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How to Start a Masjid

The Keys to Managing a Successful Masjid

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First Draft

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Helpful guidelines and recommendations to any group wishing to start a Masjid in the US. This book includes sample articles of incorporations, bylaws as well as an in-depth study of some successful Masajid in North America

Starting a Masjid in North America

Objective and Disclaimer

These guidelines are intended to help a group of Muslims establish a new Masjid or streamline the operations of an existing Masjid. They are not to be construed as definitive answers and every group is encouraged to consult with a legal counsel as well as their city/county planning and zoning offices.

In the following sections we will have multiple chapters Insha Allah from how to setup your corporation, to finding a suitable location and handling zoning issues, to various helpful items. The study is culminated by an in-depth study of model Masajid in the US. Those Masajid were chosen by recommendation of community members who once lived around and participated in the activity of these Masajid.

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Chapter One

Starting the Corporation

Incorporating in the US is easy and one may be tempted to do the incorporating him/herself to save few hundred dollars. However, the IRS website clearly states that incorporating a non-profit organization seeking a tax exempt status (here and thereafter called 501C3) must be done by a professional incorporating counsel.

There are many legal factors that must be done at incorporating times to be able to easily obtain a 501C3 exemption and we will discuss these factors individually.

1. Name of Islamic Center

I am not trying to suggest a name but it is advisable that you do a little bit of research. Thinking globally and outside your area as to what your website name will be as that is how people may find you.

There are few options:

- 1- An Islamic name that symbolizes the vision of the founders. In our case it is Hamzah Islamic Center both for the bravery and sacrifice of Hamzah (May Allah Be Please With Him) and for the “Islamic Center” for the type of activities we wished to have
- 2- A name that is based on your location such as Roswell Community Masjid, Georgia Islamic Institute and so forth.

2. Mission Statement

You need to articulate in the mission statement your vision of how you will serve the community. Think it of it as a sentence that may start like this “To serve the Muslim community by...”.

3. Name of Officers

You need at least 3 officers even though one person may serve as all 3:

- 1- President/CEO/Chairman: the person ultimately in charge
- 2- Secretary: person in charge of keeping records, meeting minutes and all legal documents
- 3- Treasurer: managing the financials of the corporation

4. What type of Corporation/Legal Entity

You can choose from “Inc.”, “LLC” or “Corp” style legal entities. You may want to check with a lawyer or CPA about which is best for you.

5. Legal Address

You can have a legal address that is different from where the Masjid will be. The legal address can be a PO Box or that of any of the officers of the organization.

6. Logo

While you can add or change logo anytime, it is still best practice to record your logo at the same time you are registering your corporation

7. Membership

You need to define the guidelines clearly in your bylaws on how members are added to your organization and their voting rights. Members can be as small as the initial founders or open to the general public or following any guidelines you like. We will discuss membership in details later Insha Allah. However, this point is highlighted here as a reference it is needed in your articles of incorporation. A simple as one sentence as “The Corporation shall have members” may suffice.

8. Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws

There is a clear distinction between articles of incorporation and bylaws. The articles of incorporation contain general information about a corporation, such as the name and location of the business. Bylaws, on the other hand, contain rules and regulations and used to establish the roles and duties of the company's directors and officers.

The articles of incorporation are usually placed in a very small document (samples included) while bylaws may span many pages of great details (recommended).

You need to articulate your vision and founding principles in details in your bylaws. This defines who you are. For Hamzah Islamic Center we defined it as “Openness, Religious Tolerance and Inclusion”. You need to define your membership rules and your election guidelines among many other things.

It is vital, based on our study, to define the role of the Imam in your bylaws no matter what management role the Imam plays. There are many management models to choose from that are included later in this booklet.

Think ahead: The by-laws should include a detailed explanation of the process that must be followed for amending them.

Chapter Two

Next Steps

Contacting a Lawyer

Once you have created the above document it is recommended once again to contact a lawyer who will help you not only register your corporation but also file for your tax exempt status (501C3).

While costs vary by state and by the law firm that you hire, the cost of incorporation and filing for 501C3 can be under \$2,000 but please do not quote me on that. I am providing this number just as a reference.

Getting your Tax ID

Once you receive approval from the state then you can contact the IRS to get your corporate tax ID.

Difference between Non-Profit, Tax Exempt (501C3) and Sales Tax Exempt

You can be a non-profit organization (and it is important to record your organization as such) but not necessarily be tax exempt. You must file a 501C3 application within a short time after you incorporate to obtain your tax exempt status. Please note that this process may take months well beyond the initial tax period.

You cannot issue donation receipts to individual donors to claim as tax deductible donations until you receive approval from the IRS on your 501C3 application.

Many people confuse being tax exempt for federal and states income taxes from being exempt from sales tax when you purchase items at department stores. These are not the same and being income federally tax exempt does not mean you can purchase goods without paying a sales tax. Please consult with a tax advisor to learn all the rules.

The following paragraph is extracted from California Tax Service Center Website

(<http://www.taxes.ca.gov/exemptbus.shtml>) which has a link to this PDF file:

<http://www.taxes.ca.gov/exemptbus.shtml>

“Religious organizations’ sales and purchases of goods and merchandise other than food are generally taxable. If your religious organization holds or participates in fundraising events where you sell goods and merchandise, such as auctions, festivals, bazaars, firework stands, swap meets, or craft shows, your sales of nonfood items are generally taxable. Tax also applies when you sell from a church bookstore, from tables in your church at events, by Internet, or by mail order.”

Establishing Bank Accounts

It is highly recommended that you have separate bank accounts for the type of functions you have. This recommendation is based on the study that we undertook. I would recommend at least 2 accounts:

- 1- Operation account for rent, utilities, salaries, maintenance and all operational expenses
- 2- Sadaqah/Zakah account to track donations to distribute to the poor

I would also recommend normal good bookkeeping general practice like balancing your checkbook monthly and entering the information in some automated fashion. I also recommend that you be diligent in keeping track of all donations made as you get them so that you can issue accurate donation receipts. Nothing ruins people's confidence and trust like a financially mismanaged organization exhibiting multiple errors in reporting back to the community their donations. Institute a clean separation between the people who collect the money and those authorized to spend it.

PayPal and Online Payments

While some may cringe at the 3% PayPal charges but it is our experience that the benefits outweigh all negatives:

- 1- It makes it easy for people to donate to you especially if they live far away from Masjid. Many people fear that their checks maybe lost or stolen.
- 2- You can get the money immediately
- 3- PayPal gives you a list of donors including names, addresses, emails, etc. This will help you generate donation receipts at year end. You can also target these individuals for future fundraising
- 4- You have an option for people to do recurring monthly donations so they set it up once and then it automatically transfers that amount on the date they designate
- 5- It is an easy link that you can put on your website

How to Establish a PayPal Account

Start by contacting PayPal www.paypal.com and open a merchant account. PayPal is very secure and you will have to provide good information to ensure your privacy and security.

If you have more than one bank account then you have the following options:

- 1- Establish a separate merchant account per bank but that is not necessary
- 2- Associate your merchant account with as many bank accounts as you have. You also need to establish a product id that is unique per account so that you can differentiate between a donation to Masjid operations from Sadaqah/Zakah

After that you will be provided with a URL that you can put on your website or email to your community.

A Website for your Masjid

I will have a full article on the subject of a website but you need to secure a URL very quickly. A URL is what generally starts with www. You may invest in both ".com" and ".org" suffixes and have them point to the same website.

A Facebook for your Masjid

The older generation of immigrants like me may not appreciate the value of Facebook until we talk to our adult children. Having a Facebook page and linking your website to it is a great tool to reach the younger generation. I would even recommend that you put a young sister in charge of setting it up and posting your events.

Email Distribution and Communication

Another topic that shall be covered in greater details but it is very necessary to decide early is whether you want public groups such as yahoo and gmail or a privately managed group that you maintain yourself. You can check with your website hosting company to see if they offer group management as well.

It is also important to note here that communicating with your community should be a two way street where they have the ability to respond to your emails or send questions. You can and should keep their responses and requests private of course.

How About Newer Technologies like Mobile Apps?

The technology is moving fast and it has become cheaper and cheaper to create apps that keep the community connected. We created an Android app and iPhone app for Masjid Hamzah that has basic functionality like Athan and Iqamah times.

We will dedicate a chapter on this Insha Allah.

Chapter Three

Zoning Issues and Dealing with Your Municipality

A Masjid or an Islamic center is considered to be a religious assembly and there are many city and/or county rules that regulate religious organizations. Please consult with your local municipality as to what rules apply to your area.

The following narrative is to be used for educational purposes only and there no guarantees that they apply in part or as a whole to your individual organization's situation.

