



May the Fourth Be with You, to Invest in Your Staff

By Mark S. Young

What I appreciate most about the tradition of the Jedi is that we generally find an absence of Jedi desiring to be in the limelight. Rather, each Jedi master sees their key career objective to help the next generation fulfill their own Jedi potential – Obi Wan to Anakin, Yoda to Luke, Luke to Rey. Whether you are a Star Wars fan or not, we also know the saying, “may the force be with you.” When I hear this charge I hear it as a validation for a management style that prioritizes the training and investment in one’s protégés, and to see this as the top priority in a Jedi master’s work.

Joyfully, Star Wars fans have adopted every May 4th as Star Wars day. As many of us wish each other not only a *Shabbat Shalom* but also “may the fourth be with you” this *Shabbat*, may this also be a reminder and charge for us to help the next generation fulfill their own potential and make our role for those of us responsible for managing staff to properly invest in them and honor them as the top priority in our work.

May the 4th, or 54, also has a numerical significance in Jewish tradition. 54 is three times *chai* (18) or life, a multiple often used when investing in charitable causes or writing a check to the *bnai’ mitzvah*. It was no coincidence that six years ago this week when I posted the [\\$54,000 Strategy](#) piece both in the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* and on this website that I suggested a multiple of *chai* as the new base line salary for entry-level staff that we in the Jewish nonprofit sector should strive for. Properly and meaningfully investing in staff gives life and health three times over: 1) it strengthens and further motivates the individual who receives the proper investment, 2) it strengthens and increases the productivity of the organization in which they serve and 3) it strengthens and nurtures the broader community that is serviced by that individual and their organization’s work.

Six years on, I am delighted to see that today both the landscape and dialogue around proper staff investment, management, and culture change in our sector has fundamentally changed. We now have, for example, the survey findings and CEO onboarding training of [Leading Edge](#), a re-surgent vibrant [JPRO Network](#), talent and work culture initiatives from Hillel International, Moishe House, Foundation for Jewish Camp, and JCC Association, and new organizations such as [Sacred Spaces](#) as well as

the [Safe Respect Equity \(SRE\) Coalition](#) working to reduce abuses and advance respect in the workplace. We also have many more Jewish leadership and management training institutes and initiatives, with gratitude to a multitude of visionaries and generous funders, for educators, leaders, and managers in our sector to master the skills of properly investing and valuing our staff. We have prioritized doing our part at JTS which includes, but is not limited to, our William Davidson School [Leadership Commons](#) suite of Jewish educational leadership institutes and initiatives.

Yet we are only scratching the surface. No matter how many and how far reaching these regional or continental initiatives may be, the most critical difference can only be made in the working relationship between the employee and their manager, the Jedi apprentice and the Jedi master. I have benefited myself from and am in deep gratitude to the managers that have nurtured and inspired my growth.

Over the better part of the last two years I have been writing and editing my first book on how we can best *Bless Our Workforce*, a follow up to my similarly named [ELI Talk](#). I have interviewed thirteen mid-career Jewish professionals for this project and asked them, among other questions, what motivates them in their work, what discourages them, and what makes them feel valued or blessed as a Jewish professional.

As I complete the book and surface its many major take-aways, there is a common refrain among every professional with whom I spoke. When a mentor took them under their wing, guided them, and gave them the tools to thrive, they became motivated to stay in our field. When a supervisor demonstrated their care, gave voice to, and regularly helped address the professional's talents, aspirations, and challenges, the professional felt valued, inspired, and became more committed to stay at that organization and in this field.

There is much to do to ensure that our sector is indeed the best place to work. Like the Jedi, we must harness the natural good forces inside each of us to embrace our destiny: to help those next in line to fulfill their own potential. In doing so, we will strike back against the evil forces of turnover, conflict, and mediocrity, and realize a new hope of a sector with staff fully engaged and inspired, thriving organizations and flourishing Jewish community. May the force and fourth be with us, now and always.

Mark S. Young is the managing director of the Leadership Commons at the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). Mark is also a board member and local groups chair of JPRO Network. Mark is currently completing his first book Bless Our Workforce: Stories of Jewish Professionals

that Will Change the Way We Manage Our People, which he aims to have published later this year.

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