



The Top 6 Things We Can Learn from Small Jewish Communities

1. The “Showing-Up-For-Minyan” Mentality

Have you ever been asked to be the 10th person for a *minyan*? There's a sense of responsibility that comes with accepting this request. Your presence is intimately tied not just to the success of the *minyan*, but the existence of the *minyan* overall.

In small Jewish communities, every program – religious or not – comes with a “showing-up-for-*minyan*” mentality. I could tell you countless stories about the parents that leave work early or drive 45 minutes to get their children to Hebrew school on a Tuesday afternoon. Or the families that refuse to miss a single PJ library program. When I ask them why, the answer is always the same: “we know if we don't make a consistent effort to show up, these sorts of programs won't happen.”

2. It's All About the Volunteers

Volunteers are an essential part of every Jewish community, large or small. So, what's the difference in small Jewish communities? When paid staff are few and far in between, volunteers do EVERYTHING. Cook, clean, program, administer, handle HR, educate, manage finances, sort garbage, paint the synagogue, etc. You name it, volunteers in a small community have done it. It is not uncommon to find volunteers committing 40+ hours a week to their Jewish institutions in small communities. Is it any wonder that these volunteers become some of the most dedicated and committed Jewish communal leaders?

3. The “We-Can't-Afford-to-Lose-a-Single-Family” Attitude

Have you ever been in a small Jewish community when a new Jewish family moves to town? Utter excitement, joy, and warmth. Every Jewish family – every Jewish person – is so incredibly vital for a small Jewish community's future and long-term success that they cannot afford to lose a single one. Small Jewish communities cannot risk alienating any family when it comes to Jewish community programming and services. Talk about a strong push for inclusion and pluralism. But, more than that, small Jewish communities are willing to go above and beyond to make sure that not a single family leaves town. Need help finding a job? They'll look for you. Can't get the healthcare you're looking for? They'll help you. Small communities know how to make families feel welcomed and wanted.

4. When it Comes to Outreach – Get Creative!

As one community member said to me recently, “in a small Jewish community, you can't hide.” It's true. Small Jewish communities are inventive when it comes to outreaching to unaffiliated Jews. They have to be. I frequently get calls with people telling me: “I saw someone wearing a *chai* necklace and I got his name” or “I overheard a couple speaking Hebrew in Costco, so I introduced myself.” In fact, this year, I even staked myself out near the *matzah* display at the one grocery store in town that sells *matzah* just before Passover ... all to try and find more Jews.

5. A Personal Invitation goes a Long Way

At a recent Jewish community conference, I went to a presentation about one of the latest and most innovative trends in Jewish community programming: home-hosted *Shabbat* dinners and holiday programs. This made me laugh a little ... small Jewish communities have been doing home-hosted programming forever! That's what happens when you have few, if any, community buildings. And having community members instinctively invite newcomers to their homes has always been in style. You can't go to *shul* in small Jewish community without expecting an invitation for lunch that very same day.

6. It's OK to Make 'Em Work for It

In a small Jewish community, people don't develop Jewish identities on the basis of their environments or their friend groups. In fact, just the opposite is true: being Jewish – and raising Jewish children – is really hard: services, programs, and communal institutions are scarce, and the vast majority of people around you are not Jewish. You can't just decide at 4pm on a Friday that you want to buy some fresh *challah* for *Shabbat* dinner, or, really, that you want to buy any Jewish cultural food at any time. Everything needs to be thought out and arranged in advance, and nothing is ever conveniently timed or located.

That being said, hundreds of families in small Jewish communities put in the effort. And all this work has a long-term impact on the Jewish identities of their children.

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