

# EIGHT LEADERSHIP LESSONS OF A “WELL-TEMPERED” EXECUTIVE

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I am honored to write about leadership in this special issue of the *Journal* dedicated to Darrell Friedman. Other articles focus on Darrell's unique leadership style and how his legacy will be carried on through the Darrell Friedman Institute (Friedman, 2001). He also mentored and influenced dozens of professionals in the field, and I consider myself to be one who has benefited from his mentorship and friendship.

The issue of leadership is perhaps one of the most hackneyed topics of current discussion. Literally dozens of volumes on leadership fill the shelves of bookstores and libraries. There are books on the leadership styles of Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant, who used opposite tactics in confronting each other in warfare. Other works outline the leadership qualities of presidents, executives, statesmen, and even barbarians such as Attila the Hun. Perhaps the volume of works on leadership is in inverse proportion to the perceived quality and depth of leadership during our troubled times.

Let us remember, however, that the two great paragons of leadership in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, were either mediocre, or, in Churchill's case, maligned leaders in the foreign policy realm until catastrophe struck, catapulting them into the pantheon of war-time leadership (Adler, 1971; Manchester, 1988). Subsequent presidents have never reached Roosevelt's standard of greatness, though Harry Truman comes closest, albeit through the eyes of historians writing decades after his presidency ended.

As the allure of political leaders declined in reaction to Vietnam and Watergate, the leadership vacuum has largely been filled by successful CEOs. There is a cottage industry of CEO autobiographies and studies of successful corporations and organizations that

have elevated CEOs into superstars, with compensation packages to match those of royalty, and more liquid, too. Of course, much of this has come crashing down with the stock market bust and the plethora of corporate scandals. Notions of the “servant leader” are becoming more popular among current works, perhaps to compensate for the excesses of the ravenous corporate culture of recent times (Spears, 1998). Of course, the non-profit sector has not been immune to those excesses.

A disproportionate amount of literature on leadership emphasizes the traits, characteristics, and styles of successful leaders. Such traits include integrity, charisma, energy, curiosity, incisiveness, and the ability to inculcate vision, among others (*A Study in Excellence*, 1989; Bennis, 1994; Depree, 1993; Nanus, 1989; O'Toole, 1996). However, as experience teaches us, an executive of the human relations school will not succeed if the bottom line leads to massive layoffs, and an “authoritarian” leader will not ensure continuity of success after he or she leaves the corridors of power.

As Peter Drucker and others remind us, we should focus less on the traits of leaders and more on the relationships between leaders and followers, as the one thing that all leaders share in common is that they have willing followers. “If leaders need followers, then leadership isn't just about character, it is largely about the relationship between leaders and followers. Leadership, therefore, is about what you do with who you are, how you interact with your followers” (Blank, 1995; Drucker, 1996).

Based upon my own experiences as an executive for over 15 years, I would like to share some lessons that have guided my practice.

- **Make sure your campfire is in better shape than how you found it.**

One of the key responsibilities of leadership is to ensure appropriate engagement, not only among professionals but also among lay leadership. In the federation world, executives are increasingly cultivating and soliciting many donors for annual, capital, and planned gifts campaigns, traditionally a responsibility of volunteers. By so doing, are we neglecting the responsibility of developing and energizing a core of volunteers, who must solicit the great majority of the largest gifts? If too much dependence is built on CEO's key relationships and solicitations, are we building a cult of indispensability to the detriment of the continuity of excellence after we leave the scene? We must address these concerns if we take our stewardship responsibilities seriously.

- **Cultivate Level 5 leadership.**

In the classic *Good to Great*, which is based on an empirical study of how good companies and organizations became great, the author Jim Collins (2001) identified top-level executives as exhibiting Level 5 Leadership. They "build enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will." These leaders channeled their ego needs away from themselves and into the passionate quest for making a great company. It is not that Level 5 leaders have no ego. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious, but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves. Negation of the ego, for the betterment of the greater cause, is a hallmark of outstanding leadership. Truman, the most unlikely of near-great Presidents, invoked Level 5 leadership when he stated, "You can accomplish anything in life provided that you don't mind who gets the credit" (McCullough, 1992).

- **Do not confuse growth with success.**

All too often, companies and not-for-

profit organizations believe that being bigger is better. The effort to increase revenues, from any source, without having the appropriate synergy to improve the whole organization, is a prescription for disaster. The AOL/Time Warner debacle is the most vivid example. Increasing the assets of federations and foundations, without harnessing them to improve the continuity of the Jewish community for the next generation, marginalizes our achievements. It may increase our balance sheet, but not harness the engine of financial continuity for the future. Large philanthropic funds and supporting foundations that do not leverage the bulk of their assets to improve, change, but sustain the Jewish community do not build strength for the future, but delude us into thinking so.

