Engagement Process

Challenge
Engagement consists of four stages.
• Stage one: attend or participate in some activity.
• Stage two: agree to volunteer.
• Stage three: agree to take on leadership responsibilities (from committee chair to synagogue president).
• Stage four: agree to support the synagogue, financially and/or with expertise. Stage four actually occurs at any stage of the engagement process.

Engagement also takes many forms.
• Episodic: for example, just attending High Holiday services.
• Financial: give money but don’t attend programs.
• Time-limited: the completion of the Bat Mitzvah; the ending of one’s membership in the synagogue.
• Discontinuous: was active, stopped being active, became active once again (based on life experiences, needing a rest, etc.)
• Continuous: synagogue life or volunteering is part of one’s engagement DNA.

The engagement challenge comprises a number of factors.
• Competing interests.
• Better choices other than what the synagogue has to offer.
• Interested but not willing to or incapable of self-initiation.
• Family and friends are not involved.
• Emotional distancing from the synagogue: the people, the service, the programs.
• Bad experiences: with people, with services (boring), etc.
• Not willing to assume leadership positions: too much work involved, feelings of inadequacy, don’t want the responsibilities, not in their personality.

So, why don’t they leave? Maybe it’s because of feelings of obligations, family were involved for many generations, inertia, etc.

Thoughts on how to enhance engagement
Understand each congregant
Leadership may know much about their congregants, but it is worth checking back in with each member for a personal, substantive, and caring conversation.
• Their personal lives: how are they doing, how is their family, things they are proud of; things of concern, etc. Is there anything that we in the congregation can do for you: any misheberach, any kudos to communicate, anything that you need help with or that can help enhance your current interests or activities?
• Their capabilities: is leadership able to identify areas of synagogue life that they have a talent for, an interest in?
• Their thoughts about the synagogue: positives, negatives, feedback about their own experiences as participant, volunteer, leader, donor (as applicable).
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- Their reactions, observations, and suggestions: here are our challenges: short-term, long-term.

Understand the information
Evaluate the information from the congregation “interviews”.
- Are there patterns for identifying desired (or to be avoided) programming?
- Is there any institutional behavior that should be enhanced, improved or avoided?
- Are there resources (financial, personnel, technology) that need to be considered?
- Are there indicators about how to overcome the various engagement challenges listed above?
- Are there possibilities for new leadership (at programmatic level; at governance level)?
- What other useful information has been gathered to help improve engagement at all levels?

Develop strategies
The desired outcomes are: (a) a more participatory membership and (b) a leadership succession plan. Imagine that the outcomes have been achieved. Then using the information that has been gathered and evaluated ask the question: how did we get there?
- The strategies will be developed based on how that question is answered.
- How do these strategies affect the way we currently “do business as a synagogue”?
- How does the strategies affect the way that we interact with our membership?
- What resources do we need to help us achieve our desired outcomes?
- What role do we the current leadership need to play to create an environment for more participation and leadership succession?
- How are individual capabilities and interests matched to governance, committee and program volunteer positions?