

DREAMING BIGGER

Jewish Leadership for Teens

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INTRODUCTION

DREAMING BIGGER

Dear Teen Leader,

Teens are changing the world. You are changing *our* world.

Teen leaders are planning, protesting, and raising the social consciousness of those around them. They are questioning the status quo, using technology to do good, and pushing others to do so as well. Teens are leading others. In sports, through extramural activities, and in clubs.

They're helping kids with cancer and teaching residents of senior facilities how to use the internet. They're holding bake sales and car washes for tzedakah and working as counselors in day camps and overnight camps, youth movements, and travel programs. Does this sound like you? For example . . .

- Do you look at problems others ignore? ✓
- Do you have a strong desire to fix what's broken? ✓
- Do you find joy in helping others? ✓
- Do you want to do something big in the world? ✓

If you're reading this book, chances are the answer is yes to at least one of these questions. Maybe you want to help neighbors or those in need through community service, advocate for a political cause, or run a debate club. You want to create change locally or globally—or both.

We know more about Jewish teens today than we've ever known before. Drs. Arielle Levites and Liat Sayfan surveyed over fifteen thousand teens in their

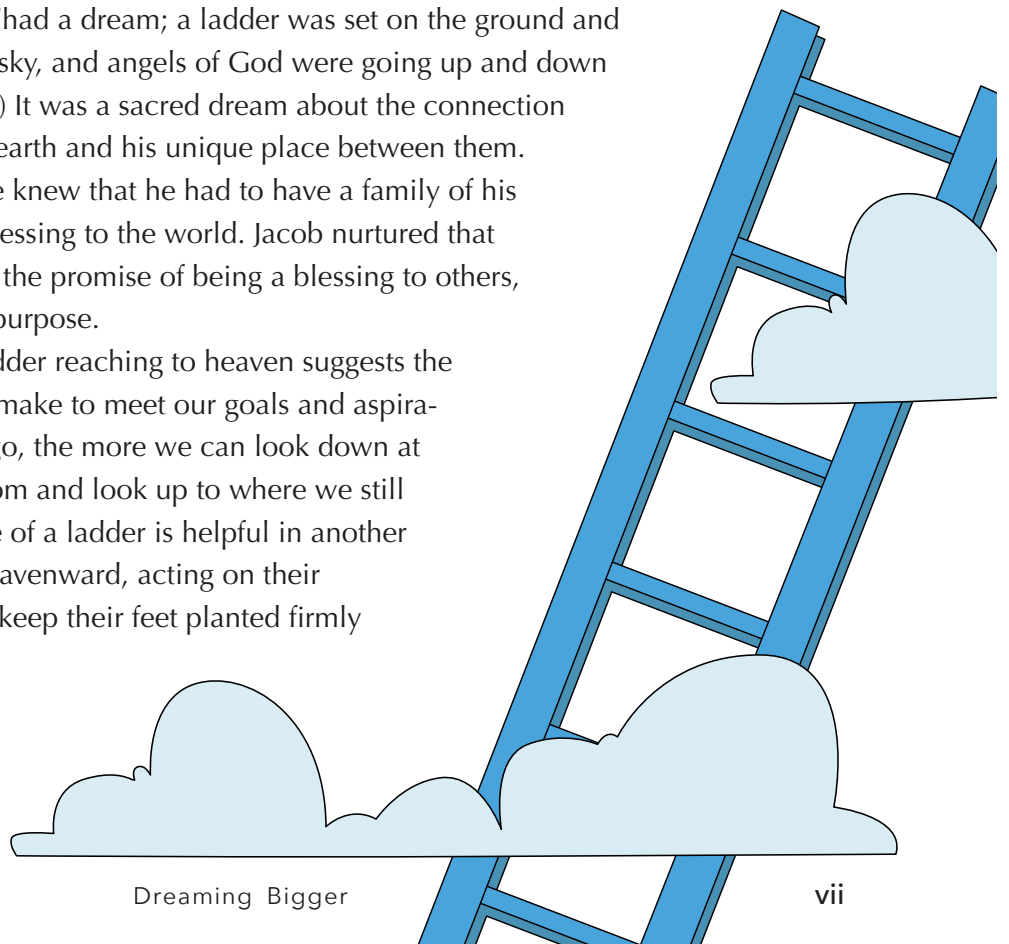
groundbreaking study “Gen Z Now: Understanding and Connecting with Today’s Jewish Teens.” Their findings tell us a lot about how Jewish teens feel about Judaism and their role in it. Teens today have a strong sense of self and feel proud to be Jewish. They enjoy learning about other Jewish communities and Jewish holidays and feel positive about celebrating them. They value strong friendships, family bonds, and the opportunity to be mentored. They want to be part of the Jewish people and have a positive relationship with the people and State of Israel. They seek language to express their spiritual journeys and their struggles. They also want to make a difference in the communities in which they live and the world at large.

