

# Chai Simple Ways to Become Gen X and Gen Y Savvy

by Rachel Jury

Second puberty is a strange phenomenon. Few have heard of it, yet many are in the midst of it and do not recognize its signs. Second puberty is the life stage that applies to people who are immediately post-college or grad school and but do not have children. Currently some members of both Generations X and Y are embedded in it, but soon it will be other generations. For Jewish organizations to remain vibrant it is essential that the needs of this stage be addressed. Just like the first puberty, second puberty is an awkward time which is a major transition point; there is no longer a structured social environment like those created at universities, finding community is not clear cut, struggling with first employments is common, determining a life purpose is challenging, and finding the right someone is tough in a society where the notions of dating are constantly changing. Those in second puberty do not fit neatly into the fabric of Jewish communal organizations currently. They are stuck between attending High Holiday services with their parents, attempting to forge their own identity through a young adult groups (a.k.a. social meat markets), or not attending at all. Second puberty ends abruptly not with marriage, but with the third birthday of a child. It instantly becomes clear where one fits into the Jewish community and the options are abundant; however, until then, many remain Jewishly homeless living in second puberty.

Below are 18, chai, simple ideas to help understand the mysterious nature of this group today as well as suggestions for how to better incorporate them into the flow of Jewish life today and in the future.

## What is a Gen Xer or a GenYer?

1. **Age is not always the best divider-** This group is diverse! It includes singles, married people with children and without, people in committed partnerships, college students, and graduate students, as well as divorcees with children and without. What a 35 year old single dad with two kids needs, is different than what a 30 year old SJM needs and wants, even though they are both Gen Xers.

2. **There is no place like a Jewish home-** In this group are people who have found their Jewish home, others who are searching and a third group who isn't looking. Only targeting one of these groups leaves the other two cold and dry.

3. **Background is important-** Some Jews in this age group used to be involved in general with the community or at your organization. Some Jews were not involved and some were only marginally involved. The key is to continue the involvement of the involved while broadening the scope of their roles; meanwhile, energizing those who have not yet participated formally in Jewish communal life or who have only been marginally involved.

4. **Knowledge is Power-** Jewish information is available at the touch of a fingertip. Educational opportunities must be broad and varied in order to appeal to people at all different Judaic knowledge levels.

5. **Working Girls and Boys-** Once this age group finishes college or grad school, they are busy. Scheduling must be accommodating. Programming should be at different times on different days being especially considerate of working people.

6. **Techno Savvy-** This group does not use the yellow or white pages. They use the internet. Detailed, uncluttered websites and e-mail communication are essential! (Having a website does not make your organization techno savvy for the future; it only means it is up to date with the current technology needs of this group)

## Easy Steps To Take Today

7. **First Impressions Count-** Be friendly the first time a member of this group walks through the door. If the first impression isn't good, they won't come back for another three to five years. Find out who they are and what their story is. Listen to who they are as

*The author offers 18 ideas both to help understand the mysterious nature of those who are immediately post-college or graduate school, but do not have children, and to better incorporate them into the flow of Jewish life today and in the future.*

*Rachel G. Jury is in her fourth year of teaching Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School in Chicago, IL. She received her B.A. in Judaic Studies from Emory University in 2001, is married and remains fully entrenched in second puberty.*

adults and do not solely associate them with trouble they may or may not have gotten into throwing spitballs during Hebrew school.

8. **http://-**Make sure you have a functional, informative, current website with all programming and e-mail addresses.

9. **Positive Premarital Counseling-** Do call both members of the couple by their correct names. Do not spend most of the time arguing. Do get to know the interests of each person. Do seize the opportunity to expose them to the variety of ways to be involved in the Jewish community. Do be creative and accommodating about scheduling. Do follow-up with the couple during the year (especially if you give them free membership).

10. **Timing is everything-** Look at your programming and determine if it is feasible that working adults could get to. Keep in mind that people in this age group are primarily not high level executives who have several hours for a lunch break. Develop diverse programming to target different groups and make it great! Be supportive if groups want to create their own programming in your space. Create an environment that allows them to do so.

11. **\$\$\$-**Create a sliding dues scale and bill monthly. The cell phone bill, gym bill, and TiVo bill all arrive monthly; this age group does not think about any other expenses in a yearly fashion, why would they think about membership to a Jewish organization this way? Make the process as confidential and non invasive as possible. Please try to avoid the filling out of 15 forms justifying why a reduction of dues is necessary. If those in their 20s and 30s are willing to pay a small amount, think of it as an investment in the future; as they pay off their debts, they will have more disposable income to contribute to the Jewish community. They will also remember the good will of your organization

12. ???-Solicit input from this age group in your community.

### **Investments for the Future**

13. **Career Ladder-** Create a job infrastructure so there are many employment options in Jewish Communal Organizations without being clergy. Make sure to include entry and mid-level positions with quality compensation and benefits especially in Jewish Education arenas. Create training programs and paid internships to support the new jobs.

14. **Rethink Tzedakah-** Finance grants and new organizations which help to keep Jewish life vibrant. Grants might be used to encourage new Jewish small business opportunities, social justice programs, high caliber Jewish teacher training, new minyanim, Jewish video games, new publications, interactive Hebrew classes on the web.... The possibilities are endless, but they must receive financial support to flourish.

15. **Personal Interactions-** Send an e-mail or call high school students, college students and recent grads just to reconnect.

16. **Learn In Order to Do-** Teach school age children about the importance of supporting the Jewish Community and joining synagogues.

17. **YOUTH-TY -**Hire a full-time youth director or create a plan to hire one. This is an investment for the future! Please make sure they can pay their rent with the salary and see a doctor (i.e. they receive a competitive salary and full benefits).

18. **Families-** Create more Jewish Early Childhood Programs with a full day option and those that can support children under the age of three. Help families from early childhood programs find appropriate Jewish educational environments for their school aged children, while helping parents find their own place in the Jewish Community with or without their kids.

