

## RECRUITING TEACHERS TO “OUT-OF-TOWN” SCHOOLS

by Rabbi Maccabee Avishur

### The Problem

Referring to any community outside of New York’s gravitational pull as “out of town” can be irritating, especially to an “out-of-towner” like me. However, the more I speak with teachers and graduate students in the New York area about job prospects, the more I hear the phrase. I’ve come to accept the expression as a sociological reality that highlights the challenges schools from outside the NY area face. However, in deference to those who live in all those amazing communities that don’t happen to be near Manhattan, we prefer to refer to “out of town” as ONY (Outside New York).



I’ve had many conversations with school leaders at ONY schools. They want to hire new teachers who are energetic, youthful, and passionate about Torah who will serve as Modern Orthodox role models for their students. Of course, they want those teachers to come with deep content knowledge, classroom experience, and some kind of credentials (e.g. Masters degree, *smicha*, etc.). The problem is, for the most part, those teachers aren’t interested in leaving the New York area.

I’ve also had a lot of conversations with aspiring teachers. When we talk about the prospect of leaving the New York area to teach, they shut down. When I probe deeper, I find that unmarried teachers are most scared of being away from the *shidduch* scene. Other concerns, which are shared by both married and single teachers (and which rank lower for single teachers), include being away from family, being away from familiar social circles, and lack of kosher food (read, Jewish infrastructure).



When I served as a school leader in ONY schools, I often wondered aloud with my colleagues about this problem. The conversation usually ended up with us throwing our hands in the air and saying, “We don’t really stand a chance at recruiting the best and brightest. We just can’t compete with New York.”

What would need to be true for young men and women to consider moving ONY to accept teaching positions at your schools? Here are some practical suggestions to help you recruit the best teachers.



## **HAVE A PLAN**

The most important step you can take in recruiting teachers to your school is to create a plan for this effort. Don't pick and chose from the suggestions below and try them haphazardly. Rather, set realistic goals for faculty recruitment, develop a strategy that you think will work for your community, plan your steps, and marshal the resources and people you need to execute the plan. We hope the ideas you see below will inspire you to think of creative ways to systematize this process in your school.

Your plan should include the following steps, each of which our office can work with you on to help you elucidate the details.

- I. Appoint a recruitment committee
- II. Evaluate your school and community
- III. Brainstorm possibilities for teacher recruitment
- IV. Establish leads in professional communities
- V. Reinforce and upgrade systems of support for new teachers in the school
- VI. Set SMART recruitment goals
- VII. Develop compensation packages
- VIII. Create job descriptions
- IX. Mobilize your board, parents, and alumni
- X. Design marketing and recruiting opportunities and events
- XI. Attend the Jewish job fair
- XII. Conduct recruiting trips
- XIII. Follow up with candidates
- XIV. Seal the deal
- XV. After the hire - supporting new faculty

## **WHAT DO YOU OFFER?**

### **Transparent Compensation**

The first thing to focus on is compensation. I think it's vital for schools to be open and transparent about how much beginning teachers can make AND how far that money will go in their communities. Schools should communicate a starting salary or a salary range for beginning teachers based on basic credentials (Masters Degree and up to two years of experience). They can also indicate that they'd be willing to pay more for someone with more experience.

### **Cost of Living**

One area in which ONY schools can make a real impression on potential candidates is cost of living. Vital to the communication about compensation is making it abundantly



clear how far that salary will go. How much does it cost to rent an apartment? How much will single men be able to squirrel away in preparation for when they get married?

You should know (or have someone close by who does) the actual cost of housing in your area. Don't tell a young teacher how much a 4-bedroom house costs in your neighborhood. Tell him how much a 1- or 2-bedroom apartment costs. For young families, that 4-bedroom house might be relevant, but they might be more interested in a 2-bedroom house or a 3-bedroom condo. These accommodations cost a lot less in most ONY communities than in the New York area. Make it your business to know this data and to openly share it with all your candidates.