You may find the following links on the internet helpful:

<http://aclj.org/churches-organizations-/zoning-religious-land-use>

<http://plannersweb.com/2009/09/zoning-for-religious-institutions/>

One of the easiest ways to establish a Masjid is to purchase an existing church that is for sale as all zoning issues have been taken care of already.

However, if you are interested in an existing building (whether to lease or purchase) or a piece of land then you must check for the type of zoning you are in. Please note that even if the zoning ordinance allows for a religious institution that other factors such as road access, sewer, building type, etc. may adversely impact your application.

Religious: this is the easiest to work with and you simply need to check on the type of building you are interested in. No public hearing will be required

Multipurpose: this offers you as close to the religious zoning as you wish to have as it would require no public hearing

Commercial: this still gives some flexibility but please double check in your area

Agriculture: there are minimum size restrictions as well as few others but you are allowed to have a religious building if you meet the criteria. A hearing will be required and I would recommend that you hire a very good zoning attorney as this may be an uphill battle.

Residential: some Masajid start by buying a small house and then convert it to a Masjid. This process is laden with many issues but has worked in the past. I would personally not recommend that route unless absolutely necessary.

Chapter Four

To Lease or Buy?

There are definite advantages to leasing a space as you start your Masjid and then purchase a more suitable, permanent location. This is unless you already have the money and you found the perfect place. Some of the advantages of leasing over purchase are:

- 1- You can start with small capital to pay rent and monthly expenses
- 2- The building is already up and the time to renovate and start can be measured in weeks if not days
- 3- You have a chance to establish your identity and vision and attract new people from the surrounding area to come to your Masjid
- 4- You will have time to do multiple fundraisings and raise the capital to purchase a suitable place
- 5- You will have time to gauge the size of your community, understand their needs and interest and look for a place that meets those years for years to come Insha Allah

The main disadvantage of leasing is that it is money that you cannot recuperate or get back.

Here are few questions you need to ask yourself and/or research regardless of what option you prefer:

- 1- What is the size of the Muslim community in the area and how many Masajid there are?
- 2- What would be the expected growth as Muslims tend to relocate to be closer to their Masjid?
- 3- How many people do you expect to pray on a given Friday? Think 5 to 10 years from now.
- 4- Do you intend on having a weekend school and what size it may grow to?
- 5- Do you intend on having a daily school and what grades will it have and what size it may grow to?
- 6- Do you have plans for community functions and gatherings and, if so, where will they be and how big?
- 7- How welcoming is the non-Muslim community? Will they allow rezoning if you purchase?

Chapter Five

What to Look for in a Land

- 1- Zoning as explained earlier. This is big as there are many things you need to prepare for if you had to have a public hearing. I will devote a chapter on this subject Insha Allah.
- 2- Size of land both to meet your zoning requirements and your overall vision and future expansion
- 3- Road access: this may dictate many things including being granted your permit and whether or not you would have to build deceleration and/or turn lanes
- 4- Utility type (sewer, septic) and access requirements. You may not know at the time but there may be limitations in number of people that you may be allowed on your land based on this factor alone.
- 5- Topography of land: many may miss on this important factor as things like grading can be a huge expense
- 6- Existence of creeks, wetlands and other environment factors: this may significantly reduce the size of buildable area you have that may render your entire project a complete failure. For instance the law requires 50 foot setback of a creek plus 25 feet of impervious buffer. That is 75 feet on both sides of a creek that you cannot build or have any type of structure on.
- 7- Zoning types of neighbors: there are different buffer requirements based on the zoning of your adjacent neighbor. In Forsyth County for example, we had to have 50 feet of tree buffers (we had to plant trees) between us and our agriculture as well as residential neighbors. It would have been 25 feet had they been zoned commercial.
- 8- How many parking spots can you legally fit (no double parking)? Please consult with a site engineer as your expectations and city/county requirements may be way too far about. Do this before you buy
- 9- Do you have to build a detention pond and how big and at what cost? Once again, a site engineer can help with that

A good article to read on the subject, albeit a little negative, is:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/almihrab/2012/07/top-10-ways-on-how-not-to-build-a-mosque-in-america/>

Chapter Six

Buying an Existing Building

In addition to the land questions above which highlight zoning and public hearing among other factors, here are a few you need to think about but my best advice to you is to call the fire Marshall in your area and get his/her input:

- 1- Size of parking lot
- 2- What type of neighbors you have. If you have business neighbors then you may have a very difficult time policing the community to make sure they do not park in your neighbors' area. If you have residential neighbors you will still have to work hard at that too.
- 3- Handicap access both in parking and bathrooms
- 4- Number of bathrooms as the number in your occupancy permit will not only be based on the size of the building but the number of bathrooms for men and women
- 5- You may have to work hard to convince the fire Marshall to count your prayer area to be 7 feet per person rather than 15 feet per person as in churches. You may be able to do that if you explain how we sit and pray
- 6- Number of entrances and exists
- 7- Type of firewalls, if any
- 8- Sprinkler system: it is now a requirement for any religious institutions in many cities and counties
- 9- Future growth

Modula Buildings – Read Made Masjid

Modular buildings are trailer styles structures put together to fit any size or shape and requirements. If you have the land and you want a very quick and somewhat cheap way to get a Masjid up then a modular building maybe the way to go. You can either lease or purchase them.

The Pros

- a- Modular building constructions may fall under federal or state rather than city and county rules and that may make it easier for you
- b- You can shop around and may be get a used structure preferably a school building that you can customize
- c- The cost per square foot is relatively low
- d- You can be up and running in two to three months
- e- You can utilize the building while you raise funds and build your permanent structure

The Cons

- a- They are not as sturdy as concrete buildings obviously so you will have to pay special attention to maintenance especially the roof

b- There is a setup and dismantling fee and obviously rent that you are paying rather than investing in your own building.

Chapter Seven

Communicating with Your Community: It Defines You!

I travel a lot as part of my software consulting job and I always try to find the closest Masjid to the area. I start by going into websites like Islamic Finder (www.islamicfinder.com) and entering the zip code I plan to be in. Therefore, creating your information on these websites is of great importance.

Second I go to the Masjid's website and try to find out what type of activities the Masjid has on my dates of travel. If that fails then I call the Masjid to try to find out.

Now I hate to be negative but I am an elite Gold Flyer Member with Delta so I travel a lot but rarely have my efforts been proven fruitful.

How many times have I called a Masjid to get an answering machine and I left a message only to NEVER have it answered?

How many times did I email a Masjid on their website as they provide a "contact us" link and never gotten a response?

As a matter of fact, communication is an integral part of what makes a Masjid successful. As part of this study that we are undertaking to define a successful Masjid, we emailed many Masajid requesting an hour of their time. Unfortunately, just a few out of many has replied to our emails.

The one that responded is MCA in the Bay Area <http://www.mcabayarea.org> and their president brother Fouad Khatib responded within a day. MCA is one of the largest Masajid in the US and deemed by many people to be a very successful Masjid. You can read our review for MCA in the appendix of this document.

Chapter Eight

Modes of Communication

1- The Need for Quick Response Time

A point that is often overlooked is that not only the Masjid's own community will need to reach the Masjid and have access to a live person to talk to but the list includes:

- a- Muslims traveling to the area as I described
- b- Muslims who wish to move to the area who have questions about schools, housing, etc.
- c- Muslims with marital problems
- d- Muslims with financial issues
- e- Muslims with religious questions
- f- Muslim organizations requesting announcements to be made on their behalf
- g- Muslims requesting dua'a for a sick or diseased family member
- h- Non-Muslims wishing to learn about Islam
- i- The news media whenever there are news worthy events and they need to reach a Muslim organization

As a matter of fact there were few times the news media did an interview with management members of our Masjid simply because: we answered the phone! This goes from the case on Syria a few days ago to the drought in Atlanta few years ago.

2- Telephone

Many Masajid have an answering machine and may even have it automated where you can use a touch tone phone to leave a message to a different party.

Unfortunately, as has been my experience, many of the calls are never answered. This is a big source of consternation and frustration in the community. One is led to believe that the Masjid simply does not care about them, that they only matter when it is time for the next fundraising.

Technology nowadays enables you to have voice messages converted to an audio file and sent via email allowing you to respond quickly.

Whatever method you employ it is vitally important that messages are returned and people questions answered within a reasonable time frame.

There are other alternatives that you may want to look into:

- 1- An answering service for a nominal fee. You can give them basic information like direction, Jumaa times and basic events then phone numbers to contact for different calls
- 2- A phone number for the Masjid that you auto forward to a board or community member on rotational basis. In masjid Hamzah scenario each month a different board member is assigned the responsibility of answering the phone.