Today’s Jewish teens are a generation of doers and creative thinkers who have the skills and confidence to know they don’t have to ask permission or wait for adults to make the world a kinder, better place.

What the research tells us are things you may already know because you are now designing your Jewish future. Now’s the time to find your voice and your causes, to think about your influence, mission, and purpose, and to bring others along with you to do good in the world. You are leading. You are dreaming bigger.

Judaism is a continuous story of dreams and dreamers. In the Torah, Jacob, as a teenager, “had a dream; a ladder was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it.” (Genesis 28:12) It was a sacred dream about the connection between heaven and earth and his unique place between them. When he woke up, he knew that he had to have a family of his own and become a blessing to the world. Jacob nurtured that dream, held tightly to the promise of being a blessing to others, and made it his life’s purpose.

The image of a ladder reaching to heaven suggests the climb each of us can make to meet our goals and aspirations. The higher we go, the more we can look down at where we’ve come from and look up to where we still want to go. The image of a ladder is helpful in another way: while striving heavenward, acting on their dreams, leaders must keep their feet planted firmly on the ground.



Inner Workout

- What do you usually dream about?

- Describe a dream that had an influence on your life.

Great leadership is built on big dreams. Shimon Peres, the ninth president of the State of Israel, who gave decades to public service, once offered this leadership advice:

People sometimes ask me: if you look back, what were your biggest mistakes? I will answer: we thought we had great dreams. And now we understand that they were not so great. Dream big. The bigger your dream, the more you will achieve.

Peres was not the only leader to believe in the power of dreams. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, who was the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth and a great Jewish leader, once wrote, "Dream dreams. Never be afraid to let your imagination soar."

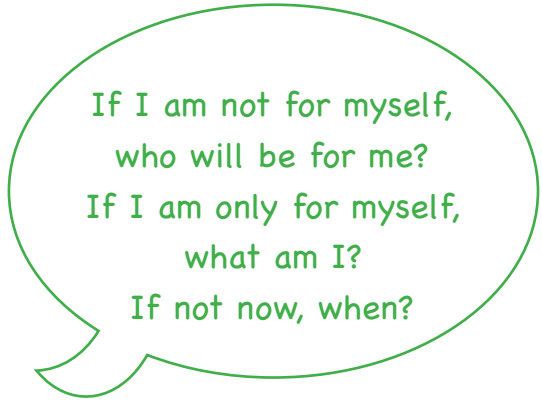
Pay attention to your dreams. Nurture them and grow them. Act on them and be bold.

What are your big, audacious dreams?
Let's discover them.

Erica and Benji

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The Talmudic sage Hillel first posed these three questions in a collection of Jewish wisdom called Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers). Each question is important on its own. But together, they remind us that in life and in leadership, we must begin with ourselves—our mission, our sense of purpose, and our unique skills and talents. Then we move beyond ourselves to see how we can make a meaningful contribution in the lives of others. While we may never finish the work, we can't wait another minute to begin making a difference. "If not now, when?"



In line with Hillel's saying, we've organized this book into three parts:

- Part I: Leading Yourself—"If I Am Not for Myself, Who Will Be for Me?" Understanding ourselves and how we lead.
- Part II: Leading Others—"If I Am Only for Myself, What Am I?" Our responsibility to others and how to lead effectively.
- Part III: Leading in Community—"If Not Now, When?" Leading to improve the world, starting today with issues that require teen leadership.

When you pick up this book, we encourage you to read it through to get a sense of where it may help you with your leadership or skip straight to what is most helpful to you right now. Need to raise some money? There's a chapter on fundraising. Need to give a speech and you're feeling nervous? Find some helpful guidelines in the chapter on communication. Struggling with issues of inclusion

and trying to persuade others to join you? Take a look at the chapter on inclusion and diversity.

Throughout the book, you'll find "Inner Workouts" to help you reflect on your leadership, along with case studies that you can use alone or in groups. There's also lots of advice from leadership experts and other teens. Finally, most chapters end with a "Jewish Bright Spot" to share insights from Jewish texts and invite you to interpret them.

We hope the questions and exercises included in many of the chapters will ease you out of your comfort zone and toward new discoveries, because we all grow through challenging where we are now, taking risks, and stretching ourselves.

