as opposed to groups or cohorts); recognize the uniqueness of each synagogue.
- Support more services like the excellent Partners in Caring initiative, in which social workers are placed in synagogues.
- Provide synagogues with help in applying for grants and working more effectively to sustain grants.
- Provide to synagogues discretionary-type funds, so they can do some of the “small things” they cannot now afford but that would make a difference (for example, the ability to provide food during programming for twentysomethings and thirtysomethings, which would encourage attendance at events).
- Define change that is critically important in the Jewish community, and create new norms and new sources of money to enable this change.
- Serve a coordinating function to make change happen — provide information sharing, networking, and opportunities to learn from studies and each other.
- Provide help in implementing best practices in synagogues (for example, how to conduct meetings and how to address different constituencies). Lay leaders, professionals, and clergy need the skills, tools, and information to “go back to the trenches” and actually do this work in one’s synagogue
- Synagogues do not have enough professionals to do the work that is necessary — a serious problem — and lay leaders are already being asked to do so much.
- Be aware that synagogue growth and management require information; federations can develop materials to educate lay leadership.

Keruv: Attracting and Engaging Newcomers in Congregational Life

Facilitator: Froma Benerofe

Presenters: Dr. Leonard Saxe, Professor of Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University; Rabbi Hayim Herring, Executive Director, STAR; Rabbi Andy Bachman, co-founder, Brooklyn Jews; Rabbi Charles Klein, Merrick Jewish Center; Rabbi Manny Vinas and Esther Rodriguez, Lincoln Park Jewish Center, Yonkers; Rabbi Jeffrey Sirkman and Meg Feinberg, Larchmont Temple.

Synopsis of Presentations:

Dr. Leonard Saxe — Session One

- birthright israel studies show that engagement of young adults was palpable and achieved in a way exactly opposite to their synagogue experience, which begins cognitively. To engage people, we must get them emotionally involved.

- To be successful, synagogues need to find a way to lead with emotion and pay attention to the transactions between people.
- In using demographic studies, it's important to know who is not being served and who is not connecting.

Rabbi Hayim Herring — Sessions One and Two

- From Synaplex handouts: The program builds on the notion of community and is designed to help congregations reach out to diverse membership, build community, and engage them.
- Learning from Synaplex: Engaging in *keruv* is a question of vision and values, not programs. Success requires a vision of Jewish community in which diversity is a value.
- Success factors include the commitment of the rabbi, shared ownership among volunteers and professional staff, a synagogue mission that includes reaching out, a strong sense of identity, and measurable goals for accountability.
- *Keruv* is a challenge — it can raise anxiety as it raises interest and excitement. The vision can't be imposed, but requires support and commitment by the rabbi AND by volunteers and staff.
- Good planning is also critical to success, so the embedded vision can become part of the synagogue's mission and culture; part of planning is developing a marketing plan to build relationships along a continuum of involvement.
- Barriers include overworked and under-resourced professionals, a lack of support from the board to spend time on non-members, a synagogue culture that does not support follow-up and has difficulty tracking people who pass through, differing interests of new members from the old-timers, synagogue programs and communications that are not welcoming to outsiders, and the broken business models of synagogues.

Rabbi Andy Bachman — Session One

- Brooklyn Jews was inspired by his experience in a large congregation, where his capacity to reach out to young people was limited because they were walking away, and his experience as N.Y.U. campus Hillel director, where he saw greater success in getting out of the Hillel building and into places where young Jews are gathering.
- In targeting those under 40, things should be fun, open, and wherever Jews are. To succeed, focus on the next generation's values:
 1. *When Generations Collide* by Jim Collins: total openness of process — institutional transparency is key
 2. Lots of birthing is taking place. If people don't see what they want, they roll up their sleeves and just do it!
 3. Young adults are seeking humor, irony, and the ability to laugh at themselves.
 4. Well-educated young adults have endless opportunities, no barriers, and won't settle for mediocre quality.
 5. Use money positively. The question is how to educate people to buy into and support the Jewish institutions they participate in. Brooklyn Jews started with foundation support, but is now getting broad support from participants. People feel appreciated for their presence.

