

# Leadership

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WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PROJECT INCITE FELLOWS

*Communally, we must articulate relevant new assumptions for teen-leadership development and training. This includes a new clear framework for understanding teens, empowerment, leadership development, and the Jewish mission of change.*

**THE FOLLOWING REPRESENTS** an insight into several critical conversations among Project InCITE Fellows (<http://www.projectincite.blogspot.com>) in discussion about innovation in teen-leadership development and training.

In order for innovation to take place and for us to take the next leap off the current plateau, which is now “leadership training” in youth programs, the community at large (e.g., national youth movements, local community youth infrastructures, and informal Jewish educational institutions focusing on teen services) must address the following questions in a way that will empower its youth educators to design and evaluate more effective leadership programs:

1. What is explicitly Jewish about our approach to leadership? What do our texts and traditions tell us about leadership? Is it a singular approach

(e.g., the strong leadership models of Moses and David or the shared leadership of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam)? If so, what is it? If not, what does that mean for leadership training? Do Jewish leaders require different skills or outlooks than non-Jewish leaders? Can a non-Jew be a leader of a Jewish community? Is a Jew who is a leader of a non-Jewish community/organization a Jewish leader?

2. What exactly do we mean by leadership? There are so many models and definitions of the term—what do we mean in our institutions? Is it the management school approach: a leader is someone with vision, can communicate that vision, and can motivate/mobilize others to follow them? Or is it the service approach to leadership: anyone can lead by understanding needs in society and doing the right thing by actively addressing that need? Or is it a community facilitator approach to leadership: to create a group process among community members that will empower them to create leadership from within?

Each model has very different ramifications for not only what we mean by “leadership,” but also who is a leader and what skills they need to be able to lead according to that model/tradition.

3. Is leadership by its nature elitist in terms of whom we should be selecting or recruiting for leadership training? How do we ascertain who are the “best” of our teens to be involved in leadership programs? What are the implications of doing so? How do we create welcoming communities and at the same time make certain programs exclusive? If we do not make these programs exclusive, what will be their attraction to the best and brightest teens?

4. How should we be designing our programs in the twenty-first century? Our methodologies, programs, and approaches have to be redesigned for the extremely busy, multiple-identity teens of today. We are now competing so much for quality time with teens. When teens are involved with the Jewish

community, we want to also engage them with other activities beyond leadership, so we must be extremely selective in our approaches to them.

5. What separates our Jewish leadership development programs from what they are potentially receiving in their secular high schools, college-prep programs, sports coaching, etc.?

6. What should the focus of our leaders be? Are today's teens in a culture, position, and ability to be major change agents? If not, what is the role of youth organizations and movements to inspire a level of commitment to change and counterculture?

7. What support should be given from the broader "adult" Jewish community to acknowledge and support these leadership programs

the first place. The time has come for us to confront these challenges head-on: to create a new clear framework for our understanding of teens, empowerment, leadership development, and the Jewish mission of change at large into which youth leadership development and training programs will reside and ultimately flourish. ■



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and alumni of teen leadership programs—so that they have meaning beyond the isolate sessions/ classes/summer programs that the leadership programs provide?

While our "cluster group"—consisting of very talented, reflective, and well-networked youth educators—had opinions relating to each of these questions, our discussions in many ways hit a brick wall as we realized that many of the answers to these questions reside in the broader community and in the larger institutions in which our educators operate. It is clear to this group that so many of the assumptions underscoring youth leadership programs—if articulated at all—had been articulated many years ago in a different era, not necessarily relevant to today's environment or were never clearly articulated in

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