3- Website

It is vital to put important information on your website. This includes at a minimum:

- 1- Daily Athan and Iqama times
- 2- Juma'a Time
- 3- Address of Masjid and phone numbers
- 4- Links to donation and PayPal if you had followed that path
- 5- Daily and weekly activities
- 6- Contact us page

As we discussed, it is very important that the contact us page is acted upon and that all emails are answered.

Friday Announcements

Friday announcements are a great tool to reach your community if they mostly come to Friday Khutbah. Otherwise, you would need to combine announcements with some type of emails to reach a bigger audience.

If you are OK making announcements on behalf of others then you need to define your own rules for that.

Flyer Distribution

It is my own experience that many flyer leaflets get thrown in the trash or in the parking lot and, therefore, flyers should be distributed on rare occasions.

Email Communication

I will discuss creating email groups in the next chapter Insha Allah but you need to define what you would like to communicate, who is allowed to send messages and to whom.

Some Masajid communicate events they are planning to do and shy away from Fiqh or controversial subjects. Other Masjid feel that it's their responsibility to educate the community and establish their rules especially when it comes to Ramadan, Eid and moon sighting.

Chapter Nine

Setting up Email Groups

There are two types of email groups: public and private. Both offer their own advantages and disadvantages. It all depends on your preference as well as on the level of IT knowledge your staff or volunteers have.

Public Email Groups

You can setup a gmail or a yahoo group in the name of your Masjid. You can control the following:

- 1- Who owns the group
- 2- Group moderators who can send emails to the group
- 3- Group membership: you can have people automatically approved to join your group or a special request is sent to the moderators to accept their membership
- 4- Messages are sent by the moderators and responses from the public are only viewed by the moderators

Pros of a Public Group

- a- You can have your history of emails viewed by the public anytime. So if someone wants to see an email that was sent by Masjid Hamzah a year or two ago they still can
- b- You do not have to keep up with your member list. It is done for you automatically. All you have to do is Send.
- c- No one can click on "Reply All" from their Outlook or email system and reach your members. Replies are only seen by the moderators

Cons of a Public Group

- a- Your email history is actually viewed so be careful what you want people to see years from now. Ensure that you are never emotional or reactionary when you send emails. Be always positive.
- b- The group manager may have some restrictions in terms of attachments, embedded images, etc.

Private Email Groups

Private email groups are managed by your own IT infrastructure team and you would have to provide away for people to join.

Pros of a Private Group

- a- There are no restrictions on what contents or attachments you can send
- b- Your emails are only viewed by your intended audience. I am including this as a pro just in case this is your desired goal.

Cons of a Private Group

- a- You have to have the IT infrastructure to manage it. I have had many situations where I was dropped from privately managed groups including my own kids' school email list. Not sure why but it has happened with more than one organization for me
- b- People are not able to see your email history without you providing custom features to do so
- c- You have to ensure that you are not simply hiding the distribution list by using the BCC feature of your email. Better alternatives exist but your IT people should know how to do this more professionally.

Chapter Ten

Setting up Your Own Website

Your website is your face to the outside world. What and how you present it say a lot about your Masjid. So this is not to be taken lightly.

Fortunately, you do not need a huge investment of dollars or an IT team to have your website up in a couple of days. In this section I will discuss a hosted website scenario (quick and easy) vs. an in-house hosted system.

In either case you want to define your domain name and whether you want to have multiple domain endings (.com, .org, etc.)

Quick and Easy Website

There are many hosting services that offer to host your website for under \$10 a month. This includes GoDaddy among others. I am mentioning GoDaddy as I had experience with them so I will use them as an example here.

GoDaddy will get your domain name for you and they will do all the work. They provide you with easy to use templates so that you can place your logo and information on the screen yourself and with relative ease.

The major drawback is that the contents are relatively static. So you will have to keep updating them especially with Athan and laqama times.

Some hosting websites provide you with a MySQL database so you have your data easily accessible and dynamic without having to do any updates. But you will have to have slightly more technical skills than the static option.

Host Your Own Website

This is not as scary as it sounds:

- 1- You need to talk to your internet provider to give you a static IP address
- 2- You need a machine on your premises with that IP address
- 3- You have to have Microsoft IIS or other software installed. IIS is free with all Windows systems
- 4- A good team (or may be one) of developers plus development tools

If you are blessed with good developers then you can make your website come a live with important, dynamic information. You will be able to track many things and setup areas for your schools and other functions.

Chapter Eleven

Setting up a Weekend Islamic School

Even though I personally have over 30 years of teaching and managing weekend Islamic schools, I find myself learning new techniques every time I look at another Islamic school.

I have always believed that we do not need to reinvent the wheel each time a new Masjid is established and a new school is created. I tried many times to work with other schools in the Atlanta area to come up with a unified methodology to schools. A modest goal is simply to share between us what works and what does not work for our particular school.

What I am about to recommend here is simply based on my own experiences and observations aided by the number of interview I conducted. Some of these interviews are listed in the appendix. But mainly this is coming from what we do at Hamzah Islamic Center.

I hear a lot of complaints from both school management and from parents. Here are a few:

School Management Complaints

- 1- Management often complains that some parents treat the school as a babysitting service. They drop the kids in the morning to go shopping then come back in the afternoon to pick up.
- 2- Parents really do not care about Islamic education and sometimes pick up the kids before Salah and not even pray or make sure the kids pray
- 3- Parents feel guilty for not working with their kids at home and simply they think their Islamic obligations are met simply by bringing their kids to a weekend Islamic school.
- 4- Parents and students do not care about homework or what was taught. The school bag remains in the car or the garage unopened until next Saturday or Sunday
- 5- Parents have high expectations of what the school can teach in a 3 or 4 hours a week and with no help at home

Parents Complaints

- a- I have been bringing my kids to the school for years and my kids still do not know how to pray
- b- Same thing but my kids still do not know how to read Quran
- c- The school is too strict about charging a fee and they are mean when one is late
- d- Teachers are simply volunteers who show up one day and miss another. There is no consistency to teaching

Children's Complaint

- 1- We really do not want to ruin our weekend by going to a weekend school even for half a day
- 2- We spend too much time studying during the week and we need our fun
- 3- The school teaches the same material over and over and we are not learning anything
- 4- The teachers are boring and we cannot wait to get out
- 5- There are no breaks and you cannot do anything fun

- 6- Management and teachers are mean to the kids

A Word of Advice to School Management

Allah SWT put us in a place of responsibilities and brought young minds to us. We must accept all the challenges we are facing no matter the attitude of the child or the parent.

Running a Masjid or a school is a thankless job that requires patience and dedication; wisdom and foresight; and ability to overcome many logistical and operational challenges.

Here are few basic operational suggestions before I go too deep into the curriculum:

- 1- Charge a fee for each child but provide a discount based on the number of children
- 2- Offer waivers for those that cannot afford but investigate their finances. It has been my experience that some people drive to the Masjid in a brand new Lexus and yet they do not want to pay tuition
- 3- Pay your teachers. There are few teachers who are self-motivated and driven and who refuse to take money. On the other hand, you may have a majority that would require an incentive. The amount you pay the teacher does not have to be high but it should be adequate
- 4- Paying your teachers justifies to the parents why you charge them a tuition fee
- 5- Do not accept new children once the school year starts to ensure that children stay at the same level. Exceptions can be made for people moving from out of town during the school year
- 6- Ensure that all your teachers are on-time. If the staff does not respect punctuality then you cannot blame the parents or the kids
- 7- Starts your day with an Islamic function (prayer, dua'a) as an assembly for the entire school and end the day with Salah if possible
- 8- Allow for a break time between classes so that kids can have fun or eat. Make one break period long enough for kids to play ball if possible. If the number of students is too high and your play space is limited then you can stagger break time between groups of classes
- 9- Separate your students based on age , gender and learning ability if possible
- 10- Utilize subject teaching rather than having one teacher teach all classes. Some teachers are better at teaching Quran, others Arabic and some Islamic studies.
- 11- Recruit young (college students) to teach especially those that graduated from your Islamic school. This has multiple benefits from taking advantage of their language and presentation skills to ensuring that they stay connected to the school
- 12- Train your teachers on the curriculum. Few Islamic schools invest in ensuring that the teachers understand the material, especially the Tafseer or the Islamic study materials. In our school, we train the teachers an hour before the school starts and we pay for the training time
- 13- Respect Salah. We do not allow children who attended the last period to leave before praying Thuhr Salah. If parents want to take their children out early then they have to do it before last period. This practice is carried out in the public school system where early dismissal is not allowed after a certain hour

- 14- Don't let only one person be responsible for policing the kids. It should be a group responsibility that is shared by many and complimented by things the kids can do.

