


Today's Rabbi: Philanthropy's Intense Multi-Tasker

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The Lapin Group



By Avrum Lapin

At The Lapin Group we are frequently asked to help contextualize key roles in fundraising. Often those roles and responsibilities are not clear cut; this is particularly true when it comes to the synagogue setting. While there are no easy or even “right” answers, we offer some thoughts and insights into the vital role that a congregational Rabbi plays in fundraising for their community.

The Rabbi in a 21st Century congregation is an intense multi-tasker – teacher; motivator; explainer; guide; consoler; and yes, fundraiser-in-chief. Thus, the role of the Rabbi in achieving fundraising goals is central to the advancement of his/her congregation. Together with, and guiding the efforts of lay leadership, the Rabbi helps to frame and articulate the congregation’s vision and enables members families to connect to that vision and to its meaning, and to a passionate and personal purpose for giving. In short, the Rabbi’s involvement and participation is key to a successful campaign.

Each congregation is different, and each Rabbi marks that synagogue community with his or her own unique personality and experiences. And there is a wide spectrum of involvement and input that Rabbis have in the fundraising process. Though comfort levels vary among rabbis and among congregational leaders as to the boundaries of the pastoral relationship, together with the imperative to avoid the perception of leveraging that information in the fundraising activity, it is important to note that clergy bring invaluable skills and leadership to fund development. Clergy involvement in the fundraising process not only leads to more success financially, but can help

to bring the congregation together around a shared vision and a common sense of purpose and direction.

How does a Rabbi advance his or her role in their congregation's fundraising imperatives? We looked at four areas where the role of the Rabbi produces results and creates a positive and immeasurable impact.

Rabbi as Thought Leader:

The "first principle" of fundraising is that "people give to people," together with the clear and immutable presentation of the impact that the fundraising campaign will directly and ultimately have on the lives of people. Clergy are able to elevate the communication of the synagogue's "value proposition" as clear priority and as a "sacred task" in a meaningful and motivating manner. Articulating the heart and passion that the Rabbi brings to his or her work in congregational life, the Rabbi makes the case and guides the congregant/prospect toward a correct conclusion, to the benefit of the community. There are no better thought leaders than those who have dedicated their life's work to the pursuit of Jewish values, connection and practice.

Rabbi as Steward:

The Rabbi's leadership in making the case and his/her participation in raising funds for the synagogue is crucial to sustaining and growing their Jewish community. A Rabbi's only motives are to enhance the synagogue and to enrich the lives of its members. This stewardship is genuine and resonates with prospects and donors.

Rabbi as Connector:

Rabbis often know their congregants in a very personal way and are often privy to intimate details of congregants' lives. That knowledge calls upon the Rabbi to exercise exceedingly good judgment and care in sharing that knowledge – even in a confidential setting.

A Rabbi knows members of his or her community through many life stages, ages and backgrounds. Additionally, we as humans tend to congregate among those most akin to us, so we become most closely aligned with those among our own age or stage in life.

Invoking of the "first principle" noted above – that fundraising is steeped in personal connection and relationships – makes the Rabbi a potentially irreplaceable asset in the establishment of personal linkages that will result in fundraising success.

With the assumption of the use of discretion and the careful communication of confidential and sensitive knowledge, Rabbis can help to connect congregants to each other. Rabbis may even use the opportunity of participation in fundraising calls – even if he or she is not involved in the "ask," to connect with congregants and speak with them on a transformative, rather than a transactional level. By connecting through fundraising, it helps the Rabbi become potentially closer to congregants and to engage congregants in getting to know one another on a different and hopefully more meaningful level.

Rabbi as Visionary for the Future :

Clergy often have the clearest idea of the trajectory of the congregation – where it should head into the future. As the articulator of the Vision, the Rabbi inspires and galvanizes the members of their community to work together to achieve higher and noble purposes.

Though not every Rabbi is comfortable with asking, there are some meaningful things that he or she can do as a leader and participant in the fundraising activity:

- **Lead by Example.** Successful fundraising is predicated on personal leadership, and the Rabbi's financial commitment should be among the first of any congregational campaign. It enables the Rabbi to say "join me," opening the door to increased participation and results.

- **Go along for the ride.** Even if clergy isn't doing the formal asking, actually saying the words of the "ask" – as this is an area of sensitivity, the Rabbi's presence in that meeting is very meaningful.
- **Open doors.** Rabbis often can help pave the way for a meeting or establish other connections between current and prospective donors. This is a key to campaign success.
- **Share knowledge.** Talking with leadership and giving insight, with careful discretion, into potential approaches to prospective donors is a valuable resource.
- **Support the initiatives.** Demonstrating moral and personal support – beyond the "dollars and cents" – for the projects and programs that comprise a campaign's "value proposition" go a long way to lend credibility to the process.

The act of fundraising fits well into the multi-faceted role of the Rabbi. Philanthropy represents the virtue of generosity and the value of growing and sustaining community. Through involvement across every stage of the fundraising process – planning, design, and all of the stages of implementation – the Rabbi strengthens the community in so many ways.

Please feel free to contact us at The Lapin Group at 215-885-1550 or alapin@thelapingroup.com to discuss this further. My colleagues and I welcome your comments and emails. Let us know what you think.

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