

Judi Ratner: I'd suggest that someone who has the trust and esteem of the congregation meet with those who oppose the merger and ask, "What is it about the proposed merger that is most problematic for you? What would it take for you to be okay with it?" The listener would let the opponents talk and also interject many clarifying questions in order to glean important core information that might not have been considered. An elderly opponent might say, "I won't drive at night, and if the temple moved across town, I couldn't make it home before sunset." Another congregant might say, "I don't drive at all, so my neighbor takes me to services, but this location is too far for her to drive me." The congregation could then respond to these concerns, reconsidering the timing of services at the new location or potentially subsidizing or paying for cab or bus rides there. In this way, a congregation can conceive of creative solutions that can go a long way in allaying people's apprehensions.

Also, be honest with members regarding why the congregation is seriously considering the merger. Some congregants may not know that the temple only has enough funds to get through the next two years, after which it would have to shut down. Once people understand the rationale and are asked for input, they are much less likely to feel the final decision was rammed down their throats.

Rabbi Wolfman: Successful transitions allow individuals to mourn the loss of "their" building and to give voice to the things they hold close to their hearts. It is often helpful to bring to the new synagogue a piece of the past that was central to the congregation's identity, such as a *bimah* lectern, *ner tamid* (eternal light), or memorial wall. Also important is giving a role—such as "synagogue historian," sharing the sacred story of the congregation—to those most affected by the change.

Shirley Gordon: The leadership of both synagogues needs to recognize the fear of loss that many members of the smaller congregation will likely feel during such times of transition. They may feel uprooted and ask: Will the "individual" become unimportant? What will happen to the *yarzheit* plaques and donated sacred objects? Is our identity in jeopardy? Do we matter?

Both congregations could be helped to understand each other's concerns. Developing ways of honoring each congregation's members, sacred objects, and traditions will pave the road to a successful new community.

9 Be persistent. Don't give up when it appears you've hit a brick wall.

That's when many breakthroughs happen; but they require hard work, patience, and optimism—the belief that things can get better.

10 Ensure that the meeting's closing includes a summary, clear next steps, some movement toward healing, and a blessing for the community. For example (from the URJ booklet "*Brit Kodesh—Sacred Community*"): "*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech haolam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tizivanu la'asok b'tzorchai hatzibur. Praised are you Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who sanctified us through mitzvot and has commanded us to engage in the needs of our community.*"

—Judi Ratner

RJ: *The temple board learns from a reliable source that the rabbi, who is married, is having an affair with a congregant. The temple president meets the rabbi privately and inquires whether the rumor is true; the rabbi responds that it is a private matter and refuses to deny or confirm the accusation. The board suspends the rabbi without providing the congregation with an explanation of his alleged offense. Many congregants rally to support the rabbi and demand that the board provide details to justify its action. The attorney advises the board not to furnish further information until the leadership concludes its investigation. How should the leadership proceed?*

Rabbi Rubinstein: Yikes. This is a congregational and rabbinic nightmare. Whether the rumor is true or not does not mitigate a hurtful, dangerous, and potentially ruinous outcome. It's incumbent upon the lay leadership to have a direct conversation with the rabbi and say, "Look, this is what we've heard. What's going on?" If the rabbi's response is, "It's all untrue," then the leadership needs to ascertain whether the rabbi's spouse is aware of the hurtful rumors to keep her from being blindsided by them. If the rabbi denies culpability, the congregation can do little more than suggest that the couple seek counseling to deal with the pain and anger of being the focus of unfounded rumors.

But if, as in the above scenario, the rabbi neither confirms nor denies the accusation or responds, "It's none of your business," the congregational leadership has a right to assert that the moral behavior of their spiritual leader certainly is the congregation's business, and to refer the matter to the Central Conference of American Rabbis' Ethics Committee. If the leadership fails to take action, the congregation's well-being is placed in jeopardy. Moreover, a rabbi's violation of ethical codes is a matter of concern to the entire Reform Movement. If found in violation, the rabbi can be suspended from the CCAR until he/she meets the Ethics Committee's particular expectations for readmission.

I find it difficult to provide further guidance in an issue of such magnitude, as no single roadmap is applicable for every situation. This is also a legal matter requiring consultation with professional counsel.

If the rabbi requests some time off to address the issues with his/her spouse and says, without going into