Before we wrote this book, we surveyed and spoke with over a hundred teen leaders from Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They told us how they were bringing their personalities, skills, thoughts, concerns, spirituality, religious observance, politics, sexual orientation, race, color, disabilities, and abilities to lead in the Jewish community and in the world.

Through these conversations, we discovered how teens think about their leadership, what excites them, and what pressures they're under. We learned how demanding it is to balance the time devoted to friends, homework, and volunteering, along with the challenge of building a résumé for college. We heard about peer pressure and other anxieties and how much teens want to experience more joy and confidence as they lead. We share parts of those conversations throughout this book. In some cases, we changed names or identifying details when teens preferred to remain anonymous. We're so grateful to everyone we spoke with for trusting us with their thoughts and ideas!

We also interviewed many professionals who work with teen leaders. We want to give a special shout-out to all the executive directors, CEOs, therapists, rabbis, nonprofit leaders, youth movement leaders, teachers, head counselors, and others who took the time to share their insights with us.

All the wisdom we gathered from other teen and adult leaders is just the beginning. Now it's your turn to make this leadership journey your own.

This book is part of a much bigger initiative that we invite you to give to, gain from, and be part of. We have created animations and masterclasses, an educator's guide and conversation cards, discussion forums and so much more, all of which can be found at DreamingBigger.org. We invite you to share your leadership insights with us and our growing teen leadership community.

Thanks for joining us. We're so glad you're here!

LEADING AND ROLE MODELING

Adam is from London and has served in leadership roles at school and in youth movements in England, Australia, Israel, and the US, yet even he feels inadequate sometimes. “I don’t feel qualified to be a role model,” he says. “I mean, who am I to be an example to others? I didn’t do anything special; I just got here by luck.”

From talking with Adam, we know that’s not true; few teens are as qualified as Adam is. The fact that, over and over again, he’s seen a need and worked hard to fill it isn’t just luck. But like many teen leaders, Adam can’t see it for himself. That’s because he’s still figuring himself out *while* he’s leading and *when* he’s leading. That means he’s going to make mistakes, and that’s how he’s going to learn.

The moment you step into a leadership role, other people start looking up to you and judging you. They see you differently—even if you don’t feel different. They observe and may even comment on the decisions you make, the way you present yourself, and the way you treat others. They watch how you talk to adults, how you interact with friends. They pay attention to your body language, the way you dress, the way you act, and whether you follow rules or break them. They notice if you gossip or put down others who disagree with you. Leadership may be a privilege, but being watched can feel like a burden. It can also help you rise to your best self. It’s important for Adam to let others know that he’s learning, kind of like the sign that new drivers put on their cars that reads “Student Driver. Please Be Patient.”



Inner Workout

Think of a person who you consider a role model. In one minute, put down all the nouns, verbs, and adjectives you associate with that person.

● Nouns: _____

● Verbs: _____

● Adjectives: _____

Now make a word cloud of those words, writing each word bigger or smaller according to how important that quality is to you.

Being a role model doesn't just mean who you are when you're in public spaces or in front of a crowd. As a teen leader, you represent whatever it is you lead—your group, team, club, or organization—even when you're not in that setting. Leaders are often measured by their consistency and whether they are living up to their promises and values.

When you inspire people, they will try to imitate you, and that's where we see the importance of recognizing yourself as a role model. We met Jeremy in an earlier chapter. When he was working with younger campers, he started to recognize his influence on their behavior: "I try to lead by example. If I do something and people start to follow, that means I have accomplished something." Jeremy takes this responsibility seriously, in part from observing his own Jewish role models and their deep feelings of responsibility for the welfare of others. "Judaism is a part of who I am, so it leaks into everything I do," Jeremy says.

Case Study

Josh is excited to begin his first summer as a camp counselor. One week into the summer, he notices that all the fourth graders in his bunk are casually using curse words in conversation. Josh reprimands the kids for speaking this way. The week goes on and nothing changes, despite Josh's constant comments to his bunk. He brings it up in a staff meeting one evening. All the counselors agree that they will encourage their bunks to work on this. But the very next evening, when Josh is hanging out with other counselors, he notices two of them cursing a lot themselves.

Challenge: What advice would you give to Josh?

It's not always comfortable to be a leader, especially when you didn't sign up to be a role model. We're not expected to be 100 percent perfect. And that's the beauty of learning and leading.

