



Unless we can articulate why we care about our work, we will be unable to do our work well. It is critical to take the time to answer the “Who Cares?” question, and to answer it honestly. The expression of why our work is important, what value it brings, is the first step necessary for doing the work well. In his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Ronald Heifetz writes:

*People need inspiration and drive to step out into a void which only later is recognized as a place of creativity and development...The practice of leadership requires, perhaps first and foremost, a sense of purpose – the capacity to find the values that make risk-taking meaningful... Preserving a sense of purpose helps one take setbacks and failures in stride.*

## 2. Profound Optimism

Global activist Lynne Twist, in her book *The Soul of Money* (pp 43-45), explains that we suffer today from a constant attitude of scarcity:

*For me, and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is “I didn’t get enough sleep.” The next one is “I don’t have enough time.” Whether true or not, that thought of not enough occurs to us automatically before we even think to question or examine it. We spend most of the hours and the days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don’t have enough of...Before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor, we’re already inadequate, already behind, already losing, already lacking something...We go to sleep burdened by those thoughts and wake up to that reverie of lack...*

This “reverie of lack” is unfertile ground for creativity and exploration, the key ingredients of innovation, and it is not only rampant in society at large, but is an unspoken shadow in the Jewish community. Our passion for Jewish education cannot be grounded in a fear of Jewish extinction, of anti-Semitism, of intermarriage, or even of Jewish survival. Jewish life must be motivated not by what we are afraid of losing, or not having enough of, but by what it contributes to our lives. An attitude of optimism, of hope, of anti-lack, is critical for continued innovation in Jewish life.

## 3. Listen to the People & Collaborate

Innovation is a democratic process. It thrives on collaboration between people with different skill-sets, experiences, approaches, and beliefs. It assumes that the experience of a student in a school is as important as the perspective of the Head of School, and it creates opportunities to make the lesser authoritative voices heard. Innovations enter systems from a wide variety of streams, and it is more likely that insights and new ideas will emerge when there are multiple streams flowing into the system. IDEO’s Tom Kelly, in his book *Ten Faces of Innovation*, writes:

*Go out and find some real people. Listen to their stories. Don’t ask for the main point. Let the story run its course. Like flowing water, it will find its own way, at its own pace. And if you’ve got patience, you’ll learn more than you might imagine.*

In order to grow and stay relevant, we need to ensure that the widest spectrum of perspectives is included in the conversation and imagination of what might be.

## 4. Be Creative

We take our work seriously, as we should. (After all, it’s no easy job having our core text direct us to be a “light unto the nations”). But we sometimes take ourselves too seriously for our own good. Yes, the education of our children is no game, no laughing matter. But unless we learn how to be more playful in its design, we may look up and realize that the kids have gone to play somewhere more fun. If we want to design inspiring, exciting learning experiences, we need to employ exciting, inspiring methodologies. Innovation thrives in playful soil. Our planning meetings, conferences, and board meetings can benefit from some more art, theater, outdoor experiences, from more play, to help re- train us to be more open, more relaxed, and even sometimes silly, because that is the state in which we can begin to be inspired and

inspiring.

## 5. Be Patient

Real change takes time. As Chip & Dan Heath, in their book *Switch: How to Change Things when Change is Hard*, write:

*Change isn't an event; it's a process. There is no moment when a monkey learns to skateboard; there's a process. There is no moment when a child learns to walk; there's a process. And there won't be a moment when your community starts to invest more in its school system, or starts recycling more, or starts to beautify its public spaces; there will be a process. To lead a process requires persistence.*

Innovation can happen only when we slow down, and feel that our challenges are no less important, but perhaps slightly less urgent.

## 6. Failure is Educative

What do successful people and ventures have most in common? Failure. Tina Seelig, a professor at Stanford University, in a talk on *The Art of Teaching Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, shared that she asks her students to “make failure resumes – the resume of their biggest screw-ups, personal, professional, and academic. And the idea is – it is OK to fail as long as you learn something from it.” The idea is also that if you don't allow yourself to fail, you might not grow. Mark Zuckerberg, in his letter to Shareholders upon Facebook's S-1 filing, says: “This means – take risks! We have another saying: ‘The riskiest thing is to take no risks.’ We encourage everyone to make bold decisions, even if that means being wrong some of the time.”

## 7. Stay Lean – Experiment, and Learn

Finally, we know that new ideas and projects can be tremendously resource-consuming. Often, this prevents us from tackling them – who has the budget to make the changes we ideally would like to see? This should not prevent us from making those changes. Instead, we should devise small experiments to test our ideas and assumptions, learn from them, be less afraid to make mistakes because there is less at risk, and then revise them, and try again. Only after we have run multiple experiments are we ready to ask for the investment of time, and capital and human resources, to make larger changes. In his book *The Lean Startup*, Eric Reis writes: “Successful entrepreneurs do not give up at the first sign of trouble, nor do they persevere the plane right into the ground. Instead, they possess a unique combination of perseverance and flexibility.”

Together, these mindsets, and the tools that come with them, can help pave paths that have the potential to lead us towards a better future. I believe that the first step in creating meaningful, necessary growth in our educational spaces is to educate and challenge ourselves to experiment with these approaches. This is a radical culture-shift for the Jewish community, and may on the surface seem deceptively simple. But the values of the innovation sector are actually very much aligned with core Jewish values; these are the values that have allowed our community to keep its traditions and beliefs alive through so many centuries, and our community can both gain from the innovation sector's approach, and contribute to it. With an attitude of plenty, of hope, of patience and passion, and of willingness to laugh and get back on our feet each time we slip, who knows what we might build?

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