



**Cantorial Transition Committee**  
**Summary of Recommendation to the Board of**  
**Directors**  
**December 27, 2009**

Last spring, the Neveh Shalom Board of Directors created a "Cantorial Transition Committee" and charged it with making recommendations to the board on new cantorial leadership. During the past several months, the committee has met regularly to ensure a smooth transitional period and to explore options for the future.

Among the committee's early accomplishments were:

- Interviewing and hiring a Chazan for the High Holy Days this past fall. Cantor Barbara Slader was well received by the congregation.
- Planning the transition for bar and bat mitzvah training and supervision. We helped make sure that families were kept informed of changes and that Cantor Shivers' previous responsibilities were fulfilled by our team of tutors and staff.
- Organizing volunteers to help lead Shabbat and holiday services.

As you might guess, it is not easy to change from a leadership model with three clergy members to one with two. Rabbis Isaak and Greenstein and the shul's professional staff have stepped up to make sure that this interim period has run as smoothly as possible.

The bulk of the committee's work has focused on looking at what type of cantorial model makes sense for our congregation. We have done our homework. Before moving forward with a recommendation to the congregation, we wanted to be sure we understood what our options were. We have met with our rabbis, talked to leaders and clergy at more than 15 synagogues around the country, met with the leadership of the Cantors Assembly, and engaged in spirited and educational discussions within our committee. A number of interested congregants attended committee meetings and shared their thoughts. Recently, we surveyed the members of Neveh Shalom and received more than 250 responses. Based on our work to date, we are now comfortable in making a recommendation to the congregation.

#### **Cantorial Models**

Our model at Neveh Shalom has followed a "traditional" route, with an ordained cantor well-versed in traditional melodies leading Shabbat and holiday services, training bar and bat mitzvah students and organizing musical programming for the synagogue. This is a familiar model at many synagogues and one to which we are accustomed. But as we discovered in our research, many synagogues have successfully used other models. In addition to the traditional model, here are some other examples we looked at and what those models might look like at Neveh Shalom:

- **Ritual Director**  
Under this model, a paid professional leads or finds volunteers to lead each service. This person would be proficient at reading torah and is able to lead any service. S/he oversees the training of both b'nai mitzvah students and adults who would like to be lay daveners/torah readers. While this person might be musically inclined, they might not have professional musical or cantorial training.
- **Local Professional Cantorial Soloists**  
Some congregations hire "cantorial soloists" who may have training or skills but not the ordination of a cantor. For Neveh Shalom, our committee talked about the possibility of hiring three or four local professionals as "cantorial soloists" who would lead Shabbat and holiday services on a regular basis. One person from this group might be a "music director" who would ensure consistency throughout all services and programming. A separate cantor might be hired specifically for the high holidays. Someone else might lead the b'nai mitzvah program.
- **Volunteers**  
There are many congregations - even some similar in size to Neveh Shalom - that have no cantor or little in the way of professional musical staff. This model would rely heavily on lay leaders who would lead davening and read torah. The congregation might invest in special training to ensure a solid core of volunteer leaders who would meet specific standards for davening. A separate cantor would be hired for the high holidays. Someone else would lead the b'nai mitzvah program.

