



Creating a Team: Stakeholders, Dispositions and Skills

1) Stakeholders: On a very basic level, think about the people in your congregation who care about the issue at hand: members of the religious school committee, parents of children in the program, parents of children who have recently become b'nai mitzvah, etc. These stakeholders have very real feedback, ideas, and concerns. Invite people who can identify with the experiences you are addressing, but who can also look at the “big picture” beyond their personal agendas and consider the needs of the congregation as a whole.

2) New Perspectives: As a congregation, you seek to serve and inspire families; therefore, it is integral that you incorporate their insights into the process. Getting the perspectives of people who are not employed by the congregation can help you look at your current program with fresh eyes. Throughout this journey, you will have to address the question of whether the problems you are solving are issues that you care about or issues that your families care about, and you will have to ask what you can do to learn more about your families. It will be invaluable to have these lay leaders at the table when starting to answer some of these questions.

3) Champions of Change: In order to change the culture around engagement in congregations, you need to engage the community in the process. The lay leaders on your team will be your strongest influencers and your greatest partners in championing changes to the rest of the community. Lay leaders can communicate the plans, progress, successes, and failures of the process to the broader community in ways that staff can't. As W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne write in “The Tipping Point Leadership,” “To turn a mere strategy into a movement, people must recognize what needs to be done and yearn to do it themselves. But don't try reforming your whole organization; that's cumbersome and expensive. Instead, motivate key influencers--persuasive people with multiple connections. Like bowling kingpins hit straight on, they topple all the other pins.”

4) Diversity of Skills: Look for diverse skills, expertise and experience: your team should include open-minded members who are problem solvers, risk takers, and strong communicators. Dr. Isa Aron discusses lay leadership teams in [Becoming a Congregation of Learners](#), writing: “The following questions should be asked: Was a balance struck between doers and thinkers, between those who enjoy process and who like to see results? ... The watchwords here, as with the readiness group, are the diversity and complementarity.” (p. 117)

5) Unusual Suspects: “Big names” can be helpful—but not always. Getting well-known congregational leaders on your team can give your efforts more credibility; however, it’s also important to have members who are able and willing to invest time in this initiative. Often, congregations invite the same lay leaders over and over again to lead and participate in new initiatives and staff committees. The challenge with “recycled leadership” is that it leads to burnout. New voices and fresh perspectives add immeasurably to the understanding of the situation and the imagined outcomes. Including unusual suspects may also lead to expanded congregational leadership.

6) Good Chemistry: A team with good chemistry will be more successful in overcoming tensions and disagreement along the way. Conversations about making change and taking risks will hopefully create strong and tense conversations around important issues. This is expected when you are experimenting and pushing boundaries. As Dr. Aron explains, “the most important predictor of a leadership team’s success is the willingness and ability of its members to acknowledge and manage tensions. The enthusiasm that characterizes the early stages of the team’s work together is tested when disagreements arise either over substantive issues or over personal and working styles” (Becoming a Congregation of Learners, 124).