



## Four Lessons for the Jewish Community from Disney's CEO

By Dina Rabhan

I recently devoured Bob Iger's new book, *The Ride of a Lifetime: Lessons learned from 15 years as CEO of the Walt Disney Company*.

The book is abundant with powerful leadership lessons and a behind-the-scenes look at the incredible growth of the Walt Disney Company, which is now worth more than \$130 billion and recognized as the premier entertainment company, boasting dozens of brands we all know and love. I am admittedly obsessed with anything related to media, but I also know that all of us in the Jewish community would benefit from Iger's lessons.

### **Lesson #1: Innovate or Die**

Innovation might be a hackneyed word in the Jewish community, but it is not overused in practice. The Disney CEO shared what innovation looked like in his work. Taking great risks and pushing himself and his team to think entirely differently about their business. It meant taking an honest look at the company's failings and admitting that others were producing better quality entertainment than they were. Innovation led Disney to buy Pixar, Marvel, ESPN and more. It also led them to their boldest decision, to create and launch Disney Plus, their new direct-to-consumer streaming platform.

Why was this bold and innovative?

Because Disney had to take a brutally honest look at their existing models and their future and make a decision to either hold on tight to their tried and true businesses (can you say Blockbuster?) or make serious changes; changes that would cannibalize their own movie and television businesses and incur short term financial losses while catapulting them into the future.

This is the real meaning of the aphorism "Innovate or Die." It's not "innovate or choose the safer, more comfortable option and stay the same."

The options are either do it differently or lose the chance to do it at all.

Sometimes it feels like the Jewish community treats innovation as a trendy, nice option. But the important truth is that innovation is a necessity for survival, and if we don't do it differently, we will lose our chance to do it at all.

## **Lesson # 2: Lead with Courage**

When the stakes are high, we can end up leading with fear as a protective instinct. Fear compels us to build a bulwark against whatever we believe is threatening us.

This is important for the Jewish community to be particularly mindful of now. Not only do we have our internal challenges of Jews opting out of affiliating with our nation and faith, we are faced with increasing external challenges like the troubling rise in global anti-Semitism. This can push us into a fearful place. But leading with fear is defensive and can result in doubling down on the tried and true old models, which are insufficient for our brave new world.

The Jewish community has a choice. We can let our fears lead the way, or we can lead courageously and proactively and embrace the changes already at our doorstep. We can unleash our collective creativity to do things better and more boldly than ever before.

Leading with courage means being unafraid of the resistance and the cynicism, the old guard's judgment and disapproval. Courageous leadership will forge a new path, even if it means doing it alone, and demonstrating to all of the naysayers the beautiful potential that exists.

## **Lesson # 3: Swing for the Fences**

It's natural to fear failure and to set goals that are modest and achievable, but Iger reminds us, "Long shots aren't usually as long as they seem. With enough thoughtfulness and commitment, the boldest ideas can be executed." We need to embrace innovation and lead with courage to be able to start swinging for the fences, shooting for the moon and setting our sights on ambitious goals. Because there is a lot that we need to do and now is not the time to think small.

## **Lesson #4: Ordinary people can do extraordinary things**

Bob Iger is just a regular guy from a middle-class family on Long Island (no offense, Bob). He was not a genius or in the gifted and talented classes. Bob was a B student who shoveled snow, babysat, took a summer job as a janitor in his high school and cleaned gum from underneath the desks. He also made pizza at the local Pizza Hut to put himself through an ordinary (non-Ivy League) college. Ordinary people can do extraordinary things.

The Jewish community has all of the human resources we need to address our myriad of challenges. We just need to believe in ourselves and our extraordinary capabilities and be relentlessly motivated to make change happen. Believing in our superpowers will force us to look within and recognize that we alone must do what needs to get done.

Disney is all about imagination and storytelling, and as the CEO of a media company, so am I. Imagine what the Jewish community would look like if we took Bob Iger's lessons to heart and ran after innovation, led with courage, set our sights so high while swinging for the fences, and believed in the capacity of ordinary people to do extraordinary things. That's a story I'd like to tell.

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