

**Who Will Do  
What?****"What is this thing that  
you do to the people?"****Exodus 18:14**

In parshat Yitro, we find Moses working overtime to make all of the decisions himself. His father-in-law, Jethro, advises him to appoint other magistrates to handle the smaller cases since one person cannot do everything. Moses needs to delegate. Jethro also makes the perceptive observation that when an organization doesn't help people understand their roles and responsibilities, it can burn out more than just one leader – it can burn out a community.

Alban consultant, Speed Leas and George Parsons (*Understanding Your Congregation as a System*) argue that authority is a matter of balancing dispersed and concentrated power. They suggest that leaders need to handle the tension between sharing power and holding tight to the reins.

"A scene from synagogue life: Executive committee members are frustrated by a lack of board progress. They soon find themselves taking over much of the work of the general board. This concentration of authority becomes a pattern, and the board comes to feel uninformed and peripheral, like it's providing just a "rubber stamp" of approval for executive committee initiatives. Board morale begins to decline. Executive committee members are also frustrated. They feel they are working hard and are misunderstood."

The current president really wants to create a stronger pipeline of future leaders but leaders are not happy with their board work experience today. The president is frustrated. She needs a stronger bench but how can she build it? When leaders burn out they lose the energy and creativity to engage everyone at the table.

**Delegation Requires Clear Expectations**

In *First Break all the Rules*, Marcus Buckingham reports on the Gallup organization's study based on 20,000 manager interviews. Gallup found that the most important things people look for in a work arrangement are captured by the following questions:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?

4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?

The study found that people want clear expectations and appreciation for their work. I have adapted the following list of roles and responsibilities for synagogues from a book by Richard T. Ingram entitled *Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards*, Second Edition (Board Source 2009). When new members join the board, it is helpful if they are oriented about the work of the board.

## **The Work of the Board**

### **Synagogue Board Leadership Responsibilities**

**Define Mission and Purpose:** Show how your mission and values are grounded in enduring sacred texts and traditions. Develop a written statement of mission and vision.

**Create an Effective Organizational Process:** Policies, Structures and Plans: Create policies to help ensure the desired outcomes of the congregation. Define how you will delegate the means of achieving these outcomes. Design effective meetings.

**Recruit a Head of Staff:** Spell out essential functions and core competencies for the rabbi and executive director (when available). Ensure that there are job descriptions and clear reporting relationships for those who report to staff and volunteers.

**Assess Performance:** Develop goals and mutual review processes for both staff and board members. Leaders will hold paid staff to a higher level of accountability, but as volunteers rise in the organization, they should be challenged to be more accountable.

**Recruit and Train Board Members:** Define roles and responsibilities for volunteers. Ensure a meaningful board experience. Help utilize programs like Sulam to create a leadership development program to prepare leaders for their work.

**Provide Proper Financial and Operational Oversight:** The board has a fiduciary role to ensure that a congregation's resources are properly utilized and that financial plans are prudent and responsible. Boards need to determine what to measure and monitor and ensure

that there are sound methods for audits, financial processes, insurance reviews, etc. They need to make sure the budget reflects the purpose and priorities of the synagogue.

**Ensure Adequate Financial Resources:** Ensure adequate funds for capital requirements, for short term cash flow, and long term capital needs. Boards should create a financial resource development plan covering contributions, designated gifts and endowments. They should strive to educate the board and staff to understand key financial facts. Help leaders connect their budget with their vision.

**Ensure Ethical and Legal Integrity:** Create checks and balances for financial processes and avoid conflicts of interests. Develop policies and procedures for personnel, facility, communications, etc. Develop policies to ensure that the synagogue does no harm.

**Communicate the Mission:** Promote the mission, values and vision to staff, stakeholders, and members and the community.

**Monitor Program Effectiveness:** Be proactive in evaluating programs. Engage in continuous improvement. Prune old programs and explore how to grow new programs that meet the needs of a changing congregation.

Three critical tasks that a board needs to address are developing a mission and vision, developing policies, procedures and structures and recruiting a chief of staff to manage the organization. The first three are critical governance issues. By hiring staff leaders and recruiting lay leaders to lead the organization, they help ensure that the vision will become a reality.

