



much alive, living deep within our hearts, here in Africa. And similarly, every night, I am reminded of her ethical will: to make a difference in the world, contributing something positive. And then I like to think that somehow, some-

where, she must be looking down at us and smiling.

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## Rabbinic Partnership: A New Model

*Mark A. Hershey, Shira Milgrom, and Tom Wiener*

**A** synagogue needs to be a place that has a spiritual infrastructure. Spiritual infrastructures are not like corporate structures, because unlike financial power, spiritual power cannot be hoarded, it can only be shared. Today, power in the synagogue will come from creating an environment of Jewish life so compelling, so intellectually engaging, so supportive in times of doubt and sorrow, so filled with celebration and learning and community that we would not be able to imagine our lives without it.

As rabbis, we cannot cite statistics about the demise of the Jewish family if we participate in its neglect, nor speak with our congregants about relationships if we do not tap into the Jewish resources that support our marriages. We cannot teach or motivate or inspire if ministering to a congregation leaves us no time to study and replenish the spiritual sources from which we draw. We do not want to create a rabbinic-congregation relationship that makes a hypocrite out of the rabbi. Rabbis also need to be Jews.

With so many people speaking the language of partnerships — law firms, physician and health care teams, and religious institutions — our synagogue began to question a new model of rabbinic leadership. The director of Rabbinic Placement for the Reform movement warned us that there is only one obstacle to the partnership model — a rabbi's healthy ego — and this would be both the partnership's greatest asset and obstacle.

Some congregants were concerned that without a "senior" rabbi, no one would be empowered to "make decisions." But we found that while the ultimate decision-makers are the congregants, critical decisions in the synagogue are reached by consensus, following a rabbinic/clergy/staff/lay leadership partnership of open, mutually respectful dialogue and assessment.

This partnership model actually helps decision-making because it forces the lay leadership and rab-

bis to acknowledge that no one person is "the boss" and that the synagogue is not a corporation with one chief executive or controlling shareholder. Ours is a community drawn together by a common purpose and led by talented and committed professionals and lay leaders who share a common goal. It continues to embrace constructive change such as a groundbreaking joint adult education program with neighboring Orthodox, Conservative, and Reconstructionist synagogues.

What could be more sensible than two full-time rabbis working together as a team? How humane to be in a family-friendly and rabbi-friendly pulpit where every other Shabbat evening is free from congregational duties! Who would not want to share administrative tasks and work closely with families at lifecycle events?

Congregants see that we maintain a strong friendship and partnership and enjoy each other's company in small settings as well as publicly on the *bimah*. No one ever tries to play one of us against the other because we successfully project our friendship and mutual respect. A great joy of rabbinic work has always been the collegial and collaborative creative process of sitting with other rabbis, cantors, and educators in an atmosphere where the highest priority was the class, program, workshop, or worship experience being planned. It is so much more satisfying to work with others when hierarchy is not an issue.

Weekly, we spend a morning sharing the state of our own lives and the status of synagogue programs, and then we dream about new possibilities for our community and work toward fulfilling those dreams.

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