

Wayne Firestone: Building Our Next Generation

It is not often that the president of a major Jewish organization gets “props” (slang for respect, recognition) from the Millennial Generation, but Wayne Firestone, president of Hillel, is just the kind of guy that does. Creative, articulate and charismatic, this Top Jew manages a critical outreach and education network that is one of the keys to our Jewish future.

Here are excerpts from our interview. Watch the full interview on www.jinsider.com and tell us what you think at connect@jinsider.com.



Hillel Stats

Founded 1923 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Network of 465,000 college students at 550 campuses worldwide.

Unique website visitors: 2+ million (annual estimate).

Annual Budget: \$93 million.

Cost Per Jew (CPJ):** \$200 (estimate, and significantly less if web impact is included)

Board Leadership: Edgar M. Bronfman, Founding Chair, International Board of Governors; Beatrice Mandel, Chair, Board of Directors

***This is a new JInsider metric that will be refined over the next few months. For instance, Birthright has estimated its CPJ for the trip to be \$2,800. Clearly each experience has a different personal engagement and community effect. More new Jewish metrics are forthcoming as part of our next Jewish GDP analysis.*

Hillel 101: Following the Tradition of Abraham

“There is a mistaken notion that Hillel is a membership organization. Our principles of pluralism and of being welcoming are fundamental to whom Hillel, the sage, was, and who we believe we are today. We want every Jewish soul to feel welcome, important and valued by the Jewish community. We are not going to ask anyone their lineage, what they had for lunch and where they eat, or anything that could put them off. We welcome them, invite them in, invite their friends and demonstrate the values of our Abraham tradition: that we are a welcoming people, know how to be friendly to strangers. We do not exclude people.”

Historical Perspective and Value Proposition

“Let’s face it, Jews have been comfortable in their universalism in America. They are succeeding in multiple realms in society. They are no longer excluded from the clubs, organizations and other types of activities that for centuries Jews have been excluded from. With that newfound acceptance has come a need to redefine our value proposition. The value proposition for a young Jew today relates to helping deepen the understanding of what it means to be Jewish, however one defines that Jewishness.”

Community Threat: The Rodney King Principle

“One of my greatest frustrations and concerns—including the existential threats that face us—relates more to how we behave toward one another. Samuel Freedman’s book, *Jew versus Jew*, to me, is prescriptive. It is telling us that in reality we divide among ourselves. We divide around denominations; we divide around our passions for Israel. We’re passionate about Israel, yet we use that passion to divide ourselves. I’ve seen it in its most ugly forms, as I lived in Israel when Rabin was assassinated. I have been on campuses where students and professors were maligned by others in the community for holding different views. That stuff bothers me because it hurts the Jewish people. As much as we’ve achieved, as much as we aspire for a greater sense for the world—if we can’t figure out really how to live with one another in our differences and to find beauty in that, that to me is a major concern.”

NYU Buzz

“I would characterize Wayne’s leadership over the past year as insightful and pragmatic. He is a strong, active listener who always augments the level of the conversation. From our experience at NYU, Wayne has been the best kind of friend: present in an hour of need, eager to celebrate successes, cheerful and optimistic. He keeps people in a positive frame of mind.”

Rabbi Yehuda Sarna, University Chaplain and one of Jewish Week’s 36 under 36

Firestone Vital Stats

Favorite Jewish food: Hamantaschen

Favorite Jewish or Yiddish phrase:

Tzimtzum (“Contract” in Hebrew – Linked to the Kabbalistic idea that in order to grow you need to contract.)

Favorite ritual: Blessing my children Friday night

Motto: “If you will it, it is no dream.”

Favorite book: “Man’s Search for Meaning” by Viktor Frankl

Living hero: Yitzhak Perlman

All-time Hero: The Golem of Prague

Greatest accomplishment: Founding a company in Israel (Silicon Wadinet)

11th commandment: “Go and study.”

Greatest regret: Can’t sing, can’t dance