## **Governance vs. Management**

The board has a governance responsibility to assess the performance of the chief of staff and to ensure that policies are in place for the supervision of all staff. Boards may be tempted to become “hands on” managers and supervisors, but they need to step back and ensure they are performing their governance responsibilities first. They also determine the decisions they will delegate to staff or volunteers functioning as unpaid staff.

Leadership may be exercised by volunteers or staff. In a synagogue, clergy leaders are meant to both implement board plans and also to shape those plans. Spiritual leaders are accountable to the board, but as spiritual leaders they also are called to hold the board accountable to act with respect to the mission and Jewish values.

	<p>The board retains the right to make final policy decisions based on the recommendations it receives. It also has the responsibility to create processes for oversight (audit, insurance reviews, legal reviews and human resource reviews) to ensure proper systems are in place. In order to ensure effective delegation, we also believe that it is important for the board to provide strategic direction for committees.</p>
<p><b>Strategic Direction: The Committee Job Description</b></p>	<p>The board in its <b>governance role</b> ensures that key committees have job descriptions, a vision (desired outcomes) statement and a set of policies. It challenges the committee to work with staff to find the means to make the vision and strategy a reality. Some committees do not need to have a lot of structure. They can meet as needed. The most important committees, in contrast, should strive to define their role in a written job description.</p> <p>It will be helpful if the board can provide committees a charter that addresses the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Direction</li> <li>• Mission or purpose of committee</li> <li>• Vision for committee's work</li> <li>• Tasks to work on</li> <li>• Current policies relevant to the committee</li> <li>• Policies that need to be explored in the future</li> <li>• Composition of the committee</li> <li>• Some expectation for meeting frequency</li> <li>• Role of staff vs. volunteers on the committee</li> <li>• Initial list of committee tasks</li> </ul> <p>The bylaws may require that a committee exist. Few bylaws spell out what the committee should do. Here are some brief descriptions.</p>

- **Nominating Committee** – Usually, the bylaws will specify the composition of the nominating committee and the approval of the slate. A job description for a nominating committee might spell out the review process for board members (have their terms expired, do they want to continue, etc.) It might also outline the process of assessing the performance of current members with input from rabbi, president, incoming president, etc. It might define the review criteria. (Did they attend meetings, are they working on committees, are they constructive?) The job description could define the process for identifying new prospects. Should openings be announced? It might spell out the committee’s responsibilities for orientation and or training of new board members.
- **Fundraising Committee** – This committee might be expected to establish the purpose of fundraising and an overall fundraising goal for the year. They could also be expected to work with event chairs and staff to coordinate the calendar of fundraising events across all programs/departments. The committee job description should also mention the role of the rabbi, senior staff and volunteers in terms of fundraising expectations and responsibilities.

We suggest that each major committee present their committee job description during the year to inform the board of its role and the policies and proposals they are working on. This is what we call a B issue. The report is informational. No decision needs to be made.

The job description defines the role of staff and volunteers on the committee. Volunteer leaders come and go. The competencies of volunteer committee chairs can vary. Wherever possible, staff should be encouraged to provide leadership to key committees to ensure consistency. Volunteers should function in their policy role as governance on key committees. When volunteers are doing implementation “hands on” projects they will usually perform better if staff lends a hand and provides direction. Volunteers are critical to organizations like the Girl Scouts or Habitat for Humanity, but they work for staff. Their staff ensures that work places are safe and constructive.

**Thoughts to Consider**

The committee job description defines the authority that is delegated to the committee and helps define the composition of committees.

- Are some open to all?
- Are some by invite only?
- Do committees require specific qualifications?
- Do some require a level of commitment?
- What are the tasks the staff is responsible for? (such as keeping accurate membership records)
- What are the things the volunteers are responsible for? (such as greeting new members at a dinner)

**Focus on Policy vs. Case by Case**

John Carver (*Boards that Make a Difference*) encourages boards to start with their policy responsibilities. They should try to focus on the larger policy issues before they get caught up in the case by case details. Since synagogues are emotional organizations, it is easy for leaders to respond to the needs of individual families before they set an overall policy framework. We suggest they start with policy first, and people second.

