

INCLUSIVE HIRING STATEMENT

Shiv'im Panim la'Torah. "There are 70 faces to Torah." - BeMidbar Rabbah 13:15

Religious communities depend heavily upon the leadership skills of both volunteers and professional staff. These people must have integrity, intelligence, faith, knowledge and creativity. They must be humble and kind, yet also bold and assertive when necessary to help their organizations address challenges and seize opportunities to advance its mission.

Who is the best qualified Jewish professional, whether rabbi, cantor, educator, administrator, or fundraiser? The answer to this question depends largely on the particulars of the job and of the organization, but one thing is clear: there is no single demographic profile of a successful Jewish professional. Too often, Jewish organizations have forgotten this simple fact, setting aside the most talented people in favor of those who conform to preconceived profiles of Jewish leadership. This tendency to look at the container rather than at its contents hurts both organizations and professionals.

The North American Jewish community has become beautifully diverse, yet its professionals, especially its clergy, have often been expected to look like the leaders of past generations. For us to succeed, we must draw upon the talents of all of our people, lay and professional, and become discerning judges of leadership potential. Congregations and other communal organizations that focus on external characteristics severely limit their options. Congregations, schools, and organizations that instead embrace the diversity of today's Conservative clergy will encounter Torah in its many glorious forms, its traditional "70 Faces."

Just as our communities are more diverse than ever before, so too do our clergy and other professionals reflect this diversity of gender, generation, health, and relationship status. They are partnered and single, and of all ages and physical abilities. They are men, women, and gender-nonconforming. They are gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and straight. Our communities and our trained professionals include people from varied backgrounds of race and ethnicity; some leaders come from entirely Jewish families, and others come from interfaith families or are themselves Jews by choice.

Within this diversity, we are blessed that each rabbi and cantor has a unique story, perspective, and set of skills and goals. They are united in their love of Torah, their deep spiritual grounding in Jewish practice, and their excitement to serve God and the Jewish people as rabbis. We are blessed that our Jewish people and clergy embody the fullness of today's household of Israel. They should be welcome as both members and potential leaders of our religious communities.



Communities and organizations often assume that the demographic profile of their professional leadership will automatically attract (or repel) potential constituents or members. They may not even be conscious of their inclination to interview, for example, only young or married individuals, thereby missing out on the talented people who might be the perfect match for their community. They also often assume the way candidates will balance work and family life based on their gender, rather than asking how they plan to juggle their various responsibilities. Surprisingly, communities often give scant attention to the religious and educational philosophy of their prospective leaders, focusing instead on vague and subjective qualities, such as charisma.

How then should a community seek its religious leaders? First, the community should clarify its values and its mission, and then it should ask what leadership qualities are most valuable for the task. The search committee should be charged to look broadly for these leadership qualities and not assume that they can be found in only one demographic profile. Committees should be proactive in meeting candidates of different genders, generations, sexual orientations and backgrounds. They should not assume that their community is “not ready” to welcome a professional whose profile is dissimilar to that of the previous person. If there is a specific halakhic or job-related qualification that would exclude some candidates, this should be made explicit in the job description.

One of our great strengths as a religious movement is that we are pluralistic. We often respect the wisdom and authenticity of various positions even when selecting one particular policy to practice. Particularly when hiring rabbis and cantors, it is common for differences of religious perspective and policy to emerge. This is an opportunity to study issues together in an atmosphere of mutual respect so that it can become clear whether the match is likely to succeed.

Some of the most challenging differences of opinion in recent decades have surrounded the expansion of eligibility for admission to rabbinical and cantorial school and then to the professional rabbinate and cantorate. The Conservative Movement welcomes different voices on these matters and views the diversity of opinions and practices within our congregations as a strength. At this point, the vast majority of Conservative congregations identify as egalitarian, a substantial number of our clergy are women, and a growing number are members of the LGBTQ community.

Congregations and other communal organizations are strongly encouraged to meet with an array of candidates and to be open to the possibility that the best professional for their organization may not conform to their past assumptions of the profile of a religious leader. They should recall the ancient teaching that Torah has (at least) 70 facets and enriches our lives through vessels of all kinds.

So too will our communities be best served when they seek leaders for their intellectual, spiritual, and social skills, celebrating the diversity of the people who have been inspired to serve God and the Jewish people with all their heart, soul, and might.

