

## We Came, We Heard, We Will Conquer!

The Winning Edge 2018 was met with waves of positive feedback.

On Monday, June 18, executives, entrepreneurs, and key business celebrities flocked to Montclair State University to spend the day learning strategies and tactics toward business growth.

Celebrated business expert and sought-after keynote speaker, Jeffrey Hayzlett, ushered in the day with an electrifying lecture on the art of being relentless, radical transparency, and key methods for overcoming the fear that stands in the way of success. With fascinating anecdotes and deep insights from his years of experience as CMO of Kodak, Hayzlett addressed the necessity for business owners to define their core reason for existence and embrace customer behavior in order to drive change.

"Kodak's mistake is that they weren't in the business of film. They were in the business of memories," he shared.

The next portion of the day brought an engaging and interactive series of breakout sessions which addressed everything from financial, health, and legal matters, to leadership and marketing hacks. Presenters included Saul and Simeon Friedman of Saul N. Friedman and Co.; Michael Macintyre of HSBC; Bradley Nash and Solomon Klein of Schlam Stone & Dolan LLP; Dr. Firzouz Daneshgari, founder of BowTie Medical; Eli Rowe, CEO of World Medical Bank; Moishe Katz; founder of United Refuah



Stephen Shapiro, delivering his keynote on innovation

HealthShare; Michael Langer, founder and CEO of Gulliver's Gate; Allen Fagin, Executive Vice President of the Orthodox Union; and Yitzchok Saftlas, founder and CEO of Bottom Line Marketing Group.

"At the end of the day, a leader must be the one to make a decision in every situation." Allen Fagin shared, reminding us of Harry S. Truman's famous mantra that "the buck stops here!"

A trailblazer in the field of healthcare management, Eli Rowe, shared that lead-



Yitzchok Saftlas, of Bottom Line Marketing Group addressing a breakout session

ers must know their weaknesses, step back, and surround themselves with teams of talent. He reminded attendees that even innovators like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg never finished college and are still extremely successful executives.

The day culminated with a riveting Brass Tacks panel followed by an engaging closing keynote address from "Innovation Instigator" and business advisor, Stephen Shapiro. In his signature, captivating style, Shapiro provoked the audience out of

their comfort zones and into new ways of thinking about change.

The overwhelming positive responses and still-palpable excitement following the conference are testimony to the great success of the Winning Edge 2018.

Attendee, Joel Whitehouse, President of Empire Benefits Solutions shared: "The diverse personalities, ideas, and opinions were so unique. I am excited to hit my desk this morning and start putting their advice into motion!"

Winning Edge 2019, here we come!

## It Isn't Just Yeshivish Or Chasidish: There Are Many Ways To Seek Hashem

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place – the one we call "off the derech." This is so pervasive a phenomenon that there has been much written about it; I need not go into it in this space. I mention it here only to note that (a) those defending the *Litvishe derech* surely ought to acknowledge that for many people it is not working, and much thought must be given to how to adapt it for those who need something a bit different. Furthermore, (b) all is not well in the chasidic world either. Taking nothing away from the beautiful descriptions of Aish Kodesh in Woodmere and Ashreinu in Seattle, with which I am very personally familiar, it would be willfully ignorant to ignore the very many in the chasidic world who are "Orthopraxic" (Keeping up external appearances while dying inside spiritually), and the great many who have dropped out of chasidic communities altogether. Recognizing that neither the *Litvishe* nor chasidic approaches fully solve the problem brings me to my main point.

It is crucial to recognize that there is no "one size fits all" path for all spiritual-seekers to achieve greater spiritual meaning. I daresay Rav Weinberger would readily agree that *chasidus* is not for everyone. In fact, he has devoted a great deal of his efforts in teaching non-chasidic sources, particularly the beautiful Torah of Rav Kook *zt"l*. There are those who are drawn by the emotional/spiritual/mystical pull of *chasidus*, while there are some who are "allergic" to it, and are completely unmoved by its practice and teachings. Even within *chasidus* there are many different schools of thought, practice, and flavor; a person may be drawn to one and totally uninspired by the other.

*Chazal* teach us that the 12 tribes differed not only genealogically, but that each had

its individual flavor and approach. Hashem was teaching us, from the beginning, that within the boundaries of *halachah* there are many valid spiritual paths, and they all should be respected as appropriate for different personalities.