Case by Case Approach- Personal Focus	Policy Approach- Issues Focus
Can the Stems get a private room for their lunch May 15?	What is our <i>Kiddush</i> lunch policy?
My friends the Steinberg's have been loyal members. Can they just not pay this year?	What is the dues abatement policy? What information is required? Who has access to the information?
The Levys are offering \$25,000 to dedicate a window in the sanctuary and they want to design the window.	What is our policy for naming rights? What is the overall strategy for gift levels?

**Board Meeting  
Issues: The ABC  
Approach**

Policy issues are sometimes emotional and can create conflict. There are constructive and destructive conflict management approaches. In the constructive approach, the leaders focus on issues and logic. In the destructive approach, leaders focus on people and emotions. The policy approach tries to be constructive, avoiding each decision made based on the unique parties involved.

Synagogue leaders need to decide which topics and decisions should be given priority at board meetings. Leaders need to explain how decisions on recommendations and motions will be made.

- Which decisions can be made with consensus?
- Which decisions need a majority vote?
- Are there some decisions that should require a super majority?

I have developed a framework for exploring some of the different types of issues that a board faces. Synagogues vary in size, culture and complexity. A small financial issue can be of substantial importance to a congregation of 120 and a rather small issue to a congregation of 1,000. Congregations with executive directors tend to delegate many administrative decisions. Smaller congregations may require that volunteers make more administrative decisions.

The ABC approach helps the board resist the temptation of acting as a “committee of the whole” that feels they must review all issues as one in a board meeting. This is inefficient and may result in frustration for all. A committee may have worked hard to shape a proposal. Now people who just became aware of the issue are debating the fine details. Some people feel they may feel it’s their duty to cross every “t.” On other issues, the board may feel that the chair of the committee or the executive committee is rushing them to select from a set of predetermined options.

On the more important "A" issues, it is helpful to share some of the options the leaders considered in preparing their recommendation. On smaller decisions, the board may be willing to defer to the staff or committee. Inefficient boards can alienate potential board members who have experienced effective boards. Many of the individuals boards most want to recruit will not be willing to join a “committee of the whole” with a great deal of role confusion. Jethro suggests that Moses define the issues that should be decided at each level. We agree.

**R.A.C.I.****R.A.C.I. Framework**

I would like to suggest that boards think about three roles when they review a proposal.

RA-Who is responsible and accountable to get job done

C- Who needs to be **consulted**?

I- Who needs to be **informed**?

Let's look at a case from the religious school.

The 7<sup>th</sup> graders are going to go on a overnight field trip:

- 1 The school principle was responsible and accountable
- 2 The school board was consulted since they have not done this trip in the past
- 3 Parents and kids were informed because they need to make plans to participate.

If synagogue board members ask unnecessary question about the field trip, they know why they were neither consulted or informed.

Let's look at a new membership campaign:

- The Executive Director and the Vice President of Membership would be responsible and accountable for the campaign.
- The board would be consulted since membership growth is a key board goal and all changes are carefully monitored.
- The staff and congregation need to be **informed** about the campaign so they can support and promote it.

### **“A” Issues - Your Top Policy Decisions**

“A” issues involve the board focusing on their policy and decision making governance role.

For “A” issues, it is helpful if the board is given materials in advance. “A” issues deserve a priority place on the board's agenda and adequate time allocated for discussion. “A” issues are at the heart of the board’s responsibility and accountability to govern. There should be relatively few “A” issues, but they should be treated with great respect. One way to reflect on board size is to ask, “Is this board organized in way that enables us to discuss an important “A” issue”?

### **“B” Issues: Providing Information**

“B” issues are those where the board should be consulted as a courtesy to ensure that they are knowledgeable. “B” issues are raised to advise the board and to seek the board’s consultation:

- What is the financial goal for the donor dinner?
- What kind of partnership are we exploring with other synagogues youth groups?
- What is the role of the membership committee?
- What are some of the improvements that we are considering for the website?

The rabbi, president and executive directors (leadership team) can coordinate their individual reports to provide valuable information. One way to honor the board time is to focus such leadership reports on the key strategic issues for the year. Leaders can use “B” issues to introduce some new ideas. They can invite the board to dream a little because no decision is required in the moment.

### **“C” Issues: Delegated to Staff or Lay Leaders Doing Staff Work**

“C” issues are issues that should be delegated to the professional staff. In smaller congregations they may have to be delegated to volunteer leaders who are performing work or functioning as unpaid staff.