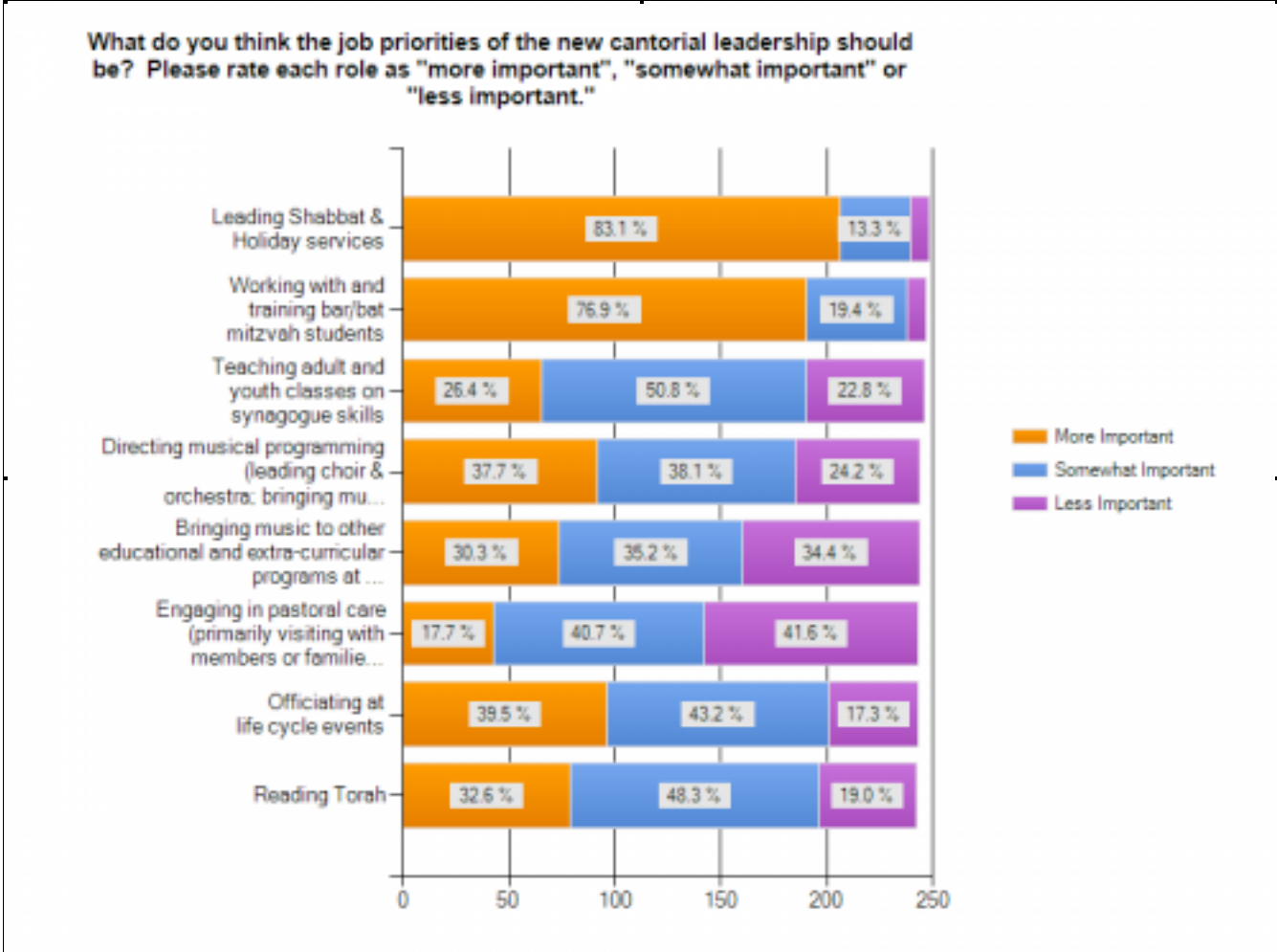
While these descriptions might give you a sense of the mechanics of how we might cover job responsibilities, they do little to get at some of the intangible benefits a musical leader can bring to a congregation. One person who met with our committee described a desire for a leader who can both "give us breath and take our breath away." Another suggested that we find someone with solid skills and a personality that fits with our congregation and then build job responsibilities around that person. We heard from many people that a musical leader can play an integral role in giving people a sense of belonging and building a more cohesive synagogue community.

#### **Congregational Survey**

With those thoughts in mind, we created a simple, four-question survey to ask members of Neveh Shalom what they are looking for in new cantorial leadership. More than 250 people responded to the survey. While the

