Relational Judaism

Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community

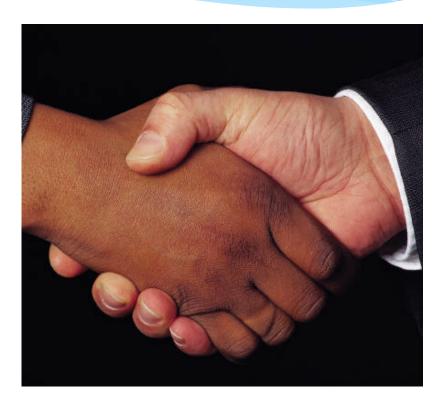### A Board Presentation by Jay O'Brien

Who is

Dr. Ron Wolfson?

Dr. Ron Wolfson

* Born in Omaha, Nebraska. PhD. in Education from Washington University in St. Louis
* Fingerhut Professor of Education at American Jewish University
* Author of many books including a series called "The Art of Jewish Living"
* Co President of Synagogue 3000 – an Initiative for Synagogue Renewal
* Conducted over 150 interviews with many leading Jewish professionals in all fields of Jewish living for this book

So, what is

Relational Judaism?

Relational Judaism is a response…

* In the past, synagogues relied on programs with clever names and slick marketing

* Relational Judaism is a shift away from the programmatic model of Jewish affiliation

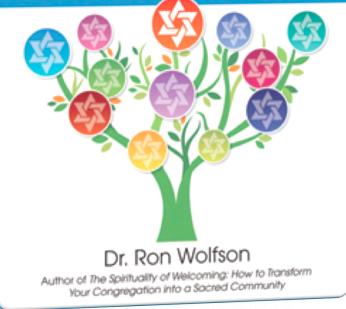* Relationships are what actually lead long term Jewish affiliation

Why are programs not working?

* Programs that are designed to get people in the door do just that- get them to show up- with little to know hope for long term engagement

* When Jewish institutions spend their time and resources on developing and promoting programs they often cannot make the necessary efforts to maintain their current members, leading to low membership retention

* Research data shows that program-centric Jewish institutions are failing in today's economy while relational based models are still thriving

How does

Relational Judaism Work?

- Relational Judaism works by building a face-to-face community of relationships that offers meaning, purpose, and belonging.

- No matter how much free Jewish content is now available online you cannot replace relationships

- Recognizing and fostering these relational values can reinvigorate synagogues.

So, what are some

Examples of Relational Judaism?

6 Examples of Relational Judaism

* **1. Chabad** – an army of outgoing delegates who build warm personal relationships all over the globe
* **2. Hillel** – developed sophisticated training models for their staff focused on building relationships
* **3. Congregation Based community organizing** – initiated listening campaigns that build relationships and empower members
* **4.** *Next generation engagement* – attracting affiliation in the 20's and 30's demographic by creating Jewish hubs
* **5. Social Media** – Websites that welcome rather than impress
* **6. Fundraiser's Wisdom** – Know your target audience personally

How do we develop

A fully engaged relational Jew?

According to Dr. Wolfson...

Jewish Institutions should see themselves as empowering their individual constituents to create, sustain, and celebrate their Judaism.

Relational Judaism works best when it engages an individual on **all** of the levels of their relational life.

In his book Dr. Ron Wolfson identifies
9 Levels of Relationships

9 Levels of Jewish Relationship

* 1. Self
* 2. Family
* 3. Friends
* 4. Jewish learning and practice
* 5. Community

* 6. Jewish peoplehood
* 7. Israel and Zionism
* 8. Global
* 9. God

The 9 Levels of Relationship correlate to the branches of the Hanukkiah…

1. Self
2. Family
3. Friends
4. Jewish learning and practice
5. Community
6. Jewish peoplehood
7. Israel and Zionism
8. Global
9. God

God is the center candle, the shamesh, which lights all of the others

9 Levels of Jewish Relationship…

1. Self

* American Individualism has combined with technology to create a new "me" culture
* People increasingly identity with their age group, represented broadly in these generational labels: Baby-boomers, Generation-X's, and Millennials

2. Family

* Covenantal Relationships are at the heart of family life
* Irreversible trend of Inter-marriage poses challenges to Jewish institutions

9 Levels of Jewish Relationship...

3. Friends

* People may choose their synagogue based on ideology and worship, but they stay because of the friends they made
* Friends are made by: sharing stories, commonalities, share experiences, volunteering together

4. Jewish Learning and Practice

* Institutions like synagogues should offer guidance and support through tough times and transitions
* Face-to-face interactions over coffee or food provide more than just Jewish content
* Education is also an opportunity for shared experiences

9 Levels of Jewish Relationship…

5. Community

* Many if not most affiliated Jews support both secular (JCC's) and sacred communities (synagogues)
* Membership models are giving way to pay-as-you-go relationships with institutions
* Success depends on recruitment, engagement, and retention

6. Peoplehood

* A global phenomenon that links Jews from all over the globe through religion and culture
* This network serves Jews in times of crises and need
* Research shows a weakened identification among American Jews with Jews abroad

9 Levels of Jewish Relationship...

7. Israel

* North American Jews are divided concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
* This trend is especially true among the 20's-30's demographic

8. World

* Classical Jewish ideas such as *Tzedekah* and *tikkun olam* can give institutions meaning and purpose
* Helping outside causes can also make people more proud to be a part Jewish institutions and efforts

9. God
- Theology can also give meaning and purpose to Jewish institutions and provide points of emotional connection in Jewish relationships

So, how do we

Bring Relational Judaism into our synagogue?

12 Principles of Relational Engagement

* 1. Personal Encounters

* 2. Telling Stories

* 3. Learning Together Doing Together

* 4. Connecting

* 5. Experiences

* 6. Volunteerism

* 7. Follow-up

* 8. Transition Points

* 9. Reengagement

* 10. Relational Space

* 11. Relational Membership Models

* 12. Relational Leadership

Now, Let's all try practicing
Relational Judaism

- Choose a partner to work with

- Choose 2 of the 12 Principles of Relational Engagement

- Script a short scene based on the 2 relational principles

- Present 1 of these scenes to the group