Weekend Islamic School Curriculum

Many of the schools I taught at and many of the schools I interviewed have similar curriculum for their weekend schools: Quran, Arabic and Islamic studies

- **Teaching Quran**

First, school management need to decide their objectives of teaching Quran: is it memorization, is it understanding (Tafseer) or a combination of the two.

Tafseer, albeit light, still requires the teachers to be somewhat knowledgeable and at least prepared. This is why I advocate training the trainers. At Hamzah Islamic Center we have a training class for Quran teachers an hour before Sunday school starts. We do this training every other week.

Another thing Masjid management needs to do is make sure they select different Surah each year and not repeat. Also use age appropriate in terms of length and rhyme.

Last year Masjid Hamzah changed the method we teach Quran memorization and that has proven to be a huge success. I would like to share it with you knowing fully that there are many other successful ways to teach Quran:

This new teaching methodology is based on learning through listening. Each student is given a CD with recitation of what they would learn. We selected sheikh Abdel Basset and we used the medium recitation, not too fast and not too slow. The teacher starts the day by having the students listen to the CD then repeat exactly like Abdel Basset.

This methodology which focuses on listening skills allowed the students to pick up both the proper Arabic pronunciation as well as the Tajweed without learning the rules. The entire class began reciting in a single, harmonious voice.

An added benefit of using the CD with each Surah numbered is that many students would have their parents play the CD in the car to the Surah they want to listen. This promoted a great partnership between student and parent and between parent and teacher.

Masha Allah our students were able not only to memorize the material but somehow they enjoyed the experience. Furthermore, unlike other teaching methodologies where kids forget what they learned a month prior, our students retained the Surahs they memorized as the words were engraved in their memory based on the harmony of the words.

- **Teaching Arabic**

This is an area that I must admit defeat in my history if your expectation is to teach children not only to read Arabic but to understand its vocabulary, spell its words and know the grammar and derivatives. This is challenging enough as a fulltime course if the native language of the student is actually Arabic.

But imagine our children growing up in the US. Simply having an Arab parent (and I am one) does not make the child really understand Arabic.

I have heard the same story from the Masajid I interviewed so far and both RCM and ADAMS abandoned teaching Arabic altogether.

Expectations must be tempered by acknowledging the fact that students really do not practice during the week and they tend to forget most of what they have learned.

I was stunned by our own principal (an Egyptian sister) who said this about her own college bound daughter:

“My daughter has been in our Sunday school for 8 years. Yet she cannot read the Quran fluently so we got her the English version”.

So I am still shocked and researching, still looking for that school that can share a methodology of transferring less than motivated students into fluent readers of Quran based on one hour a week.

So we changed our goals and we changed our approach. I am sharing this painful story and approach with you hoping that you can share your successful story with us to help the Muslim Ummah.

Our Goal for Arabic Weekend Class

We redefined our goal to be the ability of our students to open any page of the Quran and be able to read it with minimal effort.

Our New Method

We grouped the students into two categories:

- a- Those that do not know the Arabic Alphabet: we teach them the Alphabet using either “Yassarna Al-Quran or the “Noorani Qa'idah” or in Arabic “القواعد النورانية”
- b- The remaining group is taught to simply read the Quran. The details on how is below

Teaching How to Read the Quran

The idea was based on observing my own kids in something we did at home. We hired a Qari from the subcontinent who would go on Skype and teach my kids how to read the Quran. The method proved to be very effective and we did it twice a week for half an hour per child.

So we divided the Arabic classes in small groups utilizing more volunteers and teachers. We placed a maximum of 5 children per group so that each child gets a turn to read in a short period. This ensures that the child remains engaged and attentive while receiving personal direction from the teacher.

The jury is still out on the results since we just introduced this new style this year. I pray to Allah SWT not to only make it successful but to allow me to report the results back to you.

Some useful links on Arabic Teaching

<http://americanmuslimmom.com/five-fun-tips-teach-kids-arabic>

- **Teaching Islamic Studies**

Each year we get new students as well as repeating students. We test every child even repeating students the first week of our Sunday school on Salah and Taharah as well as the ability to read the Quran.

You will be shocked to find out how many children of all ages that do not know how to pray or the basics of Taharah. So we always have a special class for 4-6 weeks focusing on this subject only but we only teach it to those that do not have these basics.

We teach different subjects every year and we try not to repeat. WE chose one curriculum for the entire school except for the very young. So this year we are teaching the 40 Hadith of Nawawi. All children 7 years and up are learning this book. Only the teacher and method of delivery (how to teach) vary rather than the basic content.

We emphasized as I explained before training the teachers. So we have an hour of Islamic study training an hour before Sunday school starts every other week.

Holding Your Teachers Accountable

The training we offer to teachers is very helpful. However, teachers must be required to come to the training prepared.

They are also required to be on time to the morning assembly and also be responsible for their last period students during afternoon assembly and Thuhr Salah.

We also have the teachers send the parents an email with what was taught on that given Sunday and what will be covered next. We mandate that all emails are sent out no later than Monday evening.

This functionality required some IT development work so I do not expect every Masjid to have it.

Partnering with Parents

In my experience two things have proven successful at getting parents more involved with what the students learn:

- 1- The Quran CD we provide. This made it very easy for the parent to simply pop the CD in their car stereo system and play it for their children. It also gave them even a chance to discuss Tafseer on occasions.
- 2- The weekly emails. It created a bond between parent and teacher and made the parent feel a greater sense of responsibility and accountability. The emails also help when a child is absent from school and it motivates the parent to ask the child to recover.

The Morning Assembly

All children assemble at 10:30 AM in the Mussallah and we start with a dua'a, a short Hadith and then a two Raka'a for greeting the Masjid.

Then children can go to their classes in an organized fashion.

The Afternoon Assembly

Third period teachers are required to escort their students to the Mussallah and keep an eye on them. Once the entire school is gathered we do the following:

- 1- We have a different class each Sunday reciting the Quran they learned. It is a sight to see as they imitate Qari Abdel Basset in their young voices
- 2- We tell a short motivational story (from prophets, to Seerah, to lives of great Sahabah and scholars). It is important that the story and the speakers are interesting to the children. Just imagine speaking to over 100 fidgeting kids. Discipline is an issue but it has to be maintained
- 3- We make any announcements either for the school or the Masjid
- 4- We end by praying Thuhr

Brother Ahmed Khan of Roswell Community Masjid (RCM) writes about their Sunday school:

"As far as Sunday school is concerned, here is what inspires me <http://www.amazon.com/Ten-best-practices-Sunday-school/dp/076739593X>

It is for church Sunday schools but techniques can be used by any Sunday school.

If I had to answer in only one line "what works for us" that line would be "Make it as rules free and fun as possible, it is Sunday after all" ☺"

IT Infrastructure and Management

It may be important to have an automated system to track your student, classes, payments, attendance and many other school management needs.

You can buy a number of systems that are available online that may offer the services you need. For Hamzah we developed our own and that we can give free to anyone interested provided they have some people who can maintain it for them. The features of the system include:

- 1- It is web based and parents
- 2- Student registration including parent information
- 3- Class Setup with variables like age range, gender, topic and period
- 4- Teacher setup and teacher association to a class
- 5- Payment management and setting up fees, discounts and overrides
- 6- Student attendance
- 7- Ability (and we mandate this) for each teacher to send emails to his/her class
- 8- Ability for school management to send email reminders to those late on payments
- 9- Ability for school managements to send emails to entire school

10- Financial tracking (revenue not expenses)

11- Ability for school management to upload the curriculum material online

There are many other features that we have not implemented and we may implement later Insha Allah. But I must say that the system has been in place for two years now and our staff use the system exclusively to manage the school.

Chapter Twelve

The Role of Youth

We live in a world that is foreign to Islam; that is full of temptations to pull our young Muslims away. Being a young Muslim is not easy. You are told not to drink and not to fraternize with girls; you are asked to come to the Masjid but you find the environment boring; you have a lot of ideas but you feel powerless to speak.

We, the parents, often ask ourselves what went wrong with our children. We are in pain that they do not pray anymore or why they are on drugs, etc.

Masjid management often wonders where the teenagers and college kids are. Young children come because of their parents but what about the older youth?

The answer is simple and directly linked to how much power the youth are given. Do not take me wrong, the youth still need our mentoring and supervision and I am not advocating handing them the keys completely. But their voices must be strong. They need to feel empowered.

For years, we tried to come up with programs at Masjid Hamzah to attract the youth. We thought we knew what they were looking for. We were young, once, right?

