

Diane Zack Remarks

Thank you, Steve, for that generous and gracious introduction. You know the humorous line, cited sometimes by a speaker after a particularly lovely introduction -- "If only my mother were here to hear that!" :) Well, mercifully, my mother IS here tonight! (introduce, point out where mom is sitting!)

My dear friend Scott Waxman catalyzed this award -- it was his idea to honor my service to the congregation, and in this way. At first -- I was hesitant and very resistant -- those who know me understand that I have a sincere and strong aversion to being honored! But then I realized : it would be a negation of my identity to reject this offer. -- For this is how I've chosen to lead my life, and how I've devoted most of my adult years. And I so believe in encouraging volunteerism and engagement in others! So, here we are tonight . . .

I'd like to thank the Committee, chaired by Ruth Chavez and staffed by Shirley Berman, Lisa Fisher, Steve Tulsy and Nancy Drapin, for bringing this award to fruition in this inaugural year!

I requested that the synagogue utilize my full name -- which I rarely use -- Diane COHEN Zack -- because I have been blessed with incredible parents and am wholly and completely indebted to them for my strong and positive Jewish upbringing; my values; my moral compass; and my dedication to giving back.

My amazing father, of blessed memory, always preached the importance of giving back, and in fact taught me: "Giving is the secret to a meaningful life." (By the way, giving . . . in *every* way . . .) He was also fond of stating, "All we've got is our time" -- with of course the inherent implication to use it wisely, and make good choices about how we spend it. I have learned to evaluate my own choices by pondering, "will this make a difference to the organization or community?; will this effort yield results? ; and in 6 mos. or a year or further ahead -- what will I remember about how I spent that time?"

My father was a wise, calm, and energetic leader. He was President of many Washington, DC area Jewish organizations, including the Federation in DC. But he liked to joke with me about the one organization where he DIDN'T (by design!!) accede from Vice President to President: his synagogue!

However, I'm here to tell you, with all due respect to my father, that I believe this was perhaps his only leadership mistake! :))

My mom was also a leader and contributed many hours to community service. When I was in Junior High school, my dad excused me from school so he could surprise my mother at Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, when she was being

installed as Sisterhood President! (At that time, when women were not welcome on Synagogue boards-- this was the pinnacle of achievement for a woman at shul!)

Years later when my mom and her closest friends became involved in Federation, they worked so diligently and consistently that they forged the creation of a Women's Division! Whose campaign she later chaired, as well as serving as its President.

Recently, I attended the 30th Anniversary celebration of the Wexner Heritage Foundation in Columbus, Ohio -- along with several other members of our congregation!

The Wexner Heritage Foundation has educated a massive cohort of Jewish men and women in every major city in North America, and thus has invested heavily in volunteer Jewish leadership in the US and Canada. Following this special weekend, one of my favorite professors from my years studying in the program, Rabbi Larry Hoffman, summarized some of the critical learning transmitted through Wexner. He formulated a "Ten Commandments" of sorts, for Leadership. He articulated my beliefs and guiding principles of communal leadership so perfectly, please allow me to quote from several of them to you:

1. Attack tomorrow's challenges, not yesterday's. Be proactive, not reactive.
2. If we demonstrate the reason Judaism matters, it will start to matter.
3. Develop a compelling vision of why and how it ought to matter . . .

(skip 4 and 5)

6. Run your organization with consummate excellence. Your mission is too serious to let it be compromised by mediocrity. Demanding excellence for yourself, you will get it from others.

7. Treat those others with respect; your staff; the teachers and consultants you hire; and (especially) the people you serve -- the people who put their faith in you. . . . Everyone matters.

8. Practice scrupulous honesty with regular reviews of what is working and what isn't. Do whatever is necessary to reestablish the centrality of your vision and the excellence of how you carry it out.

9. Surround yourself with the right people; they must share your values and your vision; they must do, with excellence, what you cannot do yourself; and work positively as a team with faith in what you all are building together.

10. Over time, these practices will build trust -- trust well-placed, trust that will catapult everyone to a place of demanding the best from themselves and enjoying the common journey to a better future.

Les Wexner himself spoke from the podium over the weekend and proclaimed, "The destiny of the Jewish people is in our hands. . . ." and then added, "even before we were born. . . ."

If you care passionately about the Jewish community, and Jewish continuity . . . Consider your talents, your creativity, and your strengths -- (which I KNOW are in abundance in this audience, and in fact, I'm preaching to the choir!) -- What matters to you most? How can YOU take us from where we are, to where we need to be? From the pragmatic and logistical, to the 30,000 feet high strategic direction required -- it's ALL important!

As Rabbi Leider implored us tonight, say "Hineni" -- Say YES! -- and we can dream and work together.

Why did I devote so much of my adult time to Kol Shofar, in particular? Because I believe deeply that synagogues are critical to Jewish life, and Jewish community, and for the future of Judaism. And my own priority was to serve my local or Marin or Bay Area community, versus a national organization or agenda (although I've participated in those also.)

When I turned to my son Nathan (who is also here tonight -- and my husband Howard) -- I asked Nathan, "How do YOU feel about volunteering?"

He answered, "Volunteering?? Enriching the community? It's at the heart of Judaism and one of the best things you can do . . ." and he also exclaimed, "What you *do* matters more than what you say."

So on behalf of my son Nathan, my husband, and my mother, and Marty and Alana who cannot be here tonight -- TODAH RABAH TO KOL SHOFAR FOR ALLOWING ME to present this Volunteer Service Award tonight, in my name to a very worthy recipient!