The board chooses to delegate these issues so that they can retain a focus on their strategic governance task- ie “A” issues.”If everything is an “A” issue, then nothing is really a priority.

**Be careful what you share.** The president may choose to inform the board of a non A or B issue, but not for purpose of discussion.

John Carver (*Boards that Make a Difference*) comments that if you bring minutia to a board, they will review it. The board does not need to debate which book will be used for the adult education class or how the office is covering the phone. The rabbi can work with committees to pick books and the office manager can be charged to ensure staff is properly organized. Let’s look at some examples of A, B and C issues.

Board Decisions - Governance (A)	Information Issues - Advisory (B)	Decisions Delegated to Staff or Lay Leader (C)
Set policy about taking on new debt	Review largest variances in budget in treasurer's report	Review a major purchase of office supplies that are within the overall budget of the office manager
Develop overall policy on communications; Recommend policy on access to website, public policy statements, etc	Review communication committee's strategies for brand re: web, bulletin, etc	Debate graphics on web pages. Discuss an idea from another site. Decide how to produce August bulletin
Define new membership categories	Review reports on reasons why members are joining	Find a way to convince Rosenthals to stay members. Discuss case of prospect who was not called back
Review recommendations from a strategic task force	Present major report from youth task force on progress on goal to increase USY	Discuss location of USY convention
Develop charge to create an employee handbook, provide a budget for training	Review strategies for staff training. Dream about a staff development process. Explore types of consultants available	Decide on the date for training
Set maintenance and repair budget. Develop short term and long term facility plans	Update on key maintenance projects	Discuss allegation that the painter is coming late

Again, size matters! In a larger congregation, more is delegated to staff. In a smaller congregation the board, acting as the office of the administrator, might review a major supplies purchase.

**Executive  
Committees:  
Orchestrating  
Success**

The classic role of the executive committee (EC) is to function as advisory group to the president and rabbi. Executive committees also are empowered to make decisions in the case of emergencies. In reality, EC play many other roles. When boards are very large, the executive committee may be the real working board and the larger board may function as more of a stakeholder or representative board. In smaller congregations without executive directors, the executive committee may function as the “office of the executive director” and be engaged in many hands on programming-administrative tasks. Such small congregational boards often do not have the luxury to delegate to staff.

We believe there are some core tasks that most executive committee should consider:

1. Help plan **effective board meetings**. (Agenda, priorities, issues to be discussed, decisions to be made).
2. Handle **emergencies** that can’t wait for board to meet again.
3. Provide **oversight to committees** and help support and assess recommendations en route to the board.

In larger congregations, the president, the rabbi and the executive director, when available (referred to from now on as The Leadership Team) in consultation with the executive committee, can take the lead in **creating the agenda** and choose which committees they want to have present reports each month. There are some synagogues where bylaws require certain reports be given. In the short term, by-laws must be honored, but they should be reviewed to relate to the governance reality and changed if necessary.

**Agenda Design - Executive Committee**

- Ask your leadership team to take the lead on developing an agenda.
- Focus your agenda on your priority issues. Give “A” issues first priority.
- Find Jewish texts that connect to your vision and to the challenges you face as a board. We encourage you to consider this a priority.
- Choose committee reports that have timely and important information. They need not have a motion to vote on. (“B” issues)

### General Board Meeting Best Practices

- We suggest that board meeting should not automatically include reports from standing committees with the exception of the treasurer's report and the membership status report. All other reports can be sent electronically along with the minutes in a "consent agenda." Consent agenda items are automatically approved unless someone raises an issue with them. We believe in fewer and more meaningful reports.
- Board members sometimes come up with creative ideas that don't fit the evening's agenda. Leaders can create a flip chart page called the "Parking Lot" and then work with the person outside the meeting to understand their concerns and explore when the issue might be put on a future agenda.
- There are times where the whole board table is just too big a group for meaningful discussion. Leaders can create break-out groups to allow people to go into more depth on an issue. This also lets more introverted members have a voice. The groups can then report back to the larger group.

### Board Member Expectations

To take Jethro's advice and empower others to help you govern, you need to define your expectations of them. Jethro challenges Moses to pick people with the right character and people committed to doing the job well. Board team work is dependent on a culture of trust, a focus on results and a sense of accountability. A board expectations document helps contribute to all three. Empowered leaders have clear roles, the resources that they need, the authority to do good work, and a commitment to accountability for performance.