One day the realization of the gender gap slapped us in the face. We woke up to the fact that our generation when we grew up is so different from today's generation. When I was young, there were soccer and few other things to keep us entertained. But now, our children are on their gadgets all day surfing and texting and Allah knows best.

So we invited the youth to form their own group, elect two of them to our Masjid board (yes with full rights as any board member), and we gave them a monthly budget for their functions.

We still exercised distant control to make sure they did the right things Islamically speaking. But were surprised by just how well behaved they were, how enthusiastic they have become, and with their budget the programs they came up with.

Our youth quickly joined with the youth of RCM, another Masjid in Atlanta, with the hope to have more Masjid join.

The youth now have input on the type of facilities we have, the programs we create, and the direction we take. We are still far away from our ultimate goal but Alhadu Lillah it is a good first step for us.

The successful Masjid we have had the pleasure to interview all share a strong focus on the youth.

Masjid Hamzah Youth Group

This chapter was written by brother Emad Hamid, Masjid Hamzah Youth and Athletic Director:

A Masjid once asked for a permit to expand. After being visited by a city official, the request was denied based on the premise that most of the attendees were middle aged and older so there was no justification for increasing the size of the building.

It is often said that youth are our future leaders but I contend that they are our current ones as well. They have so much potential, Ma Sha' Allah, and it is our job as parents, community members and Masjid Administrators to offer them a healthy and safe environment in which to thrive.

A youth group is one of the most effective techniques in attracting the younger generation of mostly teens to the Masjid. The first recommended step is to give this group a name, logo and mission statement other than that of the Masjid.

Our Hamzah Youth Group has the following Mission Statement which you are welcome to use any or all of it: To help guide and motivate young Muslim boys and girls to be committed to their faith and to proudly embody it in every aspect of their lives.

If we dissect and analyze the statement above, we will notice these key components:

- 1) Help: Those in charge of the youth group are “mentors” more than they are “teachers” where they “help” the youth and in turn the youth “help” them to all develop together. It is a cycle where the study sessions are conducted in a Halaqah (circle) style to show equality and that no one person is on the “head of the table”.
- 2) Guide: Allah SWT Is The Ultimate One Who Guides. The mentors are among the means to help guide the youth. They should be chosen among community members to be very tolerant, patient, wise and understanding; bearing in mind that they are “planting a seed” which may grow in a different pace than others so as long as there is improvement in the youth, even minor, then the entire youth group is on the right track Insha' Allah.
- 3) Young: The target audience is teenaged youth although ideally they should be split into 3 groups of 13-14, 15-16 and 17-19 year olds (if there are enough resources available) or 2 groups of middle and high school.
- 4) Muslim: Since it is a faith based youth group, it is not considered discriminatory to have members of the same faith of the Masjid or organization it is a part of.
- 5) Boys and girls: Most of the Muslim youth attend co-ed schools and will be doing the same in college and the workforce Insha' Allah. By having a co-ed youth group, it is in a controlled environment where Islamic values will be instilled in and emphasized to the youth as far as how to deal with the opposite gender in a respectful and honorable manner Insha' Allah.
- 6) To be committed to their faith: Muslim youth are under so much pressure and often see some conflicting value systems between their Masjid, school, neighborhood, friends, environment ...

etc. It is therefore important to help them not only learn and grow but to also be committed to their faith in a God-Conscience manner so that wherever and whenever they go elsewhere they will be religious and behave properly Insha' Allah.

- 7) Proudly: Some of the youth are embarrassed to be known as Muslims due to the negative or neutral impression most people have about this faith. One of the goals is to help make the youth themselves proud of their faith rather than trying to hide it.
- 8) Embody it: Some Muslims have knowledge but they do not act in accordance to it. Words are easy to utter but the true test of faith is how one acts, especially under tough circumstances and trying situations.
- 9) Every aspect of their lives: As believers, they must have one single good standard by which they treat all people whether they are Muslims, people of other faiths or lack thereof. This applies to the characteristics of honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, humbleness, compassion, politeness, kindness ... etc all across the board under any circumstance.

Study Circles: The youth themselves take turns in presenting various topics from Qur'an, Ahadeeth, Seerah and general ones such as the dangers of smoking or time management. These topics are presented by various means and mediums in such a way that it applies to the youth in this day and age in the west. A typical study circle lasts around 2 hours with interactive/discussion type presentations from various attendees, including the mentor(s). The recommended seating pattern in the Halaqah is one section of the circle have boys and the other have girls.

Outings: Whether community service or leisurely based, outings and trips are an integral part of the youth group. It increases the bond between group members and brings the best (and unfortunately sometimes the worse) out in them. It also teaches patience, sharing, compromising and other valuable lessons such as budgeting and planning. Ideally outing destinations should be voted on by the youth themselves and done once every 4 to 6 weeks, alternating between their types.

Budget: Money should not prevent any youth from participating so it will be ideal if the Masjid can support the youth group by making it free of charge and assigning a monthly budget for outings and trips (including meals) to be managed by the treasurer (please see below).

Youth Group Board structure: After the youth get to know each other more and notice the commitment levels and areas of interest/specialties of each, it is recommended that they nominate from among themselves (not including the mentors) and vote on the following positions (at least): President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. The following Board Member positions are also recommended (from among the youth): Outing Director, Marketing Director and IT Director.

Mentors Succession Plan: This is a continuous cycle and unless there is a plan to make the young generation eventually be in charge, then the youth group will most probably fade away. It is important for continuity that the mentors keep their eyes and minds open on future successor candidates who they see in them perhaps an extra commitment or higher leadership qualities for example.

Tarbiya: This entire program is based on the Tarbiya (personal development) model/system where its premise is that everyone has a potential to be better, especially if done in a gradual, comprehensive and balanced way. People have good quality traits and ones where there is room for improvement so a wise

person is one who acknowledges that and works on improving his or her good points while decreasing or hopefully eliminating his or her bad ones.

Life long process: Tarbiya is a life long process because there is always room for improvement; and the mentors should strive to always work on getting themselves to the next level. As these study circles become more advanced, they may start having less attendees but the quality and faith bond between them will increase significantly Insha' Allah.

More youth to join the continuous cycle: As the study circles advance and even if they decrease in the number of attendees, this is not a discouraging sign and it does not mean that the youth group will fade away; rather, it is a good sign that the more serious youth (who may be college aged then) are reaching higher levels where they eventually will be the mentors of the younger ones (teens) starting to participate and so on Insha' Allah.

Curriculum: Study materials should be dynamic/flexible and not static so it will be ideal to set overall learning targets and goals but let the mentor apply the techniques and pace him or herself depending on the audience. This approach often generates a lot of branched out topics of discussion that most of the youth find very useful and open up even more in doing so, seeking Islamic advice in potential problem areas they are experiencing in school for example.

Long term plan: Working with youth is a very rewarding experience but may take time (perhaps years) to see them blossom even more Insha' Allah. Please be patient as this endeavor continues, bearing in mind that you may see little or even no improvement at all in some youth but Allah SWT Rewards according to the intention and actions, not the results. The Masjid Administrators and mentors, however, need to do their part to the best of their ability first.

Masjid Hamzah live practical example: Al-Hamdu Lilllah, we currently have on the Board of Directorrs of Majsid Hamzah 2 teen leaders: A high school freshman girl and a college freshman boy. They are both very religious, dedicated, focused and are doing a great job as we are so proud of them, Ma Sha' Allah.

Hamzah Lions: Sports and Activities

Brother Emad Hamid, Hamzah Athletic Director, writes:

“Another program which helps involve the younger generation is a Masjid Sports Team. Masjid Hamzah invested in a soccer field, cricket field, volleyball area and an indoor basketball court (planned). With sports comes traffic and it reassures the concept that the Masjid is a community center much like the days of Muhammad PBUH where people do not just come to pray then leave. It is recommended that you name your Masjid Sports Team. Ours is named the Hamzah Lions as voted on by the youth themselves. It has its own logo and motto: Our conduct “ROARS” for itself

This program is geared to younger children and youth boys and girls from ages 5 to 12. Youth ages 13 and above participate mostly by being volunteer coaches who do an amazing job and the young team members look up to them so much. There are also older volunteer coaches and parent administrators on the boys and girls teams.

Playing sports is a Sunnah within itself. It enhances health, trains players to be disciplined, promotes teamwork, teaches both leadership and following and instills that winning is not everything as long as one does his or her best. Sports also improve the social life of children and youth where some of them have a lot of empty time on hand. Extra free time may lead to boredom and may cause the younger generation to do unproductive things to say the least. Programs such as these fill more of the idle time of children and youth and Islamic values are taught throughout either directly or indirectly. The coaches train the children and act as their role models and mentors.

