



Sulam for Current Leaders: The Accountability Plan

The case of Sarah, the Membership Chair

Sarah agreed to be the new membership chair of her congregations when the new board was formed in the spring. She had worked with the past chair on and off over the last three years. She is a good hands-on worker. She delivered all of the “welcome to the community” baskets to new members and enjoyed helping with the new member Shabbat.

During the budget preparation process in March the next year, the president set a goal of 20 new memberships. Membership had been flat or down over the last five years. In an e-mail to Sarah after the board meeting, the president outlined the goal of 20 new membership and explained his desire for the membership committee to do some focus groups with recent new members. He hoped that this research would help the membership committee develop some new outreach approaches. He emphasized the necessity for keeping the board informed about this important effort. The executive committee was copied on the e-mail.

Sarah originally agreed to be the new chair because she likes people and thought she would get to connect with more of the community. However, the job seemed to have expanded beyond her capacity. She did not respond to the e-mail highlighting the new expectations for the committee. She did briefly mention focus groups at one of her first committee meetings, but this item was to be discussed at another time. No one on the committee had shown much interest in this initiative. With Sarah’s professional job starting to require more of her time, the membership committee has not met with any regularity. Months later the executive committee is reviewing membership numbers as the High Holidays approach. The officers are again concerned that they see little membership growth.

They remember the e-mail directive to do focus groups and research effective outreach strategies.

They ask the president when they could expect that membership report. Some executive committee members have begun to believe that Sarah is doing a poor job as membership chair.

Questions for discussion:

- Did the board utilize Sarah strengths?
- What did Sarah think her job was?
- What did the executive committee want her to do?
- Was the executive committee request reasonable and realistic? Were they fair in their assessment of her role as chair?