### **Creative Compensation**

Does your community offer any incentives to encourage young people to move in, like an interest free downpayment loan? If not, would the community consider creating one? It will mean a lot to a young family if the community is investing in them, especially if that investment is forgivable over time with each year the teacher stays in the school and the family stays in the community. Other subsidies are also attractive, like rent reduction, as are automobile subsidies and other forms of providing for basic living expenses.

Offer new teachers a Relocation Stipend. If you had originally budgeted \$55k for the position, offer \$54k and \$1000 for relocation for a single person, or \$2-3k for a married couple.

And perhaps there are other financial perks to living in your community like no state income tax. Highlight those things. They are great selling points.

### **Lower Tuition and Tuition Breaks**

Tuition in ONY schools is usually less costly than in the New York area. But that might not be enough. How much is tuition for teachers' kids? Many schools offer tuition breaks to their own teachers, either providing free tuition or substantial discounts without having the teachers go through the (sometimes humiliating) process of applying for tuition assistance.

### **New Teacher Support and Professional Growth**

Teachers care about what's going on in a school to help them grow as professionals. So, an area your ONY school might highlight is new teacher support. New teachers want to know that they're going to be successful, and they also know that between 25-50% of new teachers leave the field within five years of joining it. What does your school do to make sure that its teachers are successful? Do you have a new teacher induction program? Is there ample time for effective professional development? Highlight the things you do that make your teachers successful. Sharing anecdotes and testimonials can be powerful. Being supported means a lot to new teachers.

### **Really, It's About the Shidduch**

Recruiting young, single teachers comes down to a few things. Sure, these young people need some access to kosher food and a social circle. However, they also want to know that they will not remain single forever if they choose to move to your community.



One idea to mitigate this concern is to be creative with the compensation package. What would it mean to a single young man if an ONY school were to offer him the ability to fly back to the New York area once a month to see family, reconnect with old friends, eat great kosher food, and, of course, date? For example, the school could give this young man one Friday off every month, and offer him a travel stipend to fly back to New York. This would all be part of his

total compensation when he was hired.

But it's not enough just to fly your young teacher back to New York once a month. The school and community should designate someone outside the school (not a parent or teacher) to be the new teacher's "personal *shadchan*." This doesn't have to be a professional matchmaker, just someone interested in taking care of the needs of the new teacher. They could touch base regularly, and the personal *shadchan* could actively seek out opportunities for the new teacher to meet appropriate singles in the area. Equally important, and connected to the idea above, this personal *shadchan* should make it her responsibility to set up appropriate dates for the teacher for his trips back to New York. Don't leave it up to him alone to manage his dating life.

### **Married Couples**

Much of the above is true for married teachers, too, with the exception of the *shidduch* concerns, even though the model we suggested could also work for young couples. Married teachers care a great deal about being away from family. Perhaps the school can offer them a travel stipend and a long weekend off once a quarter to go see family. This could be included as part of the total compensation package (much like the relocation stipend we mentioned above), so it wouldn't impact the school's bottom line.

Young couples also care about being away from "kosher food," which is a euphemism for a strong Jewish infrastructure. They want to know that they won't be the only *frum* Jews around, and that there is an *eruv*, a *mikvah*, and a school for their kids to attend that will meet their needs. Communicate about these amenities in your community.

Married families also want to be sure that they'll be able to make a living.

This is where ONY schools can come on strong and shine against their "in-town" competition. As we mentioned above, housing is probably cheaper in your community than in the New York area. Make it your business to know how much it costs to rent or buy accommodations suitable for young couples (2- or 3-bedroom apartments, condos, and homes). Line up a few local real estate agents who are ready to assist the young couple with finding housing, and connect the candidates with them.

In addition, you should create resources that help young families learn about your community. Prepare a brief document describing your community, and post it on the school and *shul* websites. Link those pages in your online job postings. Work together

your school and community including interviews with young couples and singles describing what they love about living there. Provide candidates with contact information of people in the community whom they can speak with to learn more about what it's like to live there. And DEFINITELY have them visit. More on this below.