Each Hamzah Lions team is independent and autonomous, having a coach, assistant coach and administrator where they set their own training and practice schedules. Uniforms are purchased by Masjid Hamzah for the team members and a symbolic \$30 fee is collected per player to cover that cost. Any player who has a difficulty budgeting that amount does not have to pay. Inter-Masajid and inter-faith games and tournaments ideally should be arranged to promote healthy competition while emphasizing that winning is not everything and what really counts is to have fun and treat all other players with dignity and respect.”

Chapter Thirteen

Role of Women

A great article I found online as part of my research is:

<http://www.islamicity.com/articles/Articles.asp?ref=IC0503-2644>. This article talks about the two extremes regarding women in the masjid: one side advocates total segregation and the other side even promoted women to lead the Salah in front of men.

Allah SWT made Islam a middle of the road Ummah. Women have a very important role to play both as teachers, wives, students, and active members.

Many of the successful Masajid we studied had women serving in some management capacity. At Hamzah Islamic Center:

- 1- We have two women serving on our executive board
- 2- Women are allowed to share the main Mussallah when it is not crowded and not full of men
- 3- Women have their own functions and programs and we hope to follow the footsteps of some of the Masajid by creating a “Alimah” program
- 4- We try to keep the women area having the same qualities if not better of that of men including carpet, cleanliness, speaker system, visual system among others.

However, one must be VERY strict in enforcing the Islamic rules:

- 1- Women must wear Hijab in the Masjid at all times unless in private women quarters
- 2- No intermingling of men and women
- 3- Noise is kept low

We have a lot of women who come to the Masjid especially in Ramadan. We encountered many space and logistical issues before we had women on our board. There was no way for the Ramadan committee of all men to know all the issues the sisters had. Ramadan planning starts months in advance as space and furniture must be coordinated with our schools.

There are other facility issues that we could not have anticipated had it not being for having women board members.

Chapter Fourteen

Children in the Masjid

Parents bring their young children to the Masjid for various reasons:

- 1- To teach them how important going to the Masjid is
- 2- Separation anxiety on both the parent and the child
- 3- To give the other parent at home a break

What Problems do Children Cause?

Noise of course! Whether it is laughing, talking, running or hitting each other, children make noise and disrupt things at the Masjid.

What Would Happen if Children Are Not Allowed to Come to The Masjid?

First, parents will not be able to come and, second, the child misses out on observing his parents in such a great environment. The later part leaves a great impression on the child that we need not underestimate.

The Masjid should not be viewed as a place for old men (and may be women) only. The Masjid should always come alive with activities in times other than Salah and lectures.

How Do We Manage Children at Masjid Hamzah?

We apply the following rules and one may say to a good degree of success Alhamdu Lillah:

- 1- Children must pray next to their parents rather than allowed to be on their own
- 2- Children are allowed to run and play after the Salah is over. Praying Sunnah and Nafl is discussed below
- 3- Children are allowed to play outside and not inside during Khutbah and lectures
- 4- We provide babysitting in Ramadan and other events

What Do We Do When Children Make Noise During Salah?

- 1- We never talk directly to the child but make announcements to the parents.
- 2- We may go to the extreme of asking the parents to take their children home.
- 3- It is very important not to have anyone hold, yell or admonish the child.

What About Sunnah and Nafl?

It is hard enough for children to stay quite during Jama'a Salah so expecting them to remain quite for Nafl is unrealistic at best.

Reminding them to be quite too many times and too long a period will have a reverse effect. We have a saying in Arabic that goes like this: "if you want to be obeyed then ask people to do what they can"

One can argue that it was the Sunnah of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to pray Sunnah and Nafl at home.

I would simply recommend that children are taught to go outside and play the minute the Salah is over. They will make a little noise as they exit out but that noise should be tolerated.

Here is a good link that covers the role of the children:

<http://www.soundvision.com/info/masjid/children-in-masjid.asp>

Chapter Fifteen

The Role of the Imam

It is interesting to see the different models as far as the Imam is concerned. And yet each model has proven to be successful in the eyes of its community as well as others.

The 3 models we studied:

- 1- There is no fulltime Imam (RCM and MCA). Note that MCA is one of the largest Masjid in the US with over 3,500 people praying each Friday. So size does not matter. In this case a number of designated people deliver Khutbah, lead prayers and conduct lectures. A study on both RCM and MCA is included in this booklet
- 2- There is an Imam but the Imam is not part of the Masjid management. There is a board and an executive committee (and sometimes both are combined into one) that manage the daily affairs of the masjid. The Imam's role is to focus on religious and social activities. This is the case of ADAMS Center as included in this booklet
- 3- The Imam is managing the daily affairs as well as the religious and social. There is a board or a committee in each case but its tasks is more visionary rather than daily management.

The needs of the community must be served. You will find even in the absence of a designated Imam that the successful Masjid have a good number of religious volunteers performing the function of the Imam.

The Masjid must establish its religious philosophy and select the people that best fit that philosophy to lead its community. A successful Masjid values religious education and bridging the gap between religious history and current daily affairs.

Regardless which model you choose the role of the Imam must be very clear and documented. There are many expectations both religious and managerial that come along with the title of Imam and Masjid management must decide before it even hires the Imam what roles they want him to play.

Good chemistry must exist between Imam and Masjid management. Otherwise, division and discontent will ensue.

Chapter Sixteen

Management vs. Leadership

There is a great link on the internet <http://www.bobcornwall.com/2010/09/managing-polarities-in-congregations.html> albeit aimed at Christian congregation that describes the internal of conflict that every religious organization goes through. It is a conflict between who we are and where we want to be by the blessings of Allah.

The article states:

“Management is about maintenance, leadership is about vision. Vitality, requires both attending to the institutional life (management) and guiding the community into an embrace of its mission (leadership).”

Leaders embody the words of prophet Muhammad (PBUH): “Seek the Firdous Al-A’la (the highest level in Paradise)”. Leaders are in a constant struggle within themselves of wanting to reach higher and loftier goals no matter the costs. They have uncanny energy and drive that people often wonder where they get the time from.

Managers on the other hand are generally either happy with the status quo or focus their efforts at tangible efforts, measurable artifacts like infrastructure, fundraising and financials, membership, etc.

One must not confuse leadership with dictatorship and these two are often confused and abused. Allah SWT instructs prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to “consult with them (the companions)” but Allah SWT gives the ultimate decision to the prophet (PBUH): “And once You make a decision, put your faith in Allah”.

Leaders are actually characterized as knowledge seekers. They are open to ideas and they are often self-reflective and self-critical. They are actually often tormented inside their hearts by a sense of inadequacy as their goals are much higher than they can achieve.

The Balance between Leading and Empowering

Vision is singular and leaders must be strong to march toward that great vision. Vision is a man’s view from the cloud; it is a destination; an end and not necessarily the path.

The community not only needs to totally buy in and believe in the vision, they need to be totally empowered to execute that vision.

How many Masajid you see community members not able to do anything simply because the management is so tolerations? How many Masajid they lack the necessary volunteers to carry out many tasks simply because the volunteers feel inferior and unappreciated?

The Characteristics of a Great Masjid Leader

Leading a Masjid with all its different ethnic groups, religious affiliations, educational and financial levels as well as its social family makeup is a tremendous task. It requires someone or people with:

- 1- Great Islamic knowledge with understanding the differences of opinions and their reasons
- 2- Humble and respectful to others: there is no bigger turn off to people than an egotistical leader; it violates all the laws of being a good Muslim
- 3- Superb managerial skills to manage financials and volunteers and board and committees...
- 4- Great motivational skills
- 5- LOVE, LOVE and MORE LOVE to every member of the community. You must look at everyone in the community and they must look back at you almost as a family member
- 6- Unlimited patience
- 7- Wisdom

How Do You Know You Are a Good Leader?

I was asked in a job interview once (this was for an IT job by the way): how can I tell who the leader is in a company. I replied it is the one everyone goes to in a crisis.

You have succeeded if and only your community members come to you for everything. Not only with their religious questions, and not only with their marital problems but they come to you with every issue from jobs to resolving difference with others.

Advice to Leaders - Transparency

Be transparent in everything you do. Do not allow doubts to creep into people's minds about your character especially when it is related to money and/or women.

A Hadith on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is that he was standing late at night with a women covered in a Hijab when two Muslims passed by. They passed by very quickly and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "Slowdown, it is Safeyyah (his wife) Bint Ahtab". They said: "we would never doubt you, oh messenger of Allah" and he (PBUH) said: "Satan runs through people's heart like blood runs through their veins".

Second Advice: Outwork the Community

Allah SWT tells us in Surah Al-Saf: "Oh, who believe, why do you say what you do not do. It is a grave sin to Allah to say what you do not do".

