

Advocating for Your Library: What Your Board Wants to Know **Kathy Bloomfield**

Description: For a variety of reasons, the value of maintaining a Synagogue, Center or School Library has been called into question in recent years. While librarians are passionate about the need for a library in their institution, what information can they provide to their Board members so that fiduciary decisions can be made responsibly? This session will explore ways to define both the tangible and intangible benefits of School, Synagogue and Center Libraries in a manner that will encourage the Board of Trustees to support this crucial part of the institution.

Kathy Bloomfield is the AJL President-SSC. She has worked for Pacific Telephone, Pacific Bell, the Los Angeles Zoo, BabagaNewz magazine, InterfaithFamily.com, Mayyim Hayyim Community Mikveh, the Union for Reform Judaism and the Wellesley Public School System. She also founded forwordsbooks, a national Jewish book fair business. Currently, she telecommutes from California as the Executive Assistant at Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation in Bethesda, MD. Other volunteer roles have included Temple President, Mikveh Guide, URJ Outreach Fellow, and member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.

In the past two years, I have read emails from several AJL Librarians regarding the elimination or deep reduction of their job, as well as the exclusion of Jewish libraries or repositioning of them as technology centers or an extra room. This worries me a great deal, not because I am on the AJL Board, not because I know and have deep admiration for the individuals involved, but rather because I see these changes as “penny wise, pound foolish” responses on the part of synagogue, school and center boards to financial stress. Their knee-jerk reactions to monetary concerns result in cutting back or eliminating what appear to them to be non-essential departments and people with little if any thought to the long-term impact of these decisions.

To paraphrase Joseph Chamberlain, a 19th century British statesman: *I think we can all agree that **we are living in interesting times** where day by day we are faced with new objects of interest, and, **new objects for anxiety**.* From where I sit, it appears that Judaism is at a crossroads. A point much like when Temple Judaism, with its sacrifices and priests, had to evolve into Rabbinic Judaism, with its prayers and Torah Scholars.

These interesting times – this crossroads - present some unique opportunities for our synagogues, schools and centers. How will these institutions evolve to meet the demands of several new generations of Jews from Baby Boomers to the newly born iGeneration and everyone in between?

And most importantly what about our AJL libraries? What is our role in the evolution of the Jewish people? How will Jewish librarians support the changes that inevitably will occur to what is the current norm in Jewish life? How will we keep the doors of our synagogue, school and center libraries open? How do we make it clear that the job of a Jewish Librarian is essential?

9 years ago, I did a workshop at the Seattle conference entitled “Library Management 101A.” It was my goal during that session to help the attendees understand what your lay leadership is looking for from you in your capacity as a Jewish librarian and how to make yourself and the library relevant in the synagogue, school and center environment. And not only relevant, but a priority for the institution. That session was created to give the attendees the tools they needed to be excellent Library Managers.

Those who attended that session left with tools for Planning, Organizing, Directing and Monitoring their libraries. They drafted Mission Statements, created Objectives, Goals, and Action Steps, learned how to Prioritize and Delegate, uncovered their Management Style and discovered the steps to becoming a good manager. I know all of you were there that afternoon, but in case you weren't, I would be happy to email you the handout package I prepared for that day.

Nine years later, we are *faced with new objects of interest, and, new objects for anxiety*. In our short time together today, I am going to focus on making all of you good managers into excellent politicians – Lobbyists if you will – for your synagogue, school or center library. We are all going to be Members of the SHOFAR Lobby - Safranim Honoring Our Fellow Active Rooters: A Jewish Library Booster Club. Here are your badges



What lobbyists are good at is being persuasive. They have a passion, a compelling case, and they know how to share that passion, unfold that case, in clear, constructive ways. The most important thing they know is that making change is all about WHO you know. The most important questions for a SOFER Lobbyist are:

- Is there a Library Committee at your synagogue, school or center?
- Does a member of that Committee sit on the synagogue, school or center Board?

If you want to advocate for your library, if you want your Board to take your library AND YOUR LIBRARIAN seriously, the answer to both those questions better be yes.

It is essential that you and/or an active involved board member – also a member of the SOFER Lobby - is present at Board meetings to represent the library's best interests. There must be someone who can share their passion for the library and make the case to the board in a thoughtful, compelling way for having a library and librarian.

A small step back...The AJL's mission is "...To foster access to information and research in all forms of media relating to all things Jewish." AND "The AJL promotes Jewish literacy and scholarship ...". Your library's Mission Statement not only reflects this, but aligns with your synagogue, school or center Mission Statement, correct?

It seems to me that the interesting times we are in, combined with our supportive Mission Statements present a compelling case for why Libraries in Schools, Synagogues and Centers MUST exist and be supported. But how? How do librarians and your Board representatives make this VERY compelling case to their boards that the library AND librarians are crucial assets.