Scene from Synagogue Life: The president has read an article about the needs for some behavioral agreements for members. As he works with the board to develop a list of expectations, some members scroll on their phones, others are having sidebar conversations, and one leader is doing paperwork. Several members have left the room. The 1st VP is quite concerned. He wonders how he will lead this board when he becomes president.

Boards have an underlying culture – a way of doing things. Leaders can choose, however, to learn new behaviors. If leaders can help them explore a new vision of team work, they can tap the underlying good will of the members. After some transition time they may find that members are more punctual and attentive. Despite their problems, boards elicit a fair amount of commitment. Board members come once a month. Many meet for additional committee meetings.

Leaders can build on this loyalty and commitment to develop some board team commitments that will strengthen teamwork. Here are some typical kinds of agreements the president might help members explore:

- **Attend Meetings** – Arrive on time and stay for the entire meeting. Meet a defined attendance goal; at least 70% is the norm. If members cannot consistently attend, in most cases, they should not be voting on the work of others.
- **Be Supportive** – Be an active listener. Give your teammates your attention. On important issues, encourage everyone to speak once before you speak twice.
- **Be Prepared** – Review materials that are sent in advance. Complete the tasks you are assigned so that officers don't have to carry such a burden.
- **Contribute** – Contribute to the annual campaign and solicit others. This helps key solicitors feel like they are not in this alone. It creates a culture of giving.
- **Work on a Committee, Task Force or Team** – Participate in the implementation of board decisions.
- **Be Active in the Life of the Congregation** – Member interests vary. Some attend social functions, others perform social action. Some like to study, and others gravitate toward prayer. Engagement leads to a better understanding of the congregation. Leaders should be able to share stories of how their engagement is growing.
- **Speak with One Voice** – Debate issues within the board. When in public, speak in support of and with respect for the majority decision. Be ambassadors for the synagogue's vision.

### **Strategic Board Meetings**

We invite you to go to the following link: <http://uscj.org/LeadingKehilla/SulamLeadership/SulamforCurrentLeaders/default.aspx> to review a board meeting tool kit called "Ten Tips for Effective Meetings." Based on the strategies from The Delegation Plan, it outlines some specific ideas about how you can shape your board meeting to focus the board on its work.

**From the Balcony:  
Board Trends to  
Watch**

Synagogue longstanding core leaders often get upset when new people don't step up to join them. Leaders need to step away from the board table and get a broader perspective. Some Alban consultants refer to this as "balcony space." From the balcony, leaders can get a larger perspective on changes in attitudes about volunteerism and leadership.

The next generation of synagogue members may have less discretionary time. If they are going to allocate more time and energy to kehillot, they are going to want to experience authentic and dynamic learning, heartfelt worship and engaging relationships. They may not want to populate dozens of bureaucratic managerial committees or experience seemingly endless debates on "C" issues. If future leaders are going to make an on-going commitment, many will look to study groups, chesed work or social action teams.

In the future, we believe we will see a movement to less standing committees. Monthly meetings may be replaced with more virtual sessions of phone and internet conferences. Committees will most likely meet when they have a clear objective and need to meet face to face to interact. Some congregations are already reducing many committees and directing more work to task forces with shorter time commitments and more focus.

Emerging leaders may not need to make all of the decisions, but they will definitely want to have a clear idea of how decisions will be made. They will want to know that they will be responsible, accountable, consulted or informed on decisions. They will want to know what is expected of them and what they can expect.

**Conclusion**

We are firm in the conviction that it will be the strategic board that builds leadership strength and lays the foundation for the board of the future. We hope to show that the board can be efficient (focus on priority issues, prepare for important decisions, provide a timed agenda) and effective (creating a values based team, focusing on vision, strategy and goals). Moses is asked to delegate to the elders so they can share the burden of responsibilities. He also hopes that they can develop a foundation of knowledge, skill and accountability. In order to hold leaders accountable, we need shared visions, expectations and goals. In our next session we will explore how to build a culture of accountability on this foundation.

**Check List**

- \* Define roles of the executive committee and the board.
- \* Define expectations for board members.
- \* Develop operating agreements ( covenants) to define how meetings will be run and how decisions will be made.