Leaders and managers must demonstrate to the community that they are always first in line to when it is called upon. It is necessary to delegate as no man or group can do everything. But in delegation one is respectful. I do not ask someone to move a chair if I am standing doing nothing.

The community maybe even willing to forgive many of the mistakes of management when they see the effort the management puts forth.

Chapter Seventeen

Managing a Community of Volunteers

Is It a Backseat Driver or Is It Someone Who Really Wants to Achieve Something?

Someone comes to you and see the Masjid needs new paint or new carpet and another comes up with an idea for a new program or function. What will you do especially if you “think that” you do not have the resources?

At Masjid Hamzah we coined the phrase “*You suggest it, You Own It*”. This phrase has many benefits to it that are easy to overlook:

- 1- The person coming up with an idea is often passion and energetic to see it succeeds. He/she is willing to put forth the effort, rally the community to raise funds and will work hard to get the volunteers.
- 2- You are giving that person and the community a sense of ownership and empowerment by asking him/her to lead the efforts but with your guidelines and supervision of course.
- 3- You need to do everything in your power to help that person succeeds all the while making sure that he/she receives all the credit
- 4- Please be open to different ideas and do not try to enforce your own just for the sake of it
- 5- Do not do anything that may sabotage the results
- 6- Should that person hesitates or fails or run into issues then he/she will know hard the work really is
- 7- You will be able to achieve more as now you have a true community of volunteers

I remember a brother coming to us and asking if he could plant tomatoes in our land. At first thought we asked ourselves if there is any value to it. Then we said yes if there were no costs to the Masjid. What a surprise it turned out. The brother was a genius gardener (IT professor by profession) and he did an amazing job. But most importantly he started coming regularly to the Masjid and became a great member of our community.

What if we had said no? I shudder to think of a loss of such a very good person.

The Balance between Paying for Something and Utilizing Volunteers

Often we are faced with a dilemma: we need something right away and we need it done professionally. A brother or a sister comes and says they will do it for free. But free comes with hidden costs of time (it may never get done), quality, or even material costs as the volunteer may not have the right equipment. So what should we do in this case?

I would use a volunteer in any of the following cases:

- 1- The volunteer is a professional in the area you need (a painter when you need a paint job, an AC mechanic when your heating and cooling system is down)

- 2- It is a simple job that can be done quickly by most anyone and they are willing to do it when you ask
- 3- There is no sense of urgency to the time the job must get done

Even when time and complexity are not of the essence, it is good to document the job and the expectations rather than having a “hallway” conversation about it. It is also important to follow-up on the work, probably more frequently than if done for pay.

I would pay for the job if time and/or quality is of major concerns. This opens the Masjid up to the volunteer complaining that he/she could have done the job for free. It is a criticism that one must be willing to accept if getting the job done is of high priority.

Be Careful of the Self-Serving Volunteer

Here is a situation for example that many Masajid who is in the process of any construction or remodeling effort would go through:

You will have many professionals (painters, subcontractors, builders, engineers, etc.) offering you free (volunteer) service and their valuable business knowledge. They do that with the sole purpose of landing the contract with you. And may Allah SWT help you if you choose someone else over them!

A volunteer must be just that: doing something for the sake of Allah SWT.

However, to be fair you must explain to them from the very first moment that you have a policy against conflict of interest. You can say you would love to have them be part of your construction committee but if they cannot bid on any of the work. Otherwise, they cannot serve on the committee but you will give them every opportunity to bid on the work.

Chapter Eighteen

Conflict Management: the AND vs. the OR Dilemma

Often we are faced with competing and seemingly opposite views. Let's take one example and see how one issue can split a community:

The Masjid has many elders but a predominantly young community with families of 2 or 3 children. The elders or unmarried people want the Masjid to be very quiet and the other wants to bring their children to the Masjid.

The first group contends that Salah is the most important aspect of a Masjid and to have Khusho'o the Masjid needs to be in total silence.

The other group states that we need to teach our children the importance of coming to the Masjid; that the Masjid is not only for grumpy old men, and that it is OK to have fun and be a Muslim.

A huge argument ensues between the two groups as they are seeing the issue and solution as "either/or". One group will be alienated if a decision is made in favor of one against the other.

There is an opportunity to redefine the issue and objective as such:

"We want to have children come to the Masjid and have fun AND we also want them to be quiet during Salah and lectures".

Once you define the issue this way then the two groups can work together and move toward a middle compromise: bring the children to the Masjid but do one of the following:

- 1- Have children pray next to their parents and have the parents enforce discipline
- 2- Have a babysitting area especially during long lectures and events and have parents pay for the service if possible

It is very hard to see the opportunity in the AND principle if one is mired in his/her own ego and cannot see the forest from the trees. There is a temptation to go with "my way or the highway" or "I am OK with that but I do not want THEM to win". Obviously, neither feeling is acceptable from an Islamic point of view.

What is necessary for Masjid management is to imagine an outside observer listening to the issue and acting like a mediator or a judge. Do not look at it like you are relinquishing control but rather your reaffirming your leadership position by being THE problem solver.

This principle is explained in great details in a book titled "Managing Polarities in Congregations".

Chapter Nineteen

Parking: The Nightmare of Many Masajid

Many Masajid in the US face one of two problems:

- 1- Not enough parking for the number of people who come to pray
- 2- People who come late and double park and yet they are last to leave

Are you too familiar with this problem? Does it annoy you to no end? We are going to address each issue individually.

When Not Enough Parking

I would offer the following suggestions for a short term solution:

- 1- Hire a site or traffic engineer to do a study on how to maximize parking. Do not simply rely on the volunteers even though they have become all too experienced at managing parking. A fresh, experienced engineer may offer solutions that your community may not have thought possible
- 2- Should you entertain the thought of having multiple Khutbah per Friday? MCA, ADAMS and some other Masajid have gone that route

Long term solutions:

- 1- Buying land may be cheaper than building multi-level parking so investigate this option
- 2- How much will it cost you to build a parking deck?
- 3- Do you need to start at looking to have another Masjid or another location?

When People Double Park

It is amazing that the same people who obey parking rules at a shopping center or a mall do not have a problem violating all the rules when coming to the Masjid. One can only wonder why!

However, one has to study the reason people double park. Is it lack of parking as explained above or are they simply coming late and need a quick path?

If it is the latter then I would suggest:

- 1- Have a police officer on premise in addition to volunteers
- 2- Spend a good deal of time educating the community
- 3- Have your volunteers provide adequate instructions
- 4- When all fails do not be afraid to tow violators especially if they do not immediately come out after Salah

In all cases, one may have to designate a certain area for women, elderly and families then find a way to educate the community about the value of carpooling and cooperating with parking volunteers.

Parking Issues and the Neighbors

One of the worst issues that happen is when people coming to pray park at neighbors lands or businesses.

This will cause a multitude of issues not only short term but long term especially if the Masjid ever had to go back to city/county for any rezoning issues.

The Masjid must be vigilant in protecting the rights of neighbors and that includes hiring a traffic police officer and towing.

Chapter Twenty

The Founder: Greatness or Hindrance: Overcoming the Founder Syndrome

The One Man Show or Founder Syndrome: Is it Avoidable and Is It a Bad Thing?

First, one must ask: is it really a bad idea that we have a very strong leader? Is our dislike influenced by jealousy or are we simply following the American model of management?

In the following segments I am going to highlight few areas for both the founder/leader and for the community itself and try to provide certain recommendations Insha Allah.

The Warning Signs for the Founder

Often an organization becomes associated with its founder and they become synonymous for one another. The founder is the key person who drives the organization.

This becomes a major hindering element when the founder exhibits one of the following symptoms:

- 1- The founder finds it increasingly difficult to meet the growing demands of the community
- 2- The founder becomes restless and thoughts creeps to his about restarting all over again with a smaller, new Masjid
- 3- The founder becomes increasingly more irritable and less patient
- 4- A feeling that the community is a bunch of ingrates who do not appreciate the founder's hard work or efforts.
- 5- How come they are blaming me when no one steps in to do any of the work, the founder asks feeling sorry for himself
- 6- A feeling that let me quit and I will see the downfall and that the community deserves what happens to it next. This is the final nail in the coffin. The founder needs to really step away gracefully if these thoughts start creeping into his mind

The Family Sacrifice – The Ultimate Warning Sign

I have known too many people that get so involved in serving the community that their own marriage and family suffer a great deal.

The founder is engrossed with all the activities, he/she is thinking about the global needs of the community and how important they are only to forget about those that matter the most.

One must ask him/herself: why am I doing something? Is it for the attention and praise? If so, stop immediately. Allah SWT will not accept anything but pure.