- **Do not confuse mission with vision.**

A vision statement is the underpinning for the new strategies and tactics developed to enable the agency to better realize its mission. If the vision radically changes the mission of the agency, then the *raison d'être* of the organization will be compromised severely (Kleinman, 1999). Umbrella fund raising is the federated system's mission because federations are best positioned to address the emerging needs of Jews wherever they may live. Federations, primarily through the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, have the international infrastructure to be able to ascertain and meet global needs, and their local network of agencies are similarly positioned locally. Too many funds are raised, however, to meet the fads and whims of the moment and seriously erode what makes our franchise unique. This does not mean that we should not be innovative and develop giving opportunities that are responsive to donors. However, they should have an impact on the strategic and underlying needs of the Jewish community.

Similarly, good planning should recognize that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Good "fences" don't make for good networks of services (Hyfler, 2000).

Good to great agencies focus on those activities that ignite their passion. The idea here is not to stimulate passion but to discover what makes you passionate (Collins, 2001). The passion of federation executives should be to make our communities world class and to bind those communities to the rest of the Jewish people. Solely meeting the whims of donors if they are not geared to achieving the aforementioned goal will not generate the passion for excellence we seek.

- **Look horizontally, not vertically; globally, not only locally.**

The days of command and control management died with mainframes. Other than the accountability required for allocations and grants made, ensuring the primacy of the Annual Campaign, and our other fiduciary responsibilities toward donors, our thinking should be in terms of partnerships and win/win strategies. No single resource can address the existential issues confronting the Jewish community. We should, therefore, build networks and facilitate the pooling of resources from all sources to better address the daunting needs that face us (Herring & Shrage, 2001).

There is also a commensurate requirement among agency leadership to go beyond the parochial concerns of their agency. The “what’s in it for me syndrome” is too pervasive among agency staffs. This must be addressed collaboratively by federation and agency leaders. Today, global connections with other Jews must be cultivated rather than acquired through osmosis as is done among my own contemporaries. In the era of the global village too many of us still wear our outworn, parochial hats. Let’s look horizontally, eastward and westward.

- **Leadership cannot be compartmentalized.**

We live in an either/or society. Individuals are so stratified into specific market segments that we fall into the “yin and yang”

syndrome. The quintessential compartmentalization of leadership is reflected in Moses and Aaron. Aaron was the consummate “extroverted” leader who took a personal interest in his people’s lives. Rashi noted that the mourning for Aaron’s death exceeded that for Moses because Aaron engaged the people and knew their concerns and what made them tick. Conversely, Moses was a visionary and intellectual force. He was “beyond” day-to-day interactions with his followers. He was what James McGregor Burns (1985) called the transformational leader.

G-d exhorted Moses to come closer to his brother and his leadership style, because after the Israelites worshiped the Golden Calf, Moses withdrew from their encampment. Moses reasoned that since G-d was angry with them and did not wish to have his *Shechina* among them, he should also withdraw from them. Although Moses had achieved forgiveness for his people, G-d nevertheless commanded him to emulate his brother’s traits (Exodus, 32-34).

The ideal leader then must aspire to have the attributes of both Moses and Aaron: to be able to inspire but also to “sweat” details of daily, social interaction. Leaders must use the grandeur of our Jewish mission to stimulate greatness among others while having both feet on the ground.

- **Consensus building is a double-edged sword.**

Consensus building is not only a strength of our Jewish organizational life—promoting democracy and respect for diverse opinions—but it is also a potential barrier toward transformational change. Leaders must ensure that the right process is followed without allowing decisions to result in the lowest common denominator. “Parve” conclusions do not inspire followers but indifference.

While we can never achieve perfect decisions, we cannot afford to make bad ones or ones so compromised that we lose focus or energy. Lay leaders are looking to us to help set the future course, to ensure the wise use

of their philanthropic and time commitments. We must never forget that the political process is a means to an end not, as happens too often, an end in itself.

• **Whom we develop is our greatest legacy.**

Too often, because of our busy schedules, our staffs are not properly supervised or nurtured, let alone mentored. Recent focus group research done of young professionals has demonstrated these deficiencies, which have resulted in large defections from the professional ranks (JCSA, 2003). Organizations that have made the transition from being solely good to great ensure that "there are the right people on the bus, heading in the right direction," but without making frequent stops to change passengers. Our greatest legacy, therefore, is the young professionals and volunteer leaders whom we have mentored and groomed, who have taken on serious leadership responsibilities.

One of the Hassidic masters described by Elie Wiesel (1972) in his classic, Souls On Fire, was the Maggid of Mezeritch. He was great because "he understood the importance of transmitting teachings and new discoveries." The Maggid modestly noted, "I found light locked in a closet; all I did was open the door," when he foresaw the need to train spiritual leaders for the many isolated and neglected communities of Europe. Perhaps "he intuitively knew that European Jewry was embarking on a long and bloody journey and that they would need all the help and support it could get."

Once his followers became leaders in their own right, "the Maggid did not begrudge them their fame and accomplishment. Thirty-nine disciples did not resemble him nor did they resemble one another. Each went on to establish his own dynasty; rather than keeping his disciples dependent on him, the Maggid wanted them to reign as sovereigns. He, the Maggid of Mezeritch, heir of the Baal Shem, was the bond between them."

We must emulate the Hassidic masters in perpetuating the noble goals of our profession and producing the next generation of professional and volunteer leaders. In this regard, Darrell Friedman had no peer.

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*For his vision and leadership*

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