

First, thanks. Thanks to Karen Wilson, Burt Langer, Howard Sklaroff and Toby Gang for your years of service to Beth David through your membership on and participation in the Board of Trustees. And thanks to Ed and Rebecca for your service on the Executive Committee. You have all made Beth David a better community because of your service. And I extend special thanks and appreciation to Ray. He has been at this for ten years now, having held more leadership positions than you can count and having devoted countless hours of his time to this place. So many people have said to me that these must be thankless positions, but I think Ray would be the first to tell you that it's just the opposite. First, most of you at one time or another take the time to thank us. And, second, we get our thanks in other ways as well, in large part from a sense that we've helped in some small way to preserve and make prosper a Jewish community. So thank you Ray and thanks for all that you've taught me over the five years I've been involved with leadership and particularly in giving me at least a clue as to how to handle this position which you obviously cared so much about.

So a very little about me for those who may not know me. I was born and raised in Wynnefield and Lower Merion a product of Lower Merion High School, Confirmation, Class of 1965 at Rodeph Shalom, College at University of Virginia, Law School at the University of Pennsylvania. I've spent most of my life managing a law firm and representing insurance companies in their disputes with their customers so that qualifies me for this job, right?

I've been a member at Beth David since the year we moved to Gladwyne (actually, once before as a ten year old for a couple of years. That's over 30 consecutive years of membership here and though for many of those years I was a "twice a year" Jew, over time things changed. Exactly why, I'm not sure. But it did.

I started to become more active, showed up for services from time to time, got active on the board as solicitor, made some good friends here and all of a sudden, here I am. I can barely read Hebrew. I don't know all the prayers. I don't typically wear a yarmulke. A shrimp cocktail has been known to cross my dinner plate. As Moses said to Adonai before the burning bush (and, trust me, I'm no Moses) mee ah no kee? Who am I to take on this responsibility. What am I doing as president of a synagogue?

I accepted this "gig" because somewhere deep down I believe two things: 1) Judaism in all its shapes and forms is good for our world; and 2) without Jews, there's no Judaism. So what does a synagogue have to do with that? Surely one can be "Jewish" without belonging to a synagogue. Indeed, today, in demographic survey after demographic survey, when Jews are asked to self-identify with a particular movement, the answer given most frequently is – just Jewish. Synagogues are said to be – particularly by millennials who have chosen not to join them in droves – irrelevant. I think it's important that we change that perception, but it's going to take a lot of work.

We need a playbook. If you're an Eagles fan, a "Philly Special". So many people have said to me: how do we get people to re-join (and join) the synagogue. How do we increase our membership? How do we

get more people to services? How do we get ourselves on sound financial footing? How do we get more (and, let's be honest, younger) people to our programs. We've tried programs galore. We've introduced new melodies at services. We've followed in Rabbi Cohen's enormous footsteps in the forefront of social action campaigns. We built a magnificent new worship and community space. Clearly, this has helped stabilize both membership and finances. Indeed, with your help through your generous contributions, in this year just concluded I believe for the first time in many years we are going to be able to put a little money back into savings to bide us over for the inevitable rainy day surprise. But it is -- and gives every indication of continuing to be -- a struggle. In that way we are no different than so many other religious institutions. As my rabbi daughter and I remind each other all the time, if religion were a stock, a lot of people would be selling short. So what's the playbook?

There was a time when pretty much the only time I came to synagogue other than Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur was when my kids were in a service of one kind or another. And as is the case with those of you of my generation, one of my embedded recollections of those services I did attend is that of Rabbi Cohen sermonizing about Martin Buber and the "I-Thou" relationship. I didn't care much about it then but now that I do care more about it, as best as I can figure it boils down to this: it's all about people and the relationships between them. The essence of Judaism is that we can find something holy between and among ourselves.

What's that mean for synagogues in general and Beth David in particular? Let me quote Rabbi Ron Wolfson a Conservative Rabbi and author of "Relational Judaism: "The goal of Jewish institutions is not self-preservation; it is to engage Jews with Judaism. It's not gaining more members; it's gaining more Jews. It's about people, not programs. It's about deep relationships, not fee for service transactions." Our goal should be putting people before programs. We're going to try to figure out in as many ways as we can just who are members are before we worry about what programs they may want. I'd like to go about this in a bunch of different ways. I'd like to have coffee with as many of you as I possibly can. And the ones I can't get to, I'll ask our board to meet. Come into our homes, let's talk about what gets you going in the morning, what worries you when you go to bed at night and how Judaism and this synagogue might help with those concerns. I realize I'm preaching to the choir here. We're going to try to do the same thing with all the members who are not here this afternoon.

We're also going to try to free up rabbi and cantor's time move it away a little bit from programming and over a little bit toward meeting with you. Perhaps a Shabbat dinner in their house one week instead of services. AS we learn what matters to you, we program around that rather than telling you what matters and offering that program. Maybe we ask some of you to get together, just once, no big commitment, and organize a trip like Donna Kramer did this year to a museum, or to the zoo, or to a Broadway show (there are themes in Dear Evan Hansen that would resonate with any Jewish teenager). Anywhere where we get people together to talk and share life's experiences. Homestyle dinners -- they're a great example. Why do we do them only once every year or two? Cooking groups, spirituality and wellness groups, book groups. What do they have in common? They're small and we do them only if you want to. And you know what, if we do that, good things will happen. Synagogues won't feel

confining. Folks won't feel like "why should I give \$3000 so I can go to services twice a year?". Bottom line: Friendship and relationships are never irrelevant – even if you don't find Adonai within yours.

So my friends. Be on the lookout for some changes. Not too many, mind you. I for one am well aware of the role tradition plays in the Judaism I practice. But this is a synagogue with a remarkable history. Much of what we accomplished was because of our relationships to each other. We have always been known as the little place where everyone knows everyone else. Somehow, somewhere we got a little away from that. So our change will be to move to the future by learning from our past. As the movie put it, "Back to the Future". We will develop a community of human beings, not a synagogue of bricks, mortar and balance sheets, where we know each other well and care about each other more. And when we do that, good things will happen. For you, for Beth David and for Judaism.

Have a great summer. I look forward to talking to every one of you some time soon.