

Respectful Reciprocity – Creating Sacred Partnerships between Youth and Adult Leaders in Congregations

“A wise person is a student who makes his or her teacher wiser.” -Chaggigah 14a

The NFTY Board was recently asked to identify ways that TYG leaders could also be identified as congregational leaders. Based on this poll, the top five suggestions are listed below:

The TYG President is a member of the Temple Board
TYGers take an active role in Temple committees and programs
Attendance at and participation in Congregational services
Partnership with the Religious School
Communication and with adults

For many of us, our congregations are like a second home. Through mentorship, community and values, we continue to grow and learn because of our connections to our Temples. And NFTY, as a congregationally-based youth movement, places great value on that partnership. At our very core, NFTY is the Temple Youth Group at its very best.

So, how do we work to build the bridge between youth leaders and adult leaders in our congregations? Based on discussion that followed the informal poll above, the answer seemed clear. Rather than having an expectation that adult leaders will seek out youth leaders to take on these roles, the obligation falls upon each of us to reach out to the adults, and ask them to take the same kinds of roles in our community. We'd like to refer to it as Respectful Reciprocity.

Let's take the five concepts above and look at them from the perspective of Respectful Reciprocity – ways that we can set an example for how we want to be treated as congregational leaders, by reaching out and laying the foundation for this partnership with the adults in our congregation.

The TYG President is a member of the Temple Board
Consider asking the Temple Board to have a liaison to your TYG business meetings. Someone who can bring a report from the Temple Board to the TYG, share in your process, and be a conduit of information from an adult perspective.

TYGers take an active role in Temple committees and programs
Encourage the adults in your congregation to partner with you on your social action programs and learning opportunities.

Attendance at and participation in Congregational services
Reach out to your adults and professional staff of clergy and educators to participate in worship experiences that you have created.

Partnership with the Religious School
Work with your Temple Educator or Religious School Principal to identify ways that you can use your knowledge and share it with younger students in the school in some formal way.

Communication and follow-through

Include your congregational clergy, professional staff, temple president, temple board, youth committee chair and youth committee on every mailing or e-mailing that you send out. Specifically identify and include the educator/principal and the chairs of the education and religious school committees for communications as well. The more the adults are aware of your efforts and successes, the more likely they will be to want to partner with you in a formal way for their programs and projects.

We all know that it takes many talented people to build a successful TYG – members, advisors, parents, alumni, and the congregation at a minimum. By taking on the responsibility of laying the groundwork for this kind of partnership, you not only benefit your TYG, but also learn many Jewish values in the process, including, but certainly not limited to:

Shoel u'Mayshiv – Asking and Answering

Shomeah u'Mosif – Absorbing knowledge and adding to it

Machkim et Rabo – Sharpening the wisdom of one's teacher

Emunat Chachamim – Trusting in our sages

On behalf of the NFTY Board, we encourage you to take the first steps in creating a sacred partnership with the adult leaders in your congregation. We look forward to hearing the success stories about Respectful Reciprocity between your TYG and Congregational Boards. For additional suggestions or information, please feel free to contact any of the members of the NFTY Board, your regional board, or the NFTY Office.

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