

Reorienting

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The Wexner Foundation

It is wonderful to be together. I am grateful to you, Dana, for your wisdom, guidance and your unique leadership perspective. Thank you, Jay for stewarding this entire Summit together with the talented Summit team, Angie, Elisha, Ra'anana and Rachel. *Boker tov/tzohorayim tov/erev tov* to all. After a couple of weeks of sheltering in place, every zoom gathering offers a virtual human quilt of comfort. Thank GD for technology and our wired world that makes this all possible. With the many losses we are facing, how much more painful this would all be without personal screens and devices so maligned only a month ago, BC...before COVID.

From wherever we clicked in today, outside our homes the city is stunning in its silence... part eerie and, when considered apart from the source of the quiet, part beautiful. The entirety of this moment is disorienting.

I have long been drawn to silence in nature. Once upon a time, as an explorer scout, I was challenged as a teenager to attempt a solo survival trek in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, a remote and uniquely awe-inspiring hiking and canoeing destination in Northern Minnesota. In training for the brief but daunting solo journey, I was required to master the use of a compass. It is one of those lessons of my youth that remains.

One of the trickier parts of navigating with a compass is that magnetic north is not the same as true north. The angle between the two—known as the declination—varies depending on your location. It also gradually changes over time as the Earth's tectonic plates shift. If you don't adjust your compass to compensate, you'll find yourself headed in the wrong direction. I was stymied and frustrated reconciling my compass and map, which, my scout leader kept reminding me, is my best friend...once I was able to determine my true north.

Other than that, I was ready to journey into the woods. I had no fear of being alone and enthusiastically anticipated moving through a cool, dense forest. But without that illusive compass skill, I might not find my way out. Others in my gritty group of scouts also preparing to solo were petrified about being alone; one boy was freaked out about lighting matches while another was sure she would be eaten by a bear. Working together over the course of time, we patiently worked through my dismal compass skills, addressed fears both rational and irrational, lit hundreds of matches, and rehearsed encountering a bear, which Boundary Water experts regard as giant squirrels. It was quite literally my first True North group.

A True North Group is a small, intimate groups of peers where, if all bring the same intention, you can talk openly and confidentially.

As was true of your Wexner Cohort, this group is a place to share challenges and frustrations, to test assumptions and receive honest feedback. A True North Group can function as nurturer, grounding rod, truth teller and mirror. At their best, the members of your group serve each other

as caring coaches and thoughtful mentors...as scout masters. They can help you solve for your declination...and I know from personal experience, that difference between where you want to go and how to get there is hard to resolve on your own.

We find ourselves deep in a forest and not a destination of our own choosing. We are unprepared. In a Wexner call earlier this week Marty Linsky reminded us of the singular importance of identifying our core values and using them as an orienting system *even* now – or should I say *especially* now. Not knowing when or how this will end is frightening. What our countries, our world, and our Jewish community will look like on the other side of the woods is unfathomable. There is no map – yet – for the way forward. But we are all blessed with a compass to point us to our true north. That path will be defined by our deeply held beliefs. My internal compass, your internal compass is the guide and at a moment such as this one, we need to check and calibrate it with an intensity previously not known.

If ever we need a True North experience it is now. The plates of our stability have shifted. We must cultivate more patience, compassion, confidence and tenaciously seek out the silver linings of innovative solutions to what we know will be massive disruption within our homes and most assuredly our beloved institutions. We are going to need diverse thinkers to realign our priorities...to reimagine the map.

Israeli author SY Agnon tells the story of a man wandering about in a forest for several days, not knowing which was the right way out. He was surprised to see a person approaching him. His heart filled with joy. *“Now I shall certainly find out which is the right way,”* he thought to himself. When close enough he asked: *“Brother, tell me which is the right way. I have been wandering about in this forest for days.”* Said the other back to him, *“My friend, I do not know the way out either. I too have been wandering about here for many, many days. But this I can tell you: do not take the way I have been taking, for that will lead you astray. Let’s look for a new way out together.”*

Wexner Alumni, my colleagues and friends...all of your experience has trained you for this jarring moment of reorientation. Let’s look for a new way out together.