

2. To Get Heard, Start by Listening

Here's a little social media success secret: Don't worry about talking. Start by listening. Make listening a habit. Go back to the social norms of face-to-face conversations or telephone chats with loved ones and friends. These relationships are successful because they balance talking and listening.

Before social media, it was hard and costly to listen. The hub-and-spokes model, which required listening to members one by one, simply was not feasible. Today, in just a few minutes of scanning Facebook posts or tweets, you can get the pulse of your community, do "small talk" online, and connect with a dozen individuals in meaningful, relevant, and personal ways.

Gabby Kozak, membership and communications director at Temple Sinai in Oakland, California, knows this well. When she read a status update on Facebook that temple members had been in a car accident, she immediately reached

out to them and notified the clergy and staff, all of whom leapt into action.

"Within an hour of my reading the news, they received calls from one of our rabbis, our executive director, and me offering support and deepening their connection to the Temple Sinai community," Gabby says. "While the family had not called the synagogue for help, they were sharing the news on Facebook. It is Temple Sinai's responsibility—and all of ours—to be listening."

Another example: Leza, a member of Congregation Beth Israel (CBI) in Charlottesville, Virginia, posted on her Facebook profile that she was struggling to explain the death of a family pet to her young children who were wanting to fly up to heaven to visit the dog. Among those who offered condolences and support was Ellen Dietrick, then CBI director of Early Childhood Education, who shared developmental and Jewish insights on how to talk with children about death and recommended books to read with them. The public Facebook dialogue both strengthened Leza's relationship with the congregation and allowed other young Jewish families to learn from Leza's experience.

3. Ask Questions

Once you're listening, start asking questions so you can listen some more! Rabbi Arnie Samlan, R.J.E. asks a weekly Friday question on Facebook, "What did we learn this week?" which generates dozens of responses—everything from "I learned about the reproductive system of a hen" to "[I learned] to have a little more faith in myself than I might otherwise deem I deserve." Some congregations and schools make their Facebook pages a platform for communal knowledge sharing, asking such practical, relevant questions as "What's your best tip to keep young kids engaged at a Passover seder?" or "How do you talk to your teenagers about forgiveness at Yom Kippur?" You might even consider asking questions that could influence your strategy and programs, such as "What do you want to learn about Judaism this year?"

Rabbi David Levy at Temple Shalom in Succasunna, New Jersey is using Twitter, Facebook, and his blog to engage the larger temple community—

many of whom were not regulars at adult education classes or services—in learning and discussions. Conducting what he calls a "Social Sermon," he posts text and questions online, receives comments, and later delivers a sermon that weaves in the communal conversation. Several members who have put their toes in the water online are now attending Shabbat services and in-person classes more often, he says. "And because Twitter is more of a dialogue, it has enhanced many of my real world connections with congregants." He's even had prospective members walk in the door and say, "I already know you through Twitter."

4. Share Stories and Make Connections

Temple Israel in Memphis, Tennessee uses Facebook to help make the 1,500+-member congregation feel more intimate and allow people to get to know each other better. So when the synagogue office heard that another member had helped member Emilie Rattner by changing her flat tire, the staff (with Emilie's permission) shared her story through Facebook (see photo, page 8). Result: community members connected Emilie's name, face, and story; contributed to building their culture of *mitzvot*; and illustrated how the synagogue community lives outside of the building walls.

The warmth of the Temple Israel community probably was apparent to Scott Biales, a newcomer to Memphis, who posted a question on the congregation's Facebook page (see photo, page 8).

There are three lessons here.

First, if a single young adult is reaching out to a synagogue, he/she may be doing that research at 9:00 P.M., and not during the typical hours the synagogue staff is on call. Our Jewish lives, needs, and curiosities work on a 24/7 clock, and social media tools can help congregations engage current and prospective members beyond synagogue business hours.

Second, congregations trying to strengthen community need to build more points of possible connection, and Facebook is an important, inexpensive, and efficient way to do so. A prospective member may get his/her first impression of your congregation on your Facebook page. So, what does yours say? Does it

SOCIAL MEDIA BOOT CAMP

To help your synagogue succeed in the networked age, the Union for Reform Judaism is offering member congregations a year-long training program on social media tools and strategy powered by Darim Online which features:

Webinars: 12 webinar trainings with three tracks to help beginners and experts alike, including an introduction to social media tools, strategic use of common tools, and the synagogue as a networked nonprofit. You can take these courses easily from almost any modern computer.

Sharefests! At four Sharefest! webinars, congregations will present their work, explain how they tackled a particular challenge, and invite community conversation. In addition, Darim Online consultants will answer questions and/or give feedback during their Open Office Hours webinars.

The program continues through the end of 2012. To sign up: urj.org/bootcamp. Additional questions: urjbootcamp@darimonline.org.