

Introduction

With The Volunteer Development Plan, we reach the final module of Sulam for Current Leaders. Placing it last in the series was intentional.

A study by The Urban Institute in 2004 noted the importance of volunteer work in providing pro bono service, critical skills and financial resources to nonprofits. The study also explored some of the obstacles to recruiting new leaders. People are reluctant to volunteer, in part, because past volunteer experiences were not well designed or supervised. We have all seen volunteers who did not know what was expected, had received no training or support, and were not acknowledged for their time invested.

Successful volunteer experiences, by contrast, are built upon strong foundations. By creating visionary kehillot (congregations), lay and professional leaders build a *sulam*, a ladder, that invites participants to climb and aspire to new heights. Kehillot that articulate a clear mission, promote cultures of accountability, and create regular opportunities for meaningful engagement become attractive options for volunteers deciding where to invest their discretionary time.

All of the lessons from the previous sessions of Sulam for Current Leaders (SCL) contribute to creating a place where volunteers will want to take a step onto the *sulam* (ladder).

A Scene from the Bible

The Israelites are in the desert, going through one of many periods of complaining. Tired of manna, they want meat. Moses has become frustrated. His batteries are wearing down. God tells Moses that he needs to share the mantle of leadership and place some of the communal responsibility upon the shoulders of the 70 elders. Moses is not just asked to delegate, he is asked to inspire.

“A certain young man ran and told Moses, saying: ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.’ And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses from his youth, spoke up and said: ‘My master, Moses, restrain them!’ But Moses said to him, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all of God’s people were prophets, that God would put the Lord’s spirit upon them!’”
(Numbers 11:27- 29)

We see from this story that two new leaders, Medad and Eldad, take it upon themselves to demonstrate that they share the same spirit of God that Moses experiences. They openly communicate their vision to the community.

Carefully recruited and trained to be Moses' assistant and eventual successor, Joshua seems to be put off by these "upstarts". He asks Moses to re-strict them.

In this story Joshua and Moses represent a delegated system, but with slightly different approaches. God speaks to Moses. Moses teaches Joshua. They have expert authority but Moses is willing to seize an opportunity to widen the circle of leadership. A skillful visionary leader, Moses tells Joshua to learn to stand back, thereby encouraging the growth of Medad and Eldad. Why give a sermon begging for inspired leadership and then restrain it when the gift is presented? Moses understands that these are not "upstarts", but, rather, the next generation of Israelite leadership.

In our kehillot today, it not uncommon for presidents to be faced with the challenge of rebuilding the leadership pipeline. In welcoming new volunteers, presidents may have to convince a seasoned leader to step back so that new people can come forward. They may have to encourage current leaders to delegate tasks they feel they could do faster or better on their own.

The lesson of this biblical text is that when you have people who feel called to service it is critical that we empower them and give them the skills, authority and respect to contribute.

In today's hectic world our members are pulled in many directions. Kehillot need a compelling vision of how members can enrich their lives and their communities through volunteer service. Leaders play an important role because they can help volunteers committ time, develop relationships and create an impact.

A volunteer development plan provides a clear picture of a volunteer's role. While longstanding leaders are dedicated, they are often internally focused. They want new leaders to join the synagogue's programs and volunteer roles for the same reason that they joined. But volunteers have their own hearts and are moved by their own reasons. They have their own talents, gifts and skills to contribute to the creation of a *kehilla kedosha*, a sacred community.

In this article, we will explore the four R's of a Volunteer Development Plan:

1. **Relationship** - Understanding a member's talents and interests.
2. **Recruitment** - The right appeal for the right job.
3. **Relevance** - Assignment, training, feedback and guidance.
4. **Recognition** - Praising what went right with an eye towards the future.

One of the ways to remove barriers to volunteerism is to understand what motivates volunteers. While people volunteer for different reasons, the most common reason they step forward is that they are asked by the right person, for the right task, in the right way. It all starts with relationships.

I. Relationship

In the building of the Tabernacle we learn that the Israelites were encouraged to bring their gifts. They were to give from the heart. Some brought gold, others brought gems and still others brought fabrics. Betzalel, the master craftsman, was charged with creating a design for all these gifts and utilizing them in the tabernacle. Let's look at how leaders can develop a system to understand and welcome volunteer gifts and utilize them in the building of your congregation.

Case Study of Sue and Beth: First Relate, Then Create

A Scene from Synagogue Life: Sue had been attending services for about four months at Beth El. She had heard that the synagogue had a program to learn more about prospective members. She waited for someone to welcome her formally, but that call never came.