### **Find the Spouse a Job**

Another concern married teachers have about moving is finding jobs for their spouses. This is an area where I think ONY schools thrive. Your school probably has a network of well-connected professionals in several different fields, including law, medicine, and business. Schools should promote their ability to help make connections for potential new teachers. Never guarantee a job, but guarantee to do your best to help, and talk about past successes you've had, giving specific examples.

## **GET THEM THERE**

### **The Pilot Visit**



Teaching candidates are not going to come to your school or town unless you pay for them to do so. You should offer to pay for their flight, accommodations, and food. You should make their visit to your school a real first-class, wine-and-dine event. They should feel like the school really wants them.

It's also a good idea to have candidates come in for *Shabbos* so that they can really check out your community. Schedule the school visit, interviews, and model lesson for a Friday, and then set the candidate up for *Shabbos* in your community. Pick the right host family, and arrange for the candidate to have a great *motzei Shabbos* activity with other young teachers from your school or other young people in the community.

## **ONCE THEY'RE THERE**

### **Adopt-a-Teacher**

When a new teacher moves to your town, he probably won't have a built-in network of friends and family. While the new teacher likely will be very busy during the week, he might be anxious about making *Shabbos* plans. Your community might consider setting up each new teacher with an adoptive family that would have the new teacher over for *Shabbos*, set up invitations for him for the first few months, and generally look out for his welfare. Let him feel like he is booked solid every *Shabbos* rather than worrying on Friday afternoon what he'll be doing for lunch the next day.

The adoptive family can also help the new teacher navigate the new town. Where should he shop for food? What are the fun places to visit? Who are people in town that he should meet? New teachers have a lot of questions about the new community they are living in and need someone to help them find answers.

### **Learning Opportunities**

Teachers who are new to town are also looking for opportunities to learn Torah. Make sure that someone in the community is actively helping the new teacher find a *chavrusa* and learn about *shiurim* that he/she could attend.

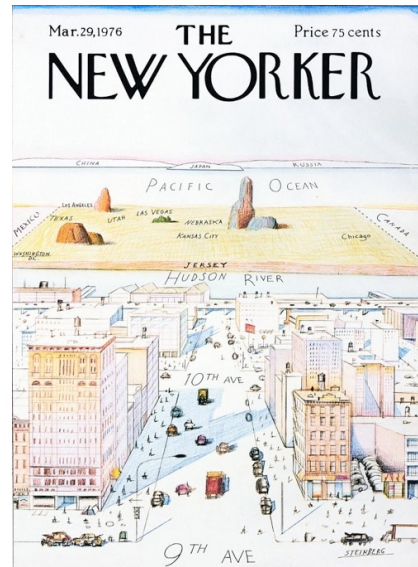


## MARKET YOUR SCHOOL

### There are Jews There?!

That old *New Yorker* cover of the world according to New Yorkers still resonates today. When I speak with emerging teachers, they are often surprised to learn that there are Jewish communities of substance in places like Tennessee, Texas, and Northern California, to name a few. This reality strengthens the notion that ONY schools, in collaboration with other community organizations, have to take an active and robust approach to marketing themselves.

One way to do this is to raise your community's profile by working together with other YU organizations, like the CJF to bring young Jews to your community during school breaks. See if you can get the OU and the NCYI to profile your community in an upcoming publication. Start creating an online presence for your school on sites that teachers frequent, like the YUSP online Community of Practice (YUEducate.com) and Lookjed.



### Bring in the Social Scene

If young people are hesitant to come to your community because they're afraid to be separated from the social scene, why don't you bring the social scene to your town? Every city has something exciting to offer people who visit. For example, Houston hosts the biggest rodeo in the world every February. The Houston community could host a young singles Rodeo *Shabbaton* for any people interested in coming down there. The weather is typically nicer in Houston than in New York in the winter, the Rodeo is awesome (I speak from personal experience), and if the cost were minimal or free, I suspect many young singles would attend. Communities just have to look at their local cultural and social offerings to see what might be appealing to young Jewish singles and develop social gatherings around those.