Jewish Bright Spot

Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan (1881–1983), the founder of the Reconstructionist movement, reminds us that role modeling can go even beyond our own lifetime: "It is true that we are thrust into a world we did not make. But who makes the world into which our children are thrust?" We inherit a world from others, and we also create a world for others after us to inherit.

1. What do you think Rabbi Kaplan means by this?
2. We inherit worlds and we pass down worlds. How would you describe the world you inherited?
3. How would you describe the world you want to pass down to the next generation?

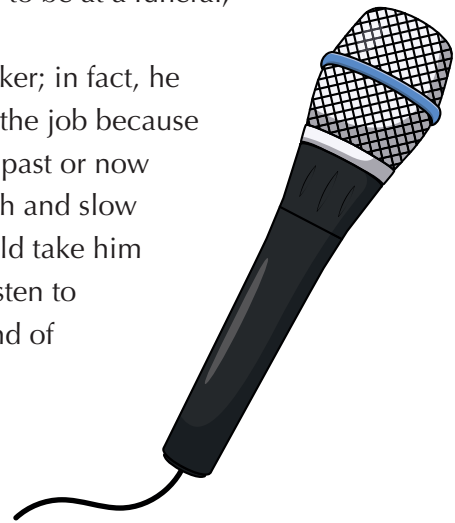
SAY WHAT YOU MEAN, MEAN WHAT YOU SAY

When you have to speak in front of others, do you . . .

- Blush?
- Feel weak in the knees?
- Sweat profusely?
- Fear you'll forget what to say?
- Rush through speaking to get it over with?
- Stumble?
- Doubt anyone's listening?
- Hold notes in front of your face so you can disappear?

Comedian Jerry Seinfeld talks about a study showing that public speaking was the number one fear of the average person, with number two being death. "This means," he says, "that to the average person, if you have to be at a funeral, you'd rather be in the casket than doing the eulogy."

In the Torah, Moses didn't think he was a gifted speaker; in fact, he had the chutzpah to tell God that he wasn't the man for the job because of it: "I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." (Exodus 4:10) Moses feared that no one would take him seriously: "What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me?" (Exodus 4:1) It sounds like Moses had the same kind of stage fright that terrorizes so many of us.



Inner Workout

- How often do you speak in front of a group?

- What emotions do you feel when thinking of speaking publicly?
Excitement? Anxiety? Nervousness?

- As we just read, Moses struggled with self-confidence and self-esteem. If you experience any of these struggles, do they get in the way of your leadership?

Effective communication skills are essential for leadership. Sure, you're also communicating when you write high-impact emails, texts, and meaningful thank-you notes, more on that later, but if you're going to lead, you're likely to be in front of a group sometimes. It may sound scary, but it can also be fun.

Estee Portnoy is the business manager and spokesperson for the NBA Hall of Famer Michael Jordan. And how did she get her start? As a teen leader in a Jewish organization, of course!

By age fifteen, as part of her local youth movement, Portnoy was planning conferences for two hundred people. "Adults advised us," Portnoy told us, "but we made a lot of decisions. We thought it was fun, but by the time I was eighteen, I knew how to lead." With her background as a dancer, she wasn't afraid to perform in front of others, but she wasn't naturally a speaker. She had to work hard at it. "Public speaking is about finding your voice." That means a journey of self-discovery: finding your passions and causes and then finding the language to share those passions. Just like playing basketball, public speaking requires thinking on your feet. It also takes practice.

Great public speakers have a gift:

- They make you feel like you're the only person in the room.
- It's as if they're talking directly to you.
- They share information while building a relationship with the audience.
- They create a warm and intimate atmosphere, even when they're speaking in front of thousands of people.
- They seem at ease—because they are.
- They look like they're really enjoying themselves—because they are!

Public speaking works best when speakers are true to themselves and speak from the heart.

Case Study

Daniella is an eleventh grader in a large public high school in Texas. During the rabbi's weekly discussion group for high school students, Daniella shared how shocked she'd felt getting off the school bus that morning and seeing two large swastikas etched into the glass of her school's doors. The school had held an assembly to talk about the incident, but Daniella still felt shaky. She burst into tears talking about the scene later, in the discussion group. Afterward, the rabbi took her aside and asked her if she would be willing to spend a few minutes next Shabbat speaking from the pulpit and talking about what she saw and how it made her feel.

Challenge: What advice would you give to Daniella to help her prepare?

US President Franklin D. Roosevelt is remembered as “the Great Communicator,” one of the best speakers of the twentieth century, with his words reaching the nation over the radio for the first time in history. But he wasn't always a great orator; those who knew him recalled that at first, he was halting and lacked

confidence. A few tricks helped him gain confidence, but he always kept his talks earnest and plain-spoken. So it makes sense that he summed up his own philosophy on public speaking in so few words: “Be sincere; be brief; be seated.”