As the high holidays approached, Sue decided to join the congregation. In her new members orientation kit there was a short volunteer profile. The document read:

"Welcome to Beth El. We look forward to getting to know you and learning about your passions, interests and how you might want to participate in Beth El community life."

You can see some of Sue's responses to the first part of the questionnaire on the next page.

NEW MEMBER BACKGROUND

What were you raised? Reform _____ Conservative X Orthodox _____ Just Jewish _____ Secular _____
Another religion _____

Education: Master's in elementary education

Years in Synagogue: Just joined

Family Members: Single

Employment: Part time elementary school teacher

Interests	Very Interested	Somewhat	No Interest
Art	X		
Children	X		
Theatre	X		
Reading		X	
Field trips			
Office			X
Curriculum		X	
Sports			X
Music			X
Holidays			X
Pre school	X		
Religious school	X		
Teens		X	

Sue let it be known that she had been an elementary school teacher. She had just moved to town and decided not to work full time. She has an interest in children, theatre and art with a special interest in younger children and education. Sadly, a call never came to invite her to get involved. Her profile form was in a file folder that was never opened or shared with the leadership.

Beth, the education director, had trained herself to be an observer of people. She loved matching people and opportunities.

One day Beth noticed Sue admiring the artwork of the Religious School. Looking at her, Beth remembered how Sue talked to the children at Shabbat morning kiddush and they seemed to love her. Beth wondered whether Sue would be willing to work with some children in the Religious School on an art project.

Beth approached Sue, "You really seem to be having a great time. You are a

natural with the younger kids, and I can't help but notice that you have an interest in our art projects. What is your background?"

Beth asked, "What do you most enjoy doing with kids?" To which Sue replied, "I am an art person. I even paint at home. My mom got me lessons when I was young and I have a passion about seeing kids with a paint brush in their hands. It reminds me of growing up in Hartford. As an educator I love to see parents get involved in the project with their kids."

Beth saw a match-making opportunity to put Sue's talents to good use. At the last religious school retreat, they recognized the need to integrate Jewish studies and the arts. With this in mind, Beth invited Sue to work with a group of students and teachers to help develop and create a mural in the school hallway.

When the project was finally launched, some teachers dragged their feet. They were not sure they wanted the hallway space used for a mural. Some questioned whether any of the adults would really want to volunteer to help. "You know, we got very little interest last time," said Connie, one of the veteran teachers.

Beth persisted, for she had a vision to bring the walls of the religious school to life. She also connected parents and children, who loved working with her. Sue became a big supporter of the school and motivated several of her new adult friends to pitch in on the art project. They could not say no to Sue's enthusiasm. In the end, parents, students and teachers had a ball. The mural became a permanent testimony to what a community can do when it welcomes the gifts of others.

This case study had a happy ending, but it could just as easily have been a cautionary tale about missed opportunities. Beth noticed Sue and then proceeded to invite, encourage, support and appreciate her effort.

Your members have diverse gifts. Our leadership challenge is to help connect members' talents and interests with opportunities to strengthen our congregations.

Too often, we pass like ships in the night in the hallways of our congregations. We don't really know where people are at in their lives. There are members who are at some transition point in their life who might step forward to become involved if they knew more about your volunteer opportunities.

It is very helpful to be intentional about welcoming your members' gifts. In smaller congregations it may be easier to do this. In larger congregations some formal process or to record it and make it accessible to leaders, is required. These forms frequently contain members' talents, interests and passions.

This data can take many forms:

- High Holiday cards with boxes to check off before the holiday or tabs to turn over during services
- Paper forms kept on file or scanned
- Online surveys that gather data on member's interests
- Use of synagogue software that has fields to hold interests such as in: Adult study, social justice, etc.
- Use of fundraising software programs that is designed to look at a member's volunteer work contributions and financial donations. Such programs often have a field to reflect the member's background, other community involvements or things the member has shared about their relationship with the synagogue.

Some synagogues are moving to create a stronger "donor/doer" database to better recognize their members' volunteer contributions. Some membership chairs google new members to find out more about their accomplishments and interests. Regardless of your method of collecting information, it is only helpful if it is reviewed, updated and accessible to your professional staff and committee chairs.

II. Recruitment

A scene from synagogue life: Rabbi David is aware that a visiting scholar is available through United Synagogue to teach about poverty and hunger issues. Rabbi David passes the information to the social action chair, Margie. Margie sends out an email to the committee to ask for a volunteer to organize the program.

Is this how finding a volunteer would be handled in your congregation?

Sending an email blast to committee members or everyone who noted they were interested in social action when they joined 10 years ago often yields little response. By contrast, a personal note or phone call to someone who has demonstrated prior commitment can be an inviting call to action.

