7 Principles of Jewish Leadership Activity

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Is there anything unique about Jewish leadership or have these principles defined what leadership is supposed to look like?

This activity is a group discussion based on the principles of Jewish leadership as described in this article by Rabbi Sacks.

The goal of this activity is to focus thinking about leadership in general and Jewish leadership in particular. It can be run in groups of all sizes and for learners of a variety of ages and levels of knowledge.

Directions:

Step One: Read and discuss the 7 Principles of Jewish Leadership as described by Rabbi Sacks.

Use the hypothetical situations and discussion question to help guide your discussion.

1. Leadership begins with taking responsibility

   a. Hypothetical 1: You are the group leader in a group school project. You discuss your project with everyone and assign tasks to each person to complete in a week. In a week you regroup and one group member has not done their task correctly and everyone's grade suffers. Do you:
      
      i. Accept the grade
      ii. Speak to the teacher
      iii. Speak to the student
      iv. Other?
      v. Who is to blame? Could this have been prevented?
      vi. Discuss responses.

   b. Hypothetical 2: While you are eating lunch you see a couple arguing heavily at a nearby table. Both parties seem distressed and the fighting escalates into yelling. One party grabs the arm of the other to drag them outside. Do you:
      
      i. Let them fight outside, it's not your business.
      ii. Tell the manager of the restaurant
      iii. Ask the couple is everything is okay
      iv. Other?
      v. Think about short-term versus long-term consequences
      vi. Discuss responses.
2. **No one can lead alone**
   a. During biblical times there were three different types of leaders: political, religious, and visionary.
      i. Do you think there need to be 3 different people to fulfill all these roles?
      ii. Why are three different types of leaders required by society?
      iii. Can you think of another type of leader needed by society?

3. **Leadership is about the future**
   a. Hypothetical 1: You and your group of friends continually notice a new kid being bullied by older students. You encourage your friends to step in and confront the bullies, but they are worried about becoming the victims of the bullying themselves. Do you:
      i. Ignore the bullying, you don't even know the kid
      ii. Tell the school administration
      iii. Convince your friends to sit with the kid
      iv. Sit with the kid by yourself
      v. Confront the bullies
      vi. Other/mixture
      vii. Think about risks versus benefits. Discuss responses

4. **Leaders learn**
   a. Do you think the leader of a group should be smarter than everyone else in the group?
   b. Do you think intelligence is an important characteristic of a leader? Are there more important characteristics?

5. **Leadership means believing in the people you lead**
   a. What is the difference between power versus influence?
   b. Which is more important to lead?
   c. Judaism says: the highest form of leadership is teaching.
      i. What does this mean?
      ii. How does it relate to power and influence?

6. **Leadership involves a sense of timing and place**
   a. Why would Judaism think it is important to name a successor?
   b. Why does place matter? How does this relate to Israel?
7. **Leadership is stressful and emotionally demanding**
   
   a. If this is the case why lead?
   
   b. Is one leader always necessary?
   
   c. How can leaders overcome this burden?

Is there another principle of leadership you think should be added to this list?

**Step two: Apply these principles of leadership to the following Jewish leaders.**

1. Moses
2. Abraham
3. King David
4. Theodor Herzl
5. David Ben-Gurion
6. Menachem Begin
7. Golda Meir
8. Benjamin Netanyahu

Find examples of how these leaders did or did not embody the 7 Jewish principles of leadership.

**Discuss:**

- Do we consider each of these leaders to be “typically good” leaders. Do we view them favorably? If not, why not?
- Is there something unique about the Jewish leader?
- Why might a Jewish leader be forced to behave in one manner or another in a multicultural society?
- Is this true inside of Israel as much as outside of Israel? Why?