To use a perfect writer's tool, we must SHOW, not tell. We must demonstrate with actions and facts that our libraries and our librarians have the best potential to confront a new environment that demands that we meet people where they are. We must reveal how our libraries and our librarians have the most and best opportunities to reach out to the community in order to bring in new families, new members, new generations...new income. We must have documentation and details, facts and figures of the important role the library plays in the community.

We must clearly, succinctly and demonstrably SHOW that we are:

- Holding story times at local bookstores, local libraries, even shopping centers during Jewish Holidays.
- Reviewing books and creating holiday book lists for publication in local newspapers.

- Attending public school teacher meetings to teach about Jewish holidays and Jewish history and provide appropriate and relevant book lists.
- Writing a blog for your synagogue, school or center website, publicizing the existence of that blog through the AJL's monthly Jewish Blog Carnival and providing web site analytics to demonstrate that people are finding your library, and therefore your organization, through this portal.
- Creating reading lists for the community – lists of biographies, novels, holiday stories that can support the children and parents in your community with new ideas for reading, and giving them opportunities for book reports and class education that involve Jewish characters both real and imagined.
- Organizing book discussion groups, author lectures and panel discussions about timely topics for these interesting times.

We roll out pictures of all these events. We hand out copies of all the lists. We provide copies of the PR pieces we have written and where they were picked up. We have data –METRICS– about our blogs: how many views of the article, where else did it appear, how many click-throughs did the article receive. These are just a very few ways to SHOW how important the synagogue library is.

These are the ways you demonstrate to your board that:

- You are a source of FACTS to counteract the FAKE NEWS that is crowding the information space.
- You are a trusted part of the information flow in the local community.
- When misinformation shows up in the newspaper, the Jewish library/librarian is a reliable resource for providing facts and figures to Op-ed authors, Letter to the Editor writers and Reporters.
- Your outreach to the community is an excellent source of Public Relations for the synagogue, school or center and a step-in to your community.

The AJL has many excellent resources to assist you in this endeavor. On our website, under the Publications tab, in the Digital Publications area there is a section entitled: Digital Monographs. There you will find two extraordinary resources:

- 1) **The AJL Advocacy Kit** which contains AJL's position statement on libraries, statistics, articles, sample talking points and a list of links to advocacy resources.
[\[http://jewishlibraries.org/images/downloads/Resources/ajladvocacykit.pdf\]](http://jewishlibraries.org/images/downloads/Resources/ajladvocacykit.pdf)
- 2) **The School Library: A Vital Component of Jewish Education**, a PowerPoint presentation put together by Joyce Levine and others to use with school stakeholders.
[\[http://jewishlibraries.org/Digital_Publications\]](http://jewishlibraries.org/Digital_Publications)

Also, the new edition of the **Jewish Library Handbook: A Guide for Synagogue, School and Center Libraries**, edited by Joyce Levine two years ago, has a chapter on "Promotion and Advocacy" (p.50) as well as tons of additional information for both new and existing libraries. You can purchase it via Amazon.

In addition, Nina Stenzler provided me with a copy of an excellent presentation she did about the Tycher Library at the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas, as well as her "Impressive Library Stats" handout that provides a snapshot of how the library contributes to the organization - in case someone wants to know- at any time. I want to point out the "Friends of the Library" campaign that annually raises money for the library. An excellent idea!

The American Library Association (ALA) is also rising up to advocate for all libraries – it is not just Jewish synagogue, school and center libraries that are being closed, not only Jewish librarians who are losing jobs. They have a campaign called, "Libraries Transform." Part of that campaign is the creation of "Because Statements." Libraries Transform Because...Fake news can have real-world consequences...Students who read

during the summer, end up on the honor roll in the fall...the best search engine in the library is the librarian. And it goes on. You can even create your own “Because Statement” by going to the ALA website. The AJL is an ALA Affiliate. We can use their resources, as well as our own, to advocate for our libraries and our librarians. I encourage you to do so.

Finally, the AJL Board has started a task force to find ways to advocate for our SSC libraries – and ALL AJL libraries. They are looking for ways to have AJL board members visit our libraries and speak with board members and others about why Jewish libraries are important. Amalia Warshenbrott is leading this effort. If you would like to hear more about what the group is doing or would like to participate in this task force, please contact Amalia or me.

Please contact me at kathybloomfield@gmail.com if you would like any of the following handouts:

- A set of sample slides from The School Library PowerPoint
- Nina Stenzler’s Tycher Library presentation
- Nina Stenzler’s Impressive Library Stats document
- A list of some interesting quotes about books and libraries from Jewish tradition as well as famous authors

I encourage you to go back to your libraries and find your advocates. Think outside the “Book.” SHOW why your synagogue, school or center **REQUIRES** a library. Prove that you and the library are an important part of whatever community you are in. As we continue to *face the new objects of interest, and, new objects for anxiety* presenting themselves daily, the time to act is now. Start advocating for your library and yourself today.

Thank you for your time and attention.