

A TIME OF ENORMOUS CHALLENGE, GREAT OPPORTUNITY

Start work on your shule survival plan

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It is not so much the coronavirus I am concerned about but the fast unfolding corona-recession.

This will have a significant impact on Australian shules.

In my experience, virtually every shule survives on a finely tuned budget and, even larger and seemingly well-established shules invariably balance their budget by reliance on donations.

A realistic scenario is that many people are going to lose their jobs, many businesses will either move from profit to sustaining losses or will fail and the wealth of older people has already been diminished by the stock market crash.

Members need to hear "Your shule is here for you," and at all times, the message must be about how Judaism is a religion of survival and community standing together.

All of this paints a picture of fundraising becoming difficult and this is clearly already underway.

Most shule boards have a majority of members who are not experienced in running businesses and are thus nervous of risk and of operating with a deficit budget.

The principles I worked through when I wrote my book, *Business Survival - Steering*

your Business Through the Recession, in anticipation of a major recession following the GFC, are just as applicable to shules and Jewish organisations as they are to businesses, and the principles from the last recession are just as applicable today.

The first step is to put together a diverse team to work on a "shule survival plan".

Paramount is the survival of the organisation.

This is not a burden which can be borne by the president and rabbi alone. The burden must be shared and the more communal consultation the better.

The stages to be planned for comprise the current stage which is chaos, followed by emerging pattern, worst case scenario and then rebuilding.

Sunshine will always come. The COVID recession will recede and seeds will sprout and become stems and then plants and trees.

During the chaos stages, pessimists will usually hold sway and will overstate the consequences.

The planning must include the sunshine days ahead. This leads on to what I see as real opportunities for shules.

Over the 2000 years of rabbinic Judaism, shules have been the institutions which have been critical to the survival of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. They have been flexible, democratic during eras when democracy was an unknown concept, and have been the cornerstone of communal life.

At the heart of Judaism is a blueprint for our survival.

It is the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people which is the corner-



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stone of our religion. Over 4000 years of often torturous and dangerous history, we have survived and not only survived but prospered.

In times of chaos, uncertainty and despair, shules have played a major role in Jewish lives. They need to provide a haven, as they always have during dangerous times.

The survival rates of Jews from mass diseases has usually been higher than for the general population because of the guidelines our religion provides to us. We wash our hands before eating, we don't eat treif (such as bars) and hygiene is a critical part of our life.

Jews have been at the forefront of healthcare in most of the countries they have lived in (when allowed).

The current opportunity to shule boards and presidents is to show the *yahrzeit-and-yom tov* Jews that Judaism is a wonderful gift bestowed on them and that engaging more fully with Jewish life will enrich the balance of their lives.

At this time of chaos, wise and calm leadership is needed, as well as an air of detachment from the surrounding noise.

Businesses which survive and prosper will focus on their core strengths and will be innovative, adaptive and truly focused on their customers' needs.

During the chaos stage, they will be a beacon of light and calm in the raging storm.

So it will be with successful shules.

This is a time to look at budgets and see what can be cut or deferred.

Businesses are reviewing wage costs and the shule survival plan must include this. It may involve greater use of volunteers and salary cuts for a period.

Never has the time been greater to reach out to congregants and just talk to them.

As soon as Health Department guidelines allow, services must resume. If there are limits on numbers, run more but shorter services.

During the chaos stage, members need to hear "Your shule is here for you," and at all times, the message must be about how Judaism is a religion of survival and community standing together.

We have gone through much worse, usually with us being the victim. When mankind is the victim, we gain a comparative resilience.

I predict a revival of traditional religion because people turn to it in times of uncertainty.

The shule survival plan must provide for these messages to be heard loudly and clearly now, to ensure that it prospers when the good times return.

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