

Presidential Matters

by Steve Aronowitz



It was sometime in March, don't know the exact date, and I really didn't know what COVID-19 was. I found out! Next thing I knew was I was in the hospital and the wheels were coming off, not just for me, but for the nation and world. I'm not going to get into how our leaders responded, but my focus is on how the leadership of our synagogue stepped up – rapidly thoroughly, and convincingly!

In 13 years of presidency, I have with the strong support of you, confronted many issues – from consolidations to hiring of staff to financial concerns to building management. I gained confidence in how each situation was resolved. Whatever I thought I had accomplished provided little preparation for this dilemma.

The first thing co-president Mitchell Stein and I did – and it proved to be our best move – was to form a committee to deal with the crisis that was growing each day. Here's where I have to mention that Mitchell was working independently while I was unable to serve.

Mitchell and I had been co-presidents for three years; now, we became close friends, speaking several times per day.

We chose Marc Figelman, Mark Hoffer, Dr. Alan Fein, and Chuck Wayne to join us. Each brought a wealth of passion for our synagogue, a level headed approach and the willingness to devote whatever time was required in the days, weeks, and months ahead. Each portion of our plan was discussed with and reviewed by Dr. Fein. As our medical consultant, Dr. Fein, an esteemed pulmonologist, had automatic veto power. We were supported, of course, by Rabbi Yaffe, Cantor Shron, and Miss Audi. The group can challenge my count but I think we met over 30 times, all becoming expert in zoom navigation. We took the comments, questions, and concerns from everyone, and, of course, sought the opinion of shul leaders like Stan Wirtheim, and Richie Spivack, and Bob Stern. We debated what to do, we spoke with other synagogue leaders frequently, and we consulted local government officials. We adjusted plans according to whatever new information we discovered.

All of the above is accurate, but one person stands out, the chairperson, Marc Figelman. I know Marc about 40 years, I recognized his skill, and his unending enthusiasm to help wherever needed (Marc is co-chair of our House Committee). Marc had the knowledge; in what I laugh as I tell you, his part-time job. He has helped companies navigate how organizations must navigate the COVID-19; each company requires specific guidelines to meet required standards and protect its members and employees. A high percentage of our members completed the all-important survey, and we reviewed its detailed results. The survey elements were discussed in depth with various constituencies, but make no mistake, the entire project was truly a "Figelman product."

The survey set our direction and the culminating pieces included presentations to the executive board, the board of trustees, and the general membership. Consensus – nearly unanimous – was arrived at quickly and all meetings came off flawlessly. None of this could have happened without Marc's intense interest in covering all factors, his exceptional organizational skills and stellar work ethic.

So, we carry on as you knew we would. As Rabbi Yaffe said many weeks ago, "We are open. We never closed!" That is why we were comfortable holding an outdoor service for Tisha B'Av last Wednesday evening. All protocols were observed and accepted.

Please understand that we are aware things change and while our position today is that in the interest of everyone's health and safety, our building will remain closed until further notice, the COVID-19 committee will continue to assess updated findings and recommend new policies as warranted. In the meantime, we are planning virtual services for the High Holidays, including both zoom and streaming possibilities. As has always been the case, we welcome your input.

Stay well and thank you for your support.