

Siegel Vexler, who has a master's degree in education, constructed *Atidaynu's* curriculum by integrating congregational program ideas recorded in the URJ's Communicate! ([urj.org/communicate](http://urj.org/communicate)) database. Her highly interactive class—comprised of about a dozen carefully selected congregants—covers such practicalities as temple demographics, personal communication styles, reading a budget, and delivering a *d'var* Torah. Oh, and there's homework. If the next class is about principles of Reform Judaism, students might have to respond to a speech by Union for Reform Judaism President Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie.

Bresnick says that *Atidaynu* has made him a better leader than he otherwise would have been. He now understands Temple Beth Or history and politics; board members' strengths, weaknesses, values, and approaches to problems; and the relationship between the temple and the URJ (which furnishes *Atidaynu* with expert speakers free of charge.)

Notably, of *Atidaynu's* 25 graduates, three have become temple president, and almost all the others have served on the board, taught in the religious school, or chaired a committee. Plus, Siegel Vexler says, "they serve with many new skills and strategies under their belts."



How should synagogues best identify, recruit, and train future leaders? Here are seven expert suggestions:

**1. Always look for potential leaders.** Identifying knowledgeable, active, and experienced congregants should be a year-round task for clergy, board members, and staff, says Rabbi David Fine (**photo #5**), congregational systems senior consultant for the Union for Reform Judaism. "To search for potential leaders only when the nominating committee gathers is shortsighted. Instead, pay attention to who is involved, who is speaking up, and who is showing up. Develop leadership radar."

**2. Make a personal request.** Rabbi Fine recommends sitting down with a potential board member to explain why you think s/he would be a great leader

and a good match for the synagogue. "Otherwise," he says, "the potential leader might think, 'If you want just anybody, then you don't need me. I'm not a space filler.'" Just having this conversation can strengthen a congregation's connection to the temple, he says, "and that's important in and of itself, because ultimately a congregation is about relationships."

**3. Inform leaders about the congregation before they take office.** "Don't assume leaders can learn on the job," says Judith Erger (**photo #6**), the URJ's lead governance and leadership development specialist. "Leadership is not intuitive." She advises that, prior to assuming office, all leaders be educated about the congregation's history, its purpose and mission, demographic information, finances, by-laws and procedures, facilities, and URJ resources. Many congregations have developed a "Leadership *Brit*" ([urj.org/cong/board/leadership](http://urj.org/cong/board/leadership)), a covenantal agreement between leader and congregation which articulates expectations and underscores that leadership is a sacred responsibility.

**4. Consider multiple avenues for leadership training.** "Knowledge can be delivered in a myriad of ways," says Marcy Balogh, president of Ba-Lo Consulting in Denver, "including a webinar, a book group, a retreat, a Skype coaching call..." Congregation Emanu El in Houston ([emanuelhouston.org](http://emanuelhouston.org)) organized a day-long leadership training conference featuring high-powered experts from the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds—and a number of the 125 attendees have since signed up for committees and temple auxiliaries, such as Sisterhood and Brotherhood.

**5. Keep it Jewish; keep it holy.** Rabbi Norman M. Cohen (**photo #7**) of Bet Shalom Congregation in Minnetonka, Minnesota ([betshalom.org](http://betshalom.org)) begins each Bet Shalom Leadership Development Program session with a relevant Torah selection, such as when Jethro counsels his overworked son-in-law Moses to delegate responsibility so that he can spend more time

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opment" retreats. Now, 20 and 30-year-old Jews—many of whom had grown up in the temple's youth group—have been trained and empowered to facilitate most of the retreat, along with parent-leaders.

"Our young adults have



NCSI RETREAT.

demonstrated to our teenagers that one can maintain a fulfilling connection [to NCSI] after high school, college, and leaving the nest," says Rabbi Wendi Geffen. "And the teens have responded with overwhelming acceptance and interest. Besides developing close personal relationships with the B&Bers, many have since commented that they hope to be a B&Ber when they are older. Whereas it proved difficult for high-schoolers to visualize themselves as someone their parents' age, it proved easy and meaningful to see themselves as young adults. Also, the program has helped our young professionals gain 'feel-good' Jewish experiences as the drivers [of those experiences], not the driven. And as the young adults and parent-leaders talked about their personal theological beliefs, annual *tzedakah* contributions, and more, the young adults were able to better see themselves as adults rather than big kids."

For more info about B&B email [rabbigeffen@nsci.org](mailto:rabbigeffen@nsci.org). To learn more about URJ incubator grants for membership building: [urj.org/cong/membership/grants](http://urj.org/cong/membership/grants).