6. People want learning, spirituality, and community — the three traditional pillars of Jewish life — in new forms.

Rabbi Charles Klein — Session One

- Merrick Jewish Center in suburban Long Island has a culture of *keruv* and broad acceptance for meaningfully engaging both those within the core and on the periphery. (The program director was ill and not able to co-present. Her role is critical to the success of MJC's outreach and engagement efforts.)
- MJC's approach looks at both those who are absolutely unaffiliated and those who are marginally involved in the wider orbit of the congregation (for example, people with children in preschool). A wide array of programs attracts "tourists" into synagogue and provides more gateways.
- Programs focus on transferability into the home.
- When a new member joins, they meet with a member of the board and discuss interests, what they want out of Jewish life, and how the synagogue can help them as Jews. This sets up expectations — we can learn from you, and you can learn from us.
- Start with a cohesive, small group: "thirty-six Jewish families" who commit to experience Jewish life together. Share-a-Shabbat enables Jewish families to form a community and learn from each other in a more intimate community setting.
- Target people in whom you see a spark. Use programs to identify individuals to engage. People like to know they are noticed, that you see things in them that set them apart and that they could contribute and have an impact.
- Success story: Jacob's Ladder *minyán*, which is not a typical alternative service, meets the needs of people who don't want to be in a rabbi-led bar mitzvah service. It's intellectually and spiritually satisfying and does meet quality standards.

Rabbi Manny Vinas and Esther Rodriguez — Session Two

- Personal story of outreach: he had started El Centro de Estudios Judios with the goal of reaching a single target population — Spanish-speaking Jews. There was so much interest, they needed a larger, more permanent space. Lincoln Park Synagogue, a dying traditional Conservative congregation in Yonkers, where most of the congregations are in decline, approached Rabbi Vinas, who is Orthodox. He made three proposals to the leaders:
 1. Make a denominational switch from 1950s, traditional Conservative to modern Orthodox, but with the parking lot open on Shabbat.
 2. Incorporate an existing, culturally diverse congregation without a synagogue — the majority of whom are Hispanic and African-American — to revitalize the synagogue and become culturally diverse.
 3. Enable women to hold positions on the board.
A letter was sent to the community, 400 people came to the meeting, and the change was approved by 88 percent of the members.
- How did it work? Previously there was no *mehitza*, though there was separate seating. They added the lowest permissible *mehitza* with plants. Since then, both the *mehitza* and the congregation have grown! The message: it is possible to become more Orthodox and more liberal!

- Former members, who came only on the High Holidays, began to attend during the year out of curiosity to see what was happening. Dialogue was engaging, and it seemed that the congregation would be attractive to Anglo Jews seeking an open, diverse place. In the past year, Lincoln Park attracted 45 new family units, half and half.
- Esther, who is chair of the incorporated congregation, chose to learn and embrace her Jewish roots. Her commitment led to action. She was attracted to El Centro by the opportunity to study in both Spanish and English.
- There is a saying in Cuba: “As you step higher, you become like brethren.”
- The will of Lincoln Park members to continue, even though they were fatigued, was very strong, and they elicited respect from her as a new member wanting to hear their stories.