The second question to ask is why the family is not as supportive of my efforts. If you ask yourself honestly you will discover your failings: from not helping out in family chores to not to paying attention to the problems in the house or raising the children.

When that happens then simply step away. However, my advice to you is to make it gradual and not abrupt. I will discuss this in more details below.

What Should the Leader Do?

Allah SWT says in the Quran narrating with prophet Sho'ib said: "All my success is in Allah". Everyone must keep that singular focus in mind all the time that it is indeed the Blessings of Allah that lead to success and not the efforts of one or a few.

The founder needs to be self-reflective and look for the above listed warning signs. If those signs do not exist then there are different sets of questions to ask:

- 1- Is there someone or a group of people who can take the Masjid to that next level faster and better?
- 2- Have I reached a point where I exhausted my ideas and a new vision is needed?
- 3- Do I still have the same energy that I had?
- 4- Can I still put up with aggravations and headaches like I used to?

If the answer to these questions is NO then he still needs to ask is close circuit of friends to make sure that his answers are not biased.

Do not step away simply because there are a small group of people who antagonize all the time. Check the pulse of the entire community as a small group is not reflective of the community as a whole.

How Do You Step Away?

Abrupt resignation is one of the worst things a leader can do. A good leader plans his/her exit strategy and grooms him/her successor for the tasks at hand.

Get your family in on your thoughts first and explain to them that it is going to be gradual.

Start delegating many of your day to day tasks to others and place the responsibility of managing these tasks to few different people or board members. Do not let them in on your thoughts just yet. Simply watch carefully how they do but do NOT interfere and do not make disparaging comments. Remember that your intention is to please Allah.

Focus your mind and energy on more global but less strenuous tasks. You are getting yourself prepare for the time void and social emptiness that you may feel once you are completely disengaged.

Leave on good terms and graciously. Thank everyone and explain that you are leaving not because of a problem but to simply reenergize and refocus on other, more important things.

What to Do Afterwards?

Many leaders of startup organizations suffer from serious withdrawals. They wake up one morning with too much time on their hands; people stop coming to them with problems; family life is not as good as they expected as now they are suffocating their spouses and/or children with their attention.

Worse of all they stop going to their particular Masjid and go to a different one. They say to themselves that they do not want to go not to make the new management uncomfortable.

On the contrary, you have made a lot of friends and brothers. They do not step being that simply because you are not the leader anymore. If they do that then neither one of you were doing things for the sake of Allah.

Yet go but without engaging in anything managerial or judgmental. Avoid to be dragged into any negative talk.

Worse of all do not allow your ego to let you think that you need to come back on your white horse and save the day and the Masjid. The Masjid will be fine without you, Insha Allah. Trust me!

It is important to stress here that, if done correctly, the by-laws can protect the original mission and vision of the original founders. This eases the worry that stepping away will lead to a drastic and dramatic change of direction of the masjid by the new leadership.

Chapter Twenty One

When There Are Other Masajid in the Area

Who Are We as a Masjid? The Danger of Copying

A Masjid needs to ask itself about what its ultimate goals are and who they are really. Let's not copy the Masajid closest to us simply because they are doing this thing or that. Let's compliment their offerings with things that are our core strengths whether new or the same.

Do we start a clinic simply because the Masjid next door has one? Does the community need the same classes and lectures? Should we all engage in interfaith programs even if we did not have the expertise?

The first thing one needs to do is analyze the community as well as the leadership and determine their strengths and weaknesses. Also, one needs to look at the communities around and ask about their core strengths in an effort not to repeat.

For instance, Masjid Hamzah is blessed with a big IT community so we focus on offering computer courses to anyone in the Atlanta areas. While there are other Masajid we happen to reside in between who offer clinics and great Dawa' programs.

Let's not waste energy at things we do not do well but work together as Masajid in one geographic area to collectively offer too many good things.

Working with Other Masajid and Islamic Organizations

Masajid should not compete with one another. Allah SWT says that "The Masajid belong to Allah" and as such we should not care who has what and how much.

The purpose of the Masjid is to serve its community the best it can. This includes having great relationship with other Masajid. There are many benefits to that:

- 1- Islam is about unity
- 2- Masajid can share the costs of bringing speakers and having them lecture at each Masjid
- 3- They can announce major events for one another
- 4- They can complement each other's strengths and weaknesses
- 5- They can collaborate and learn from one another
- 6- They can hold joint functions like Eid together
- 7- They can share same rules about Ramadan and Eid uniting the community when there is so much division

What If the Other Masajid Do Not Want to Cooperate?

There are different reasons why you may find difficulties in approaching other Masajid to collaborate together:

- 1- We are fine the way we are and we really do not see a reason to change

- 2- We are not sure of your motives
- 3- We tried working with other Masajid in the past only to fail miserably and get entangled with egos and politics. We really do not need all the headaches
- 4- We do not have the time, the money or the resources to do what you are asking us
- 5- We have to study your proposal carefully and present it to our committees and that may take months

It is important when faced with such difficulties not to give up and demonstrate through your actions the following:

- 1- You really do not have an ulterior motive other than serving the community
- 2- You are willing to hold the function at the other Masjid and not necessarily yours
- 3- You are willing to give them top billing (credit) and not heap the praise on your Masjid
- 4- You can see the different points of view of the other Masjid and you are flexible to address their concerns and meet their needs
- 5- You remain positive all the time and never utter a word of criticism no matter how much you happen to disagree
- 6- Above all, you must practice what you preach and accommodate other Masajid when they come to you. Do not fight it simply because it's not your idea and do not try to take over managing it. Let the people coming up with the idea have the first shot at the decision making.

APPENDIX 1

Bylaws and Articles of Incorporations

Masjid Hamzah Articles of Incorporation

As originally filed with the state in 2005:

<http://www.masjidhamzah.com/Documents/ArticlesofIncorporation-As-Filed-2005.pdf>

Masjid Hamzah Bylaws

<http://www.masjidhamzah.com/Documents/HIC-Bylaws.pdf>

RCM Bylaws

[http://www.masjidhamzah.com/Documents/RCM Bylaws 01-30-09.pdf](http://www.masjidhamzah.com/Documents/RCM%20Bylaws%2001-30-09.pdf)

ADAMS Center Bylaws

http://adamscenter.org/Files/ByLaws_05162011.pdf

MCA Bylaws

There are multiple versions that can be found on their website. The link is:

<http://www.mcabayarea.org/about-us/constitution>

APPENDIX 2

Case Studies: Successful Masajid Interviews

Muslim Community Association (MCA)

Interview with Brother Fouad Khatib - President

www.mcabayarea.org

Personal Note

One of our community responded to my request for contacts at different “successful” masajid by giving us the name of MCA as a masjid in the Bay Area.

I looked up their website and found a link to their president, brother Fouad Khatib, and I sent him an email asking for his time for a personal interview. I contacted 4 other masajid on that day making a similar request.

It is important to note that the only response I got so far is from brother Fouad. This, and by itself, is a great testament to why their organization is successful Masha Allah.

Brother Fouad Khatib

Brother Fouad and I exchanged few email and text messages and decided on a time. I promised him that I will not take more than one hour of his time. Needless to say our conversation lasted more than 2 hours.

I found brother Fouad to be open and candid, eloquent and very structured in thoughts. He is an engineer in education and trade and the structured logic in his conversation came very clear. I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation and he was very patient with my questions.

Brother Fouad has a history of service in Islamic organizations including being president of a CAIR chapter.

Brother Fouad is from India and while the majority of the Indian Muslim community follows the Hanafi school, brother Fouad is from an area that follows the Shafi'i school of Fiqh. I believe this distinction helped shape the open, tolerant mind of brother Fouad and the MCA masjid as well.

MCA as a Masjid and an Organization

MCA was founded over 25 years ago in the bay area around San Francisco by purchasing a church building. This helped start MCA without having to face zoning or non-Muslim community opposition.

Over time MCA acquired a number of business buildings and lands and now they sit on top of a combined 81,000 SQ FT of physical structure.

MCA has the following services:

- 1- 3 Jumaa prayers during the summer and 2 in the winter attended by a combined 3,500-4,000 Mussalleen
- 2- Fulltime school from pre-k to 8th grade
- 3- Daily after school Islamic studies

- 4- Weekend school (Saturday and Sunday)
- 5- Various Islamic programs for adults (Halaqa)
- 6- A vibrant youth community with their own Halaqa
- 7- Social activities
- 8- Bookstore
- 9- Restaurant

Keys to Success

Brother Fouad lists the following as keys to a successful masjid:

- 1- Level of people in applying Islamic principles that pertain to ethics, Akhlaq, etc.
- 2- Diversity of community