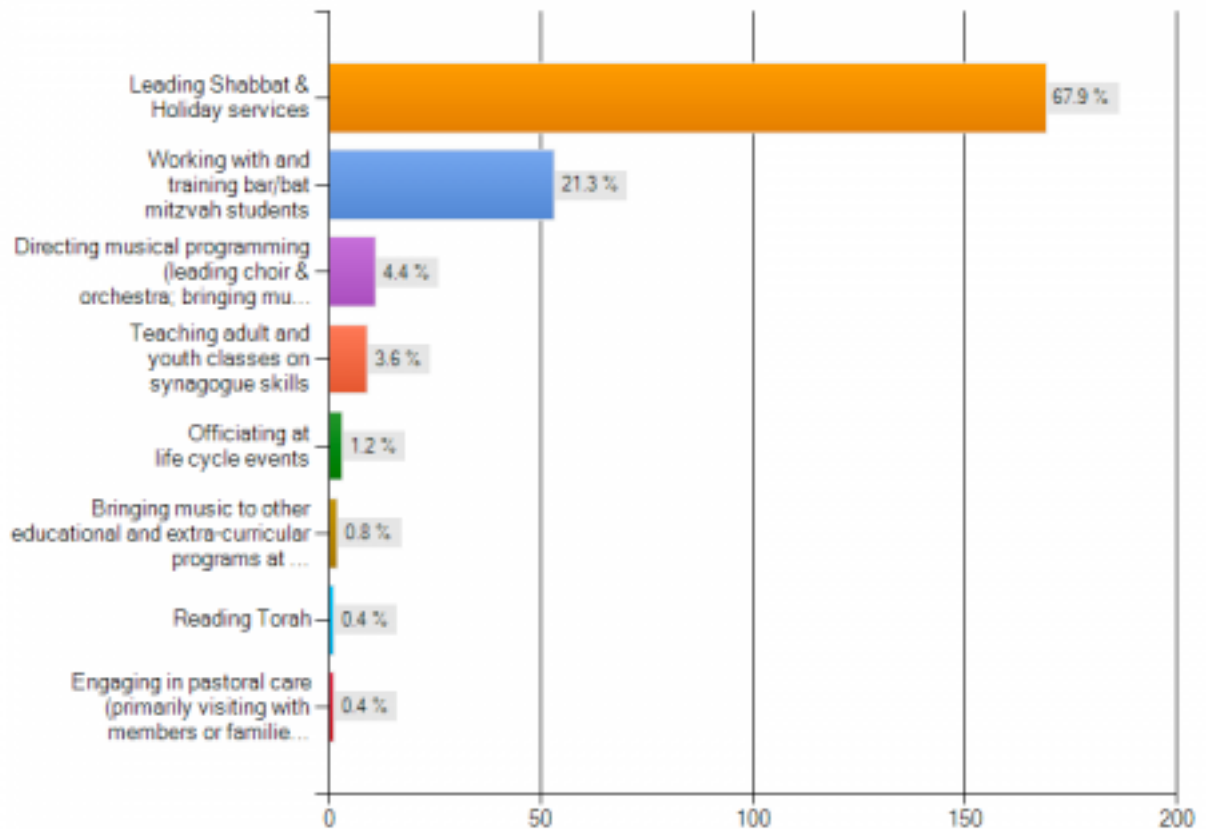
survey is not a scientific sampling, we feel the results help us to move forward. We are going to interpret the results here but want to share the raw numbers with the congregation.

The first question asked people to **rank the relative importance of a number of potential job responsibilities for new cantorial leadership**. The numbers on each bar represent the percentage of all the responses for that responsibility that were ranked "more important," "somewhat important," or "less important."