Meg Feinberg and Rabbi Jeffrey Sirkman

- Ms. Feinberg shared personal and practical perspectives: the first time she went to Larchmont Temple, she didn’t know anyone, and those she met seemed to have nothing in common with her. Then someone called her and invited her to havdalah; then she received another call and a visit from someone bringing a gift — a Sisterhood Shabbat bag (candles, challah, wine, a list of involvement opportunities, and a familiar face to connect with next time she was at temple). Reaching out with phone calls and personal invitations one on one made all the difference.
- She chairs the new member committee, which plans and organizes personal calls to new members, recognizing each one and making connections.
- Three programs support this effort: Shmear and Shmooze, with new members and the rabbi; winter havdalah at the rabbi’s home to hear about committees and ways to get involved; and a Shabbat service and meal just for new members.
- Rabbi Sirkman noted that people have a need to reach out and seek connection, but won’t do so if they don’t think they will be well received.
- Covenant 101: new membership comes with commitments and creates a sacred relationship with the community.
- Marking its 50th anniversary, Larchmont Temple revisited the mission of the congregation and based it in covenant — Torah, *avodah*, and *gemilut hasadim*. The covenant is on the wall, but the goal is to get it off the wall and into people’s lives.
- Larchmont Temple has a wide diversity of offerings, with Outreach pages listed in the calendar. They have not only the rabbi, but also a diversity of people inside and outside, both professional and volunteers, who plan and lead sessions.
 - Seeds of Faith provides learning opportunities for intergenerational and diverse participants.
 - Dialogues directly and openly address interfaith family issues.
- The key to outreach and engagement is face-to-face encounters at every level, set up to be utilitarian, to be helpful, and to promote mutual relationships. Judaism is about relationships, wrestling with tensions and engaging each other within the full diversity of the community.

Discussion Points:

Session One

- Involvement needs to be presented as a process of enriching lives of congregants and congregation. It's not all about what they can do for the congregation first. This is a significant mental shift for congregations: not to engage people so they can do more for the institution, but how the institution can help meet the congregant's personal and spiritual needs.
- If outreach efforts focus on family, they will not engage people without families and will not hold families beyond the time of child rearing. Possible ways of outreach:
 - Kolot Chayenu (Park Slope): free, open High Holiday services — with no barriers to entry — provide people with a way to connect and overcome alienation.
 - Welcome people who don't fit normative model — active seekers and learners, those without children, and families in which only one spouse is Jewish. Create active conversion and adult b'nai mitzvah program to meet a hunger for music, learning, and a feeling of welcome.
 - Design intergenerational education, rather than “family” education.
 - Don't forget older members — the absence of the older generation sends the message that you should leave once your kids are grown.
 - Too much emphasis is placed on bar and bat mitzvah. Focus on other life-cycle moments.
- Whose job it is to reach out? Every member!
- Birthright Israel is a gift — it's free. Do people appreciate something that is free? YES! It is important to end the attitude that synagogues are businesses looking for customers.
- The suburban Jewish community is seeking a visible Jewish presence and a local Jewish community, which requires synagogues to work together. A free medical clinic run out of synagogues attracted people who saw it as an important value statement.

Session Two

- Excitement is contagious — When leadership, both lay and professional, are genuine and committed to values larger than ourselves, then enthusiasm spills over and a place becomes welcoming.
- How do we reach out and expand the welcome to those who aren't already part of us, and whose job is it? It needs to be part of the culture, expressing the value of loving kindness (*chesed*) — everyone's responsibility (for example, Covenant 102 — the next level).
- How can the culture of engagement be maintained and be not only present for new members?
 - Covenant, obligation, and responsibility speaks to some people but is very threatening to others — introduce this language over time.
 - An unexpected outcome of Synaplex is re-engagement of empty nesters.
- Taking the temperature of the surrounding, larger community is key to engaging people. Many are tired of the formality, predictability, and structure of synagogues. A motivator: go to a place where not everyone looks alike, but where authentic sharing of values is the center.
- How can we deal with boundary issues, such as non-Jews and gay or lesbian Jews? Be honest and authentic in dealing with boundaries and differences.

Suggestions to Federation:

What are the resources that would enable synagogues to be more effective gateways to Jewish life?