To help you gain confidence, here are some hacks we’ve discovered from successful speakers:

- **Watch and imitate influential speakers.** Watch video clips of terrific speakers: teachers, celebrities, athletes, scholars, or politicians (TED talks are a great place to start). Listen to the content, but also observe their body language—the way they move and pause. Take notes.
- **Start small.** Find opportunities to speak to small groups of people, such as at meetings or informal get-togethers. Forget about the stage for now. Work your way up. (A great small way to get started is also by introducing someone else—see below!)
- **Personalize your remarks.** Listeners pay the most attention to meaningful personal stories. Whatever you’re going to say—even if it’s facts, numbers, or instructions—try to tell a piece of your story, especially a conflict or problem you overcame. A Jewish expression says, “Words that come from the heart enter the heart.”
- **Make eye contact.** Build trust by looking straight into listeners’ eyes. You could even try focusing on one person per sentence. Or for a short speech, you might want to make a broader visual sweep of the room a few times.
- **Less is more.** The longer the better?
Nope. Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg address was only 271 words long and only took him about two minutes to recite. The speaker before him had spoken for two hours. Hardly anyone remembers that speech or speaker. (It was Edward Everett.)



- **Keep introductions short.** One great way to start speaking in public is by introducing someone else. But please don't stand up and read their bio. Just thank everybody for coming, say a few words about the speaker and your connection to them, and then—as Roosevelt said—“Be seated.
- **Let your body speak.** Let your body language show your enthusiasm for your topic by using your arms and hands to support your words. Stand tall and confident (even if you don't *feel* confident).
- **Breathe deeply.** Before you take the stage, drop your shoulders and breathe deeply in through your nose and then out through your mouth. This should relax your shoulders and oxygenate your chest. Shallow breathing can intensify your anxiety.
- **Know your audience.** Speaking is not about you—it's always about your audience. Figure out who they are before you speak. You should tailor the content and tone to your audience.
- **Pause dramatically.** Don't hurry through your remarks; it's not a race to the finish line. And talking too fast can be exhausting for your audience. Slow down, pause, catch your breath. Help your mind catch up to your body; you can use pauses to prepare your audience for an important thought.
- **Share one thought well.** Commit to one idea and one idea only and develop it along a clear and logical path. If you're preparing a *d'var Torah* or a short spiritual message, don't try to teach the whole Torah; stick to your one key idea and deliver it in the best way you can.
- **Start strong and end strong.** How interesting and compelling are your first and last sentences? Those are your anchors. When you start out strong, your audience wants to follow you further. End on a high note and you lift peoples' spirits.
- **Give them a mission.** You have your audience's attention. What are you going to do with it? Do you want people to give tzedakah, volunteer, protest, support an issue, build a community, make a new friend? Present a call to action now that they've been inspired.
- **Say thank you.** Sure, it's essential to express gratitude. But beginning or ending with a long list of names is guaranteed to lose your audience and perhaps offend someone you forgot to thank. Instead, list their names on the program and ask people to look at it.

- **Ditch your notes.** Nothing says “I don’t care about my audience” more than reading your speech from a piece of paper. For one thing, you can’t make eye contact with listeners if you’re reading your speech. Try giving yourself just a few bullet points on an index card (or a few index cards).
- **They don’t know what you didn’t say.** Forgot something you wanted to say? Didn’t get a chance to work in that joke you’d been practicing? You’re the only one who knows about it. So unless what you forgot was essential, just shrug and move on. There will be a next time.
- **Practice.** Nothing beats practice. Volunteer for every speaking opportunity you can find, starting small and working your way up. As Franklin D. Roosevelt discovered, practice always pays off, and you’ll pick up tips and tricks along the way that will make it even easier next time.

You’ve got this.

Jewish Bright Spot

Jeremiah was very young—some say only a teenager—when he became a prophet. Like Moses, Jeremiah thought he was not fit to lead. He claimed he was too young for the job: “Ah, Adonai God! I don’t know how to speak, for I am still a boy.” But God responded, “Do not say, ‘I am still a boy,’ but go wherever I send you and speak whatever I command you.” (Jeremiah 1:6–7)

1. How does God convince Jeremiah to overcome his resistance?

2. Have you ever said or thought you’re too young to lead? How did you overcome that thought?

3. How could you encourage others to get involved who may see themselves as too young or inexperienced?
