

A toast to our synagogue superheroes

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By

[Ben Vorspan](#)

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One week to go!

Yes, Erev Rosh Hashanah is one week from tonight, and for most of us, that news is a reminder to buy the brisket or sign up for children's programming. But there are a select few in our circle of Jewish professionals for whom these four words, on this exact day, make their hearts race and their anxiety spike.

When most people think of the approach of the High Holy Days their minds go to their community's rabbis and cantors, whose inspirational sermons and elegant renditions of the liturgy will set the tone for the coming year. These community leaders will certainly feel the pressure this week, and they will receive well-deserved accolades from congregants with every pre-break-fast handshake or kiss on the cheek.

But for weeks, a vast network of synagogue employees around the world have been waking from nightmares about double-booked reserved sanctuary seats and *Yizkor* book misprints, knowing that there simply aren't enough hours in the day to fully prepare for the High Holy Days train that is barreling down the track. It is these back-of-house warriors — the people with names most congregants do not know and faces they may never recognize — who carry with them a kind of stress that makes finals week at UCLA feel like a walk in the park compared to the week to come.

So, to temper the harsh reality that just five business days remain, I propose that we take a moment to recognize and celebrate the contributions of those heroically working behind the scenes to make our High Holy Days run seamlessly:

Here's to the receptionists, the accountants, the membership directors and clergy assistants. To the communications coordinators, executive directors, development associates and facilities managers.

Here's to the tacklers of odd jobs: The grape juice procurers, Torah silver polishers, prayer book insert printers, usher organizers, directional sign hangers, Torah service honor distributors, *tallit* arrangers and *machzor* stackers.

Here's to the chair wranglers, precisely setting up more than 1,000 seats in exacting adherence to a chart detailing a configuration handed down through the ages, transforming an empty space into a gathering ground for community and connection.

Here's to the database defenders, meticulously updating member information, creating and proofreading the 80-page *Yizkor* book — and then fielding the phone call the day after Yom

Kippur about a single error from the member who refuses to accept that it was their own spelling mistake to begin with.

Here's to the champions of the new e-ticketing system: It finally won support after you spent years advocating for its adoption, and now you spend so many hours configuring and uploading spreadsheets of last-minute renewals, diligently explaining its merits to an aging population who wonder why they didn't receive their tickets in the mail.

Here's to the senders of High Holy Day emails: Finely crafting concisely worded masterpieces containing everything that each member could possibly need to know about every service and program, and still responding on Erev Rosh Hashanah to emails asking questions that were answered in each of the daily emails.

Here's to the guardians of the thermostat: Intoners of "It'll warm up as soon as the sanctuary is full" and advocates of the *tallit* as a garment to warm the body as much as the soul, grateful for each service that passes without the need to speed-dial the A/C guy.

Here's to the head usher's consigliere and the security guard's go-to: Sacrificing your own spiritual needs, perfectly balancing warmth and tough love as you race around the property putting out fires on all fronts.

Here's to the support staff's survival tools: The 8 a.m. Diet Coke, the candy bar for lunch and the three fingers of Jack Daniels at dinner. To the walk-in fridge for when you don't want them to hear you scream with frustration, and to the shady spot at the edge of the parking lot for when you don't want them to see you break down in an overwhelmed heap.

Let's raise a glass to our synagogue superheroes: To the dozens, or the handful, or (at some smaller synagogues) the lone individual carrying the weight of our High Holy Days on their shoulders.

In the coming year, may we be as resilient and adaptable in our efforts at our own organizations. May we give as selflessly and remain as dedicated to our causes as these tireless warriors are to our Jewish communities. May we all pivot and multi-task as elegantly, manage our time as efficiently and work with teams as cohesively. May we continually show support for our friends, colleagues and synagogue superheroes everywhere by reminding them:

We see you.

We appreciate you.

And if the e-ticketing system goes down 10 minutes before *Kol Nidre*, we know that it's not your fault.

Ben Vorspan is a veteran nonprofit employee and the author of [The Nonprofit Imagineers](#). He has also been fortunate to serve as "Sender of High Holy Day Emails" (aka marketing and communications director) alongside some spectacular synagogue superheroes.