### Be Where They Are

The best way to recruit people is through personal connections. Even in the digital age and with "digital natives," nothing is more effective than meeting face to face. If a young RIETS student meets you in person and likes you and what you have to say, he might be willing to consider moving to your town to work for you.

Visit YU at least once a year before or early in the hiring season (some time in the first semester), and make sure that part of your visit is set aside to meet with students who might be interested in your school. Communicate your visit with the YU School Partnership office well in advance so that we can help recruit students to come meet with you. Be creative with the type of meeting you'll be having. For example, you might screen a movie featuring your city followed by a discussion, with free food of course.

Get your alumni at YU to recruit their friends to come meet with you, too. Even if those alumni aren't interested in teaching, chances are they have friends who are. If they

know your school and you've made a favorable impression on them, your school will have created positive buzz and good will. It's hard to put a price on that.

### **Job Fair**

Make sure to come to the YU Jewish Job Fair every year. I would argue that it's valuable to come to the job fair even if you don't have any current openings. First, you never know what might happen to your faculty once April rolls around, so having a pile of resumes from people you've already met is good insurance. In addition, keeping your school in the minds and eyes of future Jewish educators is good business.

### **Cultivate the Next Generation**

Chances are there are teenagers in your community who might end up at YU or Stern as undergraduate students. Start making real and meaningful connections with them now. When you visit New York, take out your former students for lunch. Free food and personal connections go a long way with college students.

Invite your alumni back to your community for the *chagim*, and have the community offer to pay for them to bring a friend or two. Find opportunities for them to be involved in the community when they return for a visit. Perhaps they want to give a *shiur* or run a program. The more they feel connected to their home communities, the more they'll want to return there when they "grow up."

Are there any teens in your community now whom you suspect might make great teachers? If so, work with the resourceful people in your community to figure out how to get them trained and get them back home.

For example, could your community offer a scholarship to its own students who want to attend YU to learn about education? The larger the scholarship, the more leverage you have over the recipient to ask her to give back to the community once she's earned her degree.

Also, the power that a family has over its own children cannot be underestimated. Leverage those family bonds to add to the reasons why young teachers might want to move back to your town.

### **Be "Information Rich"**

I have found in my dealings with teaching candidates that the more information they have about a school, the more likely they are to apply and be seriously interested in your school. Too many school leaders are ready to be creative and offer some of the stuff we've described above only if "the right candidate comes along."

THIS IS A MISTAKE. Don't wait for the right candidate...make him come to you.

It is vital that when you advertise your openings, you share information about everything your school is willing to do to recruit the best and brightest. You don't have to promise that the successful candidate will get all these incentives, but you can put them on the table as evidence that you are committed to hiring the best faculty. Encourage people to apply to your jobs and raise your profile in the *chinuch* community by advertising and promoting the initiatives you have undertaken to recruit faculty. Everybody knows that a great school is made of great teachers, so show the world your commitment to getting great teachers. Word will spread.

## CLOSING WORDS

Ultimately, the frustrating reality for ONY schools is that the crop of Jewish teachers who are willing to move away from New York is relatively small. Therefore, ONY schools must market themselves to potential teachers. Highlighting the reasons teachers would want to work for you and creating an infrastructure that takes care of new teachers' needs (both single and married) are central to this process.

Schools spend a lot of money and effort on recruiting students for admission, but don't do the same to recruit faculty. ONY schools might need to adjust this paradigm; investment in faculty recruitment must be a priority for the board and the senior leadership of the school. Making a priority of recruiting teachers means setting aside the time and money to do it in earnest. If you want the best teachers, you've got to invest.

If you have any other creative ideas for or questions about what ONY schools can do to recruit new teachers, please share them with our office. We wish you much *hatzlachah* this hiring season.

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