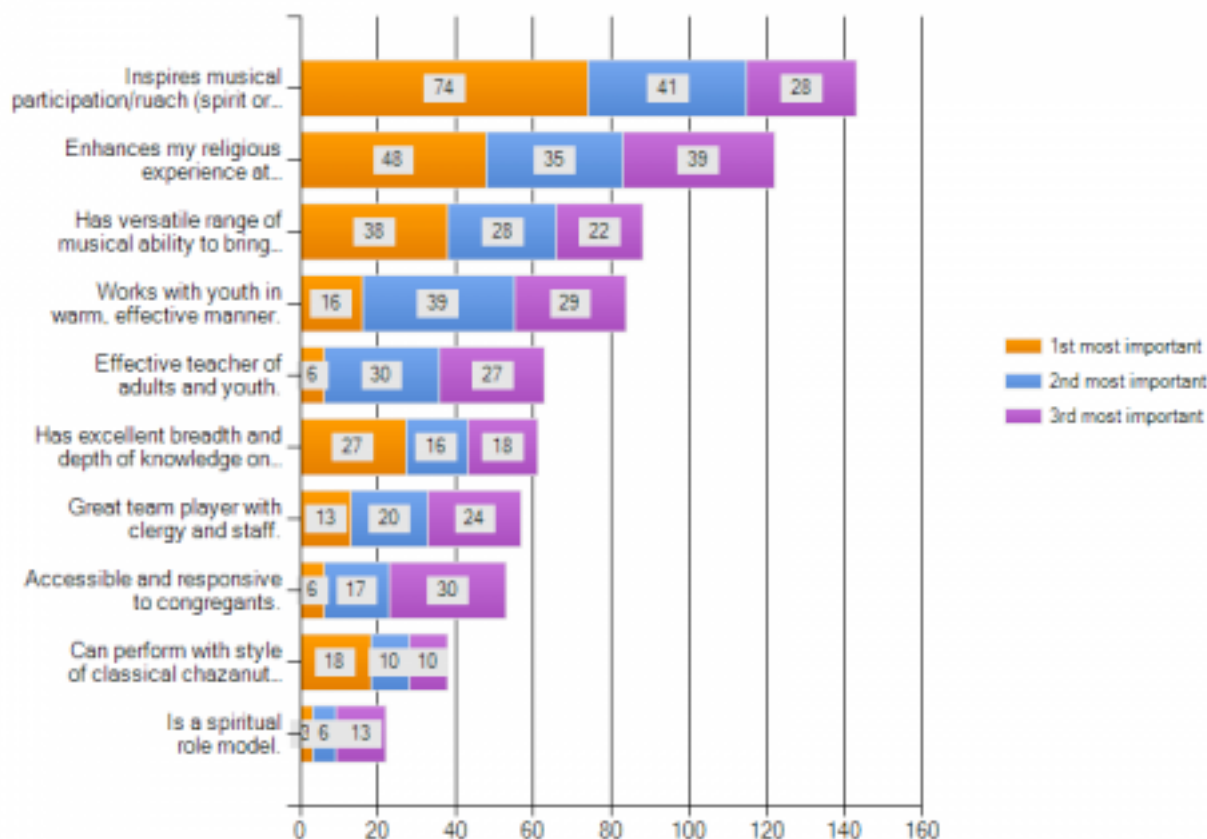
Question 2 asked people to **rank their first priority for the new leader**. The numbers represent the percentage of all respondents who ranked something as the top priority.

Now please mark which of these roles you think should be the **FIRST PRIORITY** of the new cantorial leadership. Please check only one.



Question 3 focused on **personal qualities**. The numbers on each bar represent the number of respondents for each segment (e.g., 74 people ranked "inspires musical participation" as their first most important quality, 41 said that was their second most important, etc.).

Please rank, in order of importance to YOU, the three most important personal qualities that our new cantorial leadership will have.



Finally, Question 4 was an open-ended question, to which people shared their personal visions for future cantorial leadership.

### **Committee Recommendation**

Based on our research and discussions, the committee determined that Neveh Shalom would be best served with professional cantorial leadership. We felt that new leadership could help enhance services, spirituality and ruach at the shul and could strengthen our community. However, we chose not to recommend a definite model or job description for this position (or positions). The committee unanimously recommended to the Board that the congregation begin a formal search process for new cantorial leadership, and that we start the search with the Cantors Assembly (CA), the umbrella organization for Conservative cantors. We will soon submit an application to the CA and begin to screen candidates. Depending on the response to our search, we may later broaden the search to include cantors who are not members of the CA and other candidates who are not ordained as cantors. We anticipate the search will take three to four months.

We have come a long way in the past many months and are proud of our work to date. However, we also know that the real work is yet to come, as we focus in on finding candidates that are the best match for our community. We look forward to keeping you posted in the weeks and months ahead.

For more information about this process, please contact committee chair Rich Meyer ([rich@meyer5.com](mailto:rich@meyer5.com)) or Fred Rothstein ([frothstein@nevehshalom.org](mailto:frothstein@nevehshalom.org)).