

What both rabbis seem to recognise is that while God may have had many skills, volunteer management was not one of them. Furious when people are keen to volunteer, furious when they're not, God's style of leadership relied heavily on command and not at all on soft words of persuasion.

All of us who've worked in any volunteer-led environment know that there are some roles it's all but impossible to persuade anyone to do, and some roles which are more glitzy or glamorous or otherwise able to attract long queues of willing volunteers.

The solution lies in making minor adjustments to both sides of the deal: unpalatable roles need to be made more palatable, whether by tweaking them to fit into a working week more easily, or by making them more of a social experience, or even by something as simple as providing biscuits. Nobody will agree to carry the ark if their ears are going to get singed.

At the same time, we need to think laterally about potential volunteers' abilities. It seems obvious that whoever we recruit to run the shul Facebook page needs IT skills, but actually, perhaps that's something they can learn and their availability during the evenings is a more important asset. Maybe the Levites should have restricted ark-carrying to those without flammable facial hair!

The dwindling numbers of such an important tribe illustrate what happens when roles are handed out thoughtlessly, when they are blindly doled out in the way they always have been. It's the easy option and it results in decline and the loss of potential new talent.

Delving behind the dry census statistics of Parashat Pinchas should remind all community leaders to do the hard work of looking deeply into their communities, learning about their flock, and nurturing them to ensure that everyone finds their place.

Shabbat shalom.

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