Session One

- Like birthright israel, underwrite membership for a period of time. (Pros and cons were discussed.)
- Space is a huge issue in the New York metropolitan area. Is there a way to leverage community resources? So much capital is tied up in synagogue buildings. The Jewish community at large should provide more support.
- Create opportunities for different movements to share ideas and cross-fertilize.
- Provide funding for creative new initiatives.
- *Tikkun olam* (repairing the world) activities could be offered to synagogues that can't organize such things on their own.
- Ease the strain on small congregations by instituting shared professional resources. For example, Philadelphia completed a strategic plan three years ago and created 7 different *kehillot*, like community councils. Federation provides funding for staff to help organize efforts. It's not just the program, but staffing to give TLC and help bring people through the program to connection. One size fits one! There are common goals, but the program is tailored to each community and group of synagogues.
- Two approaches: most successful initiatives are sensitive to the needs of a new generation, as opposed to synagogues that are relevant to people forever. Very few institutions can do everything. We should have different institutions for different stages of life.
- Look carefully at the economics of the situation in a systems way. Synagogues are inefficient. They really serve families with kids ages 7 to 13, with constant turnover. Preschool is a way to get new members.

Session Two

- Support development of excellent teachers.
- Fund creative programs to keep high-school students engaged when they go to college.
- Provide funding to enable young adults to create peer-driven programs for themselves.
- Address the cost of membership.
- Provide professional assistance to help synagogues define their mission and priorities.
- Continue more opportunities for cross-fertilization and dialogue.
- Cultivate a sense of responsibility to covenant values — people will respond.
- Encourage synagogues that are successfully reaching out by providing funding for them to continue.

Synagogues: Putting in Place Building Blocks for Congregational Growth

Facilitator: Marvin Israelow

Presenters: Rabbi Kenneth Brander, Dean, Center for the Jewish Future, Yeshiva University; Robert Leventhal, Senior Consultant, The Alban Institute; Rabbi Perry R. Rank and Joel Podell, Midway Jewish Center, Syosset

Synopsis of Presentations:

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

- Talmudic texts elucidate ways in which the Temple in Jerusalem is the paradigm for synagogues.
- In designing synagogues, we need to emulate the concerns of the builders of the temple. For example, structure space so that the dignity of each person is respected — people must pay attention to entering sacred space to prepare for prayer.

Robert Leventhal (PowerPoint handout available)

- Planning for growth is difficult, particularly so in synagogues.
- Congregations are constantly evolving, requiring leadership to manage many different transitions, often simultaneously. They are influenced by many different emotional factors and don't always follow a logical business model, making planning challenging. Conflict between the rabbi and president is not uncommon. Even when change is desired, leaders may still have one foot in the "old era."
- Census data is an excellent tool for predicting future community trends. Potential resources for synagogues are: Percept, which uses census tracks and provides demographics; *New York Jewish Population Study: 2000*, available on the Web, which provides data on population, affiliation, Israel, and more; federation planning studies (Baltimore, New York, etc.); community interviews (schools, planners, officials, etc.); and parlor meetings aimed at clarifying critical issues.
- Common pitfalls of capital campaigns:
 - Designing the project or timeline to meet the demands of a particular donor
 - Allowing naysayers to stall implementation
 - A focus too much on young families and overlooking older members who may have significant capacity

Rabbi Perry R. Rank and Joel Podell

- Rabbi Rank noted his emphasis on enabling lay-leadership involvement in all aspects of synagogue life.
- Joel Podell presented 18 key elements of successful strategic planning in synagogues, showing how the Midway Jewish Center used these in their own strategic planning process:
 1. Develop a strategic plan when things are going well.
 2. Assure buy in from Executive Committee and Board of Trustees.
 3. Generate momentum for planning.
 4. Be patient privately, but don't be patient publicly.
 5. Develop a clear rationale.
 6. Promote the strategic plan as a tool.
 7. Appoint a small (eight people) committee of planning advocates.
 8. Keep the work of the committee focused and moving forward.
 9. Don't mirror someone else's plan.

