



# Intentional Onboarding Inspired by Jewish Wisdom

By Rachel Shamash Schneider

When I walked into the Jim Joseph Foundation office on my first day, I was greeted with smiles and signs with the words *B'ruchim HaBa'im!!* and *Welcome!!* on my door and computer. As I reflect on that day and the months since, I am full of gratitude for the Foundation's commitment to a thoughtful and genuine welcome.

Over the past decade, I've experienced welcomes of all kinds when starting a new job and welcoming new team members onto my own teams. The truth is, I have probably spent more time on the *Welcomer* side vs. *Welcomee* side, having run a small project management business for five years and managed new employee onboarding for the past few years in my leadership role at [The Hivery](#), a women-focused community space. I'm a people-person to my core (and a dog-person) and I am cognizant of the important and ongoing connections among people, culture and impact.

**With a little bit of intention, a thoughtfully designed onboarding plan can go a long way when orienting a new person into any culture and setting them up for success.** As my first 90 days at the Foundation come to a close, I am excited to share some of the highlights of my onboarding experiences with the hope that it will inform other organizations' "welcoming efforts." Below are six reflections on what has helped make me feel connected, heard, and valued in my new workplace:

1. **Face time.** There is something special about 1:1 meeting time, especially when you're getting acquainted to a new team. My first day started at 9 am with a 2-hour orientation meeting with my manager. Over the course of the meeting, almost every team member popped into my office to say hello. Together, my manager and I reviewed my onboarding plan and first week (including pre-scheduled meetings with most team members), and the "who's who" across the organization. We met three times my first week, then twice per week for three weeks, and are now meeting once a week. My manager's commitment to my development and the entire team's open-

door policy has given me time and space to settle in, ask big and small questions, and the foundation to build meaningful relationships.

2. **A culture of listening and learning ... before doing.** On my first day, my manager introduced me to my "Learning Portfolio" – a collection of 16 grantee-partners that I would help support in the months to come. The portfolio was thoughtfully designed based on my interests (including grants focused on teen engagement and women and girls in Jewish life) and gave me the opportunity to shadow every member of the Program Team. This meant joining grantee-partner calls and meetings, supporting various projects associated with ongoing relationship building and grant monitoring, and more. Most importantly, it has created a support system for me and opportunities to learn from and work with team members with different backgrounds, perspectives, and work styles. Looking back over the first few months, I deeply value this support system and the way it is enabling me to get a lay of the land through participating in the Foundation's day-to-day work.

3. **The power of "we."** Something special that I've noticed has been the language choices used by team members at the Foundation. One such choice (of many) that I've been grateful for is the inclusive language used on calls and in meetings where I'm joining mostly as a listener and sometimes as a contributor. Across the Program Team, there is an intentional approach of speaking from the "we" vs. the "I," which provides an invitation to participate. This inclusive language along with purposeful pauses in conversation have encouraged me, as the newest member of our team, to elevate my voice.

4. **Celebrations of all shapes and sizes.** Starting this job during the fall Jewish holiday season meant dedicated time in the office (and outside) for reflection and celebration. The way in which my colleagues celebrate with one another has been particularly notable with all sorts of milestones acknowledged – a team member's two-year work anniversary (shared by email with congratulations), birthday gatherings, and a harvest lunch under a *Sukkah* at a team member's home, to name a few. I was brought into this sense of comradery from day one, when I opened my new work email inbox to a flood of welcome messages from the team and Board. It continued a few weeks later when my birthday arrived, and I was surprised by the entire team taking time away from their desks to sing me happy birthday with candles and my favorite dessert. These celebrations have set the tone for an environment that welcomes joyous gatherings, providing me with an eagerness to continue to create meaningful experiences with and between colleagues. As a result, I feel more comfortable and connected with all my team members and don't hesitate to reach out with questions, suggest new ideas, and continue the relationship building that grows in these celebratory moments.

5. **Meaningful Jewish Wisdom.** The Foundation recently shared its new theory of change, a strategic road map that is the result two years of listening, learning, and planning. The Foundation's aspiration statement reads, "Inspired by Jewish learning experiences, all Jews, their families and their friends, lead connected, meaningful, purpose-filled lives and make positive contributions to their communities and the world." With every passing day and conversation with colleagues and grantee partners, this statement becomes more meaningful. On my first day, I participated in my first-ever *chevrutah*, a learning session with my manager. We had a conversation about our staff values and what they mean to each of us – *b'Tzelem Elohim* (respect and humility), *Hitlamdut* (learning), *Areivut* (teamwork), *Shleimut* (integrity), and *Avodah* (giving back). In the months since, I've gone back to these values to frame my ongoing learning and have added new lessons and lived experiences to their meaning. I'm also now finding myself seeking answers and embracing new rituals that are already enriching my life in exciting ways. I've found that Jewish wisdom is prioritized and made accessible. For example, I have attended multiple Jewish learning sessions led by scholars and grantee-partners where the content was intended to inform everyone's work. I now see how Jewish learning can be not only the end goal of a Jewish organization's work, but also a means to achieving its goals as well.

6. **Elevating New Voices.** I am feeling empowered and lifted up by the Foundation's commitment to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) – internally, throughout its portfolio, and across the Jewish nonprofit landscape. This commitment means deep and ongoing listening and learning. This commitment means I have the opportunity to explore new grant opportunities and work on incredible women-focused grants including [SRE Coalition](#), [Moving Traditions](#), [Yeshivat Maharat](#), and [At The Well](#) (among others). This commitment means I have the opportunity to participate in women's groups and gatherings outside of the office. With the Foundation's blessing, I've joined [Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy](#) (EPIP) and [Voices For Good](#), and am being encouraged to continue to identify programs that will inspire me to be a champion for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Jewish community and beyond. It's incredibly inspiring to be a part of the systems change work to amplify voices and advance equitable communities in which every person can lead connected, meaningful, purpose-filled lives inspired by Jewish learning experiences.

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While a new employee welcome may start with first impressions and kind gestures, that welcome has the ability to stay beyond the first day with intention. I'm hopeful that these stories and reflections can help organizations preparing to do their own onboarding do so more intentionally, leading with their values and aspirations.

We know that organizations can drive more sustained impact with more intention and attention to their people. It's important to remember that people must be at the center of whatever we choose as our sacred work so that they become part of the fabric of our organizations and our impact.

*Rachel Shamash Schneider joined the Jim Joseph Foundation as a Program Officer in October 2019*

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