Spiritual paths include the Sefardic world, with its deep and moving teachings of the Ben Ish Chai and so many other greats – and in the teachings of the Zohar and Kabbalah – which require great *ameilus* to master. Others find that the teachings of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch and the path of *Torah Im Derech Eretz* opens many beautiful vistas on *p'nimiyus haTorah* that make some otherwise stale subjects, in particular the *korbanos* and the *Beis HaMikdash*, come alive in deep personal meaning. And then there are those who love the study of non-chasidic *s'farim* like the *Meshech Chochmah* and many works of Jewish philosophy such as the *Ramchal*, *Maharal*, *Kuzari*, and so many others that can inspire many to deeper thinking, having nothing to do with *chasidus*. Of course, *Musar*, as developed by Rav Yisroel Salanter and many greats of the *Musar* Movement, including contemporaries such as Rav Shlomo Wolbe *zt"l*, provides a deep spiritual practice that, if presented properly (as opposed to too many *musar shmuesen* that leave the listeners feeling guilty and inadequate), can inspire adherents to great and noble spiritual heights, while again, having little or nothing to do with *chasidus*.

And last but not least, the straight and narrow *Litvishe* approach, which focuses on Gemara and *Halachah* as the spiritual path to Hashem, and which appeals to many who are not inspired by any of the above, can and should be taught in ways that don't leave 19-year-old *bachurim* wondering why they are "wasting their time" on this irrelevant stuff. It is not difficult, with just a bit of effort, to translate oxen goring cows into

traffic accidents, *shtaros* into mortgages and deeds, and to bring the *sugyos* into real life *halachah l'maaseh*. The main point of so many *sugyos* is not the "*heicha timtza*" of the case at hand, but rather the sensitivities *Chazal* are working with in discussing how human frailties and idiosyncrasies can be respected and transformed by applying proper halachic principles. *Talmidim* can be shown how *Chazal* are training us to think and apply halachic principles and sharpening our minds to be able to properly know how to question, analyze, and gain insights to *p'nimiyus haTorah*. Furthermore, as Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik writes so beautifully in *Halachic Man*, the quest for halachic perfection and exactitude is exciting if we properly understand the context. It is about how we – pitiful, puny humans – seek to discover and perform the wishes of the great Master of the Universe, who has given lowly us the incredible privilege of serving Him, and is concerned with our actions. That alone is reason enough to want to learn and do the *mitzvos* as perfectly as possible, and transforms it into a deeply compelling spiritual quest.

So how does one sort this all out? I only have one answer. There is a need for an educational system that will expose *talmidim* to a variety of approaches, and for spiritual guides to help them find that to which their *n'shamah* is drawn, cognizant of many different valid approaches. One educator who did this in an amazingly successful way was Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz *zt"l*. He embodied and taught many different *d'rachim*, being a student of *Chasidus*, Rav Hirsch, Rav Meir Shapira, the Chasam Sofer, and the *Litvishe yeshivos*. He made sure that his *yeshivah*, Torah Vodaas, had many different influences, allowing *talmidim* to find their own way, and encouraging them to be serious about their quest, wherever it led them. I believe that with proper exposure to many

*d'rachim*, coupled with a wise guide who could help people find their own "spiritual aptitude," a great many more souls would find their way to the place they belong.

The path arrived at may be exclusively in one direction. It might also turn out to be an amalgam. I was privileged to be present when Rav Bulman *zt"l* was the keynote speaker at the KAJ in Washington Heights on the 100<sup>th</sup> *yahrzeit* of Rav SR Hirsch. He began his remarks by saying, "Here I stand, having been brought up in the *Gerrer Shtiebel*, learned in Yeshiva University under *Litvishe rabbanim*, about to lecture to *Yekkes* about Rav Hirsch." He was, in fact, a beautiful amalgam of all of those approaches, a path I have sought to emulate. In some areas, Rav Hirsch is my guiding light. In others, the teachings of *chasidus* have brought so much beauty into my life. I treasure, as well, the rigor of *Litvishe* learning that I was exposed to, and take much pleasure in learning works of Jewish philosophy. This approach works for me; it is important for everyone to find his or her own path for their unique *n'shamos*.

In summary, the problem of too many people being uninspired in their lives, even within the great *yeshivah* systems, is a very real and painful one. *Chasidus* may be in vogue, but it is not for everyone. *Baruch Hashem*, there are many other approaches available for those who seek. Rav Soloveitchik spoke often about how the Torah tells us "*U'vikashtem misham es Hashem Elokecha u'matzasa, ki sid'rshenu b'chol l'avvcha u'v'chol nafsh'cha* (And you will seek from there Hashem your G-d and you will find Him, if you search for Him with all your heart and soul)." We were born with a soul that presses us to search for Him. How to do that search? Which direction to go? The only direction that we are given is to do it with all our heart and soul. Which is different for each of us.