10. Engage in zero-based planning.
11. Be honest.
12. Seek input from all groups.
13. Keep the Executive Committee and Board of Trustees apprised of progress.
14. Work with the rabbi.
15. Have one person write the plan.
16. Present the final plan to the Board of Trustees for approval.
17. Set up a structure, and begin implementation without delay.

Discussion Points:

- Engage in strategic planning when things are going well, not only when they are not.
- Be very specific in setting goals and objectives to raise expectations of the project.
- Be conservative with numbers in your strategic plan and throughout the budget process.
- Commitment from both the rabbi and lay leadership is critical, as is a significant mass of stakeholders. (Leventhal's strategic planning process involves over 70 stakeholders.)
- Addressing the issue of sacred space is critical — for example, if the sanctuary is used for a purpose other than worship, differentiate the use of the space.

Suggestions to Federation:

- Honor the different make-ups of congregations in different neighborhoods.
- Conduct meetings throughout the year based on same size, denomination, etc.
- Provide meetings for urban synagogues at a nearby location.
- Continue to convene conferences, papers, and discussions.
- Synagogue movements each have their own conferences. Share your model of the current conference with them: interdenominational and more local.
- Share ideas about strategic planning around the country by encouraging people from New York synagogues to talk with other synagogues.
- Make strategic planning part of the language of lay leaders.
- The Jewish community is good at creating new initiatives, but not good at sustaining them. Find ways to help synagogues sustain programming.

Reflections and Next Steps

Reflections: Dru Greenwood

- The energy, creativity, and commitment of those with diverse roles represented at the conference marks a good beginning.
- Urgent needs were articulated for leadership at all levels; for ways to reach out with integrity, ignite engagement, and sustain meaningful commitment; for support in laying the structural and religious groundwork for growth; and for direction in creating and sustaining profound, renewing change.
- Other perspectives on learning from the day were invited:
 1. Rather than plan for the synagogue of the future, focus on what the synagogue of today can be. — Dr. Ari Kelman

2. There is a need to learn from the researchers and to be reminded of the vision and how to achieve it that the conference accomplished. — Rabbi Renni Altman
3. It is clear from the research that there is need for further research! Listening to constituents, those involved and those not yet involved, is critical. Learning where the expertise is and how to access it is key to helping each other. Synagogues need to be open to federation's expertise and worldview. — Bruce Yudowitz
4. Synagogue change is both substance and process, which needs to be tailored to the vision of each congregation. — Sarene Shanus

Next Steps: John Ruskay

- Ten years ago federation did one thing in synagogues: they sought to raise money. Since then, we have established a range of programs including adult Jewish learning, Partners in Caring, Israel Experience, and Partnership 2000 — all from the perspective of “Can we partner to build inspired communities?”
- The post-1990 focus on Jewish identity led to a deeper recognition of the critical role of federation in synagogue life. 70 percent of American Jews will be members of a synagogue at some point in their lives. This presents both an opportunity and a challenge.
- Can federations, denominations, and national agencies become resources for synagogues to become significant places of inspiration? Can we “max it”? Can they become inspiring places where Jews want to belong? If Jews are exposed to the power of Shabbat and prayer, then they will come to choose their synagogue as a place they want to be, in a community that's losing its soul.
- We heard today some of the learning that comes from experimentation. Dr. Sales showed us the need for talent at many levels of synagogue leadership. This is not about simply writing checks to synagogues; rather it's how we pool our resources to maximize opportunity.
- Next steps:
 1. Disseminate learning to stimulate more learning
 2. Be prepared to develop new resources and build on existing resources
 3. Seek to maximize the availability of expertise

Rabbi Robert Levine

- The conference has underscored the need to learn, from person to person and from institution to institution. Mutual respect across movements and between community institutions is key.
- “A shul must have windows” — *Masechet Brachot*. We need to recognize that a synagogue is about taking the wisdom and commitment we feel inside and bringing it to the outside.
- Judaism today is an option for American Jews. It will take all of us together — it will take synergy — to ensure the next generation embraces it.