



On Tu B'Shevat: 7 Ways to Grow a Jewish Leader

By Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman

The holiday of Tu B'Shevat (the 15th of the Hebrew months of Shevat) began after sundown on February 5th. Tu B'Shevat is the birthday of the trees and a celebration of man's relationship to the earth. Around this time of year, the slumbering trees in Israel begin to bloom, bearing the first fruits of the season.

There are many similarities between the Jewish communal world and the natural world. We plant seeds, cultivate engagement and donors, and we grow – people, our future leaders.

As such, eJewish Philanthropy sought to harvest best practices for nurturing Jewish leadership from two renowned Jewish communal professionals: No'a Gorlin, associate executive director of ROI Community, and Adam Simon, senior director at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation. Here is what they said:

1. Empower

Gorlin says young minds must be empowered to take on leadership roles in our communities. "Current influencers must make room for new voices to be heard," she says. "Key discussions should happen with young leaders – not about them."

2. Take Risks

Gorlin says the key to success is failure. Young leaders should be encouraged to think and act innovatively, even if means that some investments won't have their desired returns. "For every 10 bad ideas, there's one game-changing idea," she says. But it can only be discovered if someone is willing to take a chance.

3. Demonstrate Humility

Gorlin says young leaders must "take a 360 degree approach to learning and mentorship." While they should be encouraged to seek advice from seasoned professionals, the mark of an effective leader is one who is likewise willing to take advice and learn from those junior than them.

4. Embrace Sector Permeability

It sounds like a scientific theory, but it is a Jewish communal best practice if we want young professionals to look to the Jewish world as a positive place of employment. Simon explains that one of the best ways organizations can strengthen their talent pool is to let their best and brightest walk out the door. "It sounds counterintuitive," says Simon, but when organizations cling to talent or curse talent when it chooses to invest its energy somewhere else for a time, this leads to people feeling shunned for their professional choices. People who feel rejected are rarely excited about returning. "Keep the Jewish sector wide open. ... For the Jewish sector to be able to support the growth of its members, it must be fluid, dynamic and welcoming of all," Simon says.

5. Dialogue

Many young leaders are afraid to discuss their career growth and aspirations with their superiors, for fear of retribution if those aspirations could involve leaving their current role. Employers sometimes don't bring up the subject, thinking their staff will feel they

are being pushed out. "Let's talk about it!" says Simon. "By lifting the veil of secrecy around career goals ... organizations will notice an uptick in retention and recruiting rates."

6. Stretch

Simon says a key to growing future leaders is ... allowing them to grow. "We can best support the growth of individuals in our sector by weaving opportunities for leadership and skill-building into the very fabric of their roles," says Simon, referring to those projects that are slightly beyond an individual's current skill level as stretch assignments. "Imagine the impact if professionals were given the opportunity to design tailored stretch assignments at the start of every year, if we discussed the topic in job interviews or even provided examples of such assignments in our job descriptions," Simon says.

7. Cooperate

Finally, Gorlin says that to accomplish any of these growth goals requires cooperation of many. "We, the stewards of young Jewish leaders, must point them down the correct path to healthy development; the budding leaders must be willing to walk down it; and the established Jewish community must help them along each step of the way," she says.

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