How do we help volunteers understand the benefits of volunteering? There are times when we just need a large number of able-bodied people to do a job. At others, we need a more specialized skill set, which requires a tailored recruitment message.

Experience has shown that our volunteer prospects want to know the following:

1. What is the purpose? What impact will it have on our community?
2. What is the task? What will I do?
3. What is the time commitment?
4. What support will I have? Who will I work with?
5. What will the experience be like for me?

Think of describing the position and opportunity in terms of posting a "want ad" and creating a sales pitch.

SALES PITCH AND WANT

Volunteers want to know

1. Purpose – What impact will this have on our community?
2. What is the task? What will I do?
3. What is the time commitment?
4. What support will I have? Who will I work with?
5. What will my experience be like?
What will I learn?

Kathy's Questions

Volunteer want ads provide answers

Create opportunity for busy parents socialize and learn with other families. Families who make friends and learn together find membership meaningful.

Recruit families. Help lead a discussion group from text provided.

2 out of 4 meetins over 6 months. Meetings are 1.5 hours.

Barb Green is the chair. She is a well respected educator in the community. Sarah Marks, our lifelong learning director, is staff.

We will learn some of the key trends impacting young families and educational strategies for insiring learning.

Vivian's Answers

In the above sales pitch, key barriers to volunteer involvement are removed. The committee chair thinks through the reasons a volunteer might be interested in the project and then tailors the sales pitch to match the prospect and the opportunity.

III. Relevance

While some large churches have volunteer development books that outline hundreds of volunteer tasks, most synagogues are less formal. It is important for leaders to have some idea of what they are asking the volunteer to do and the level of supervision and support they will need to provide. When we know our volunteers, we understand their motivation and skills. We have some idea about what would be appropriate work for them and how that work can be managed.

Rabbi Charles Simon describes what can happen when expectations are unclear and support is not provided:

"I say a volunteer is charged with a responsibility or a committee portfolio, but she is not provided with a clear understanding of the chain of command, the organization culture, or the limits of her authority. As a result she finds herself undermined, misdirected and encountering a host of unnecessary obstacles. If the experience is demoralizing, she finishes the required task and fades into the woodwork". (*Building a Successful Volunteer Culture*, 2009)

In our USCJ Webex series on Membership Engagement we encourage chairs to create a task list so that they can explain what they are asking prospecting members of the committee to work on. This helps chairs provide clear expectations.

The best ways to have a successful volunteer relationship is to get off to a good start with:

1. Clear expectations
2. An appropriate supervisory approach
3. Recognition that really matters

Ken Blanchard (*The One Minute Manager*) has developed a model for supervision based on the skills and motivation of the employee. He identifies four types of supervision for different situations. Leaders may direct, coach, consult or empower based on the volunteer and the task at hand.

Here is an adaptation of this approach to describe four synagogue situations:

- **Direct:** Joe is a brand new member. He is not very involved, but agrees to help set up tables for the Chanukah party. The chair directs him as to how they want to set up the room (10 rows of 20 chairs).
- **Coach:** Alan has been on several committees and has been a member for 7 years. He has agreed to develop a list of people to call to fill *shelach manot* (bags for Purim). The event chair will coach him by showing him a list of tasks and the times when the bags are to be produced. Alan knows enough people to get some volunteers.
- **Consult:** Joyce has been a fundraising event chair before. She has been asked to join a four-person leadership team for a big donor dinner. The leaders value Joyce's opinion. They invite her to help consult with them on the design of the event and the fundraising.
- **Empower:** Dana is a past president. She stepped away from leadership for a few years. The current president has brought her back and asked her to create a search committee for a new education director. The President empowers her to gather data on the best ways to conduct the search and to put a team together.

This management model challenges leaders to consider the tasks to delegate and the appropriate type of supervision required.

Leaders can communicate their expectations for a volunteer job by creating a Volunteer Job Description or a charter for a committee. The following is an example for communicating a volunteer opportunity.

VOLUNTEER TASK OUTLINE

Title: Homeless Shelter Team Worker

Purpose: The impact this will have on our community

Our men are involved in the mitzvah of _____. We provide shelter for up to ten men in our building.

Responsibilities: Tasks – What you will do?

Check our guests in at night. Ensure they get mattress, blanket, pillow. Spend the night and check them out in morning.

Training required

Review shelter information on synagogue website. Come one hour before your first night and review guide for volunteers with experienced shelter coordinator.

Support from staff and other volunteers

The synagogue custodian will make sure all materials are at the shelter. They will clean up space in the morning. The executive director can be reached for any emergency facility issues.

Time commitment

We would like at least one night per quarter from our men's shelter team workers.

Benefits: What will the experience be like for you?

What would it be like to be homeless – to be vulnerable? This work makes us appreciative for what we have and allows us to bring a shelter of peace to others by giving up one night per quarter. When you join the men's shelter team you are working shoulder to shoulder with men who share your values.

As we have seen throughout the Sulam for Current Leaders sessions, there are times when leaders are challenged to hold onto the reins of authority and control tightly. At other times leaders are called upon to delegate and empower others (SCL 3, The Delegation Plan). When new leaders assume the mantle of leadership it is essential that we acknowledge their efforts and their growth.

IV. Recognition

What is the first thing you see when you walk in a synagogue building? Some synagogue foyers are dimly lit. They have a few programs announcements. Others have plaques that are dedicated to the past presidents and members that have passed on.

A scene from a sacred community: In an entryway of a church in the Midwest, there is a brightly lit wall with about 50 pictures of their leading volunteers. Each had a personal statement. One read, “My name is John. My real job is on the youth committee. My other job is as a service manager at an auto dealership.”

It is clear for all to see that this congregation values volunteer service above all. They do not feature plaques about the past but rather showcase the people who are volunteering to build the future. They want you to see the faces of people who make a difference. With a wall of 50 pictures, there is a whole range of ages and backgrounds. A prospective volunteer could find someone who they could relate to and may wonder, “Could I be like John?”

Do you feature your volunteers? Do you have photos of people like Sue, mentioned above, so others can dream of making an impact too?

Members will look where their leaders look. That is why it is vital that leaders remember to turn our attention towards gratitude.

What other ways can you imagine to honor volunteers in your kehilla?

- Sukkot guests - honor different groups of volunteers each night. Volunteers are invited to have dinner in the synagogue’s sukkah.
- Have volunteers as *bimah* guests. Have them perform a key ritual role. They could read the prayer for the congregation and share one thing about their volunteer life that has been particularly rewarding. The congregation would agree to give volunteers 60 seconds of their time.
- Write profiles of volunteers and put them in the foyer on the wall or on a kiosk. Begin to build your wall of acknowledgement.

- Hold volunteer appreciation brunch with great food. Combine with a speaker or other programming to draw participants.
- Have a regular place on your website to highlight volunteers' stories. Ask volunteers to talk about why they volunteer, the experience they have had and the impact they feel they have made.
- Write personal letters using the Covenantal Caring Conversation format we discussed in SCL 4 to acknowledge contributions.

In the Accountability Plan (SCL 4) we also talked about the importance of grateful acknowledgement. When volunteers step up, we should recognize them with inspired acknowledgement. Volunteers want to know that leaders have taken notice of their work. It is important to have a plan to reward and recognize volunteer effort.

Conclusion:
Volunteerism as
Avodah

Throughout Sulam for Current Leaders we have talked about how leaders build sacred community. It starts with a mission and vision that is grounded in ancient texts and wisdom. Each SCL unit reflects this value by beginning with text study. The Torah pays great attention to the building of the Tabernacle and of the systems of laws and commandments that make the Israelite community sacred.

When volunteers come into the sanctuary to worship or to volunteer they are doing sacred work. In Hebrew *avodah* means “work”, but it also means “devotion.” When you’re asked to do a task, it’s just *avodah* – work. What transforms work into devotion? It is the infusion of the sacred.

Ultimately, we’re trying to create sacred servants. People who are uplifted by what they do and who lift up people with whom they work. Eldad and Medad saw themselves as sacred servants, bringing in hopeful energy to the community around them.

How do we nurture this in our communities? Having a spirited vision is not enough. We also need to create clear assignments so that volunteers and staff can work as partners in making their shared vision a reality.

In the Accountability Plan (SCL 4) we do *heshbon nefesh* (self assessment). Have we been effective leaders or good followers? Have we set goals and celebrated success?

Our Sulam leadership team wants to recognize your efforts. You have been on a journey to strengthen your leadership. You have encouraged leaders to explore the Sulam for Current Leaders readings. You have found ways to do some of the experiential workshops. You have chosen to take some next steps to enrich the experience of your board volunteers, to clarify the tasks you expect them to do and to help the entire leadership develop a more sacred kehilla.

Your Sulam leadership team feels encouraged because we believe that each congregation has talents and gifts. At USCJ it is our responsibility and privilege to help you connect the dots and weave these talents together.

The six SCL sessions provide the rungs of a leadership ladder. When your kehilla leadership engages these units we all learn more about how leadership takes shape. With every session you climb higher and higher. We hope that you go from strength to strength as you move your leaders up the Sulam (ladder) of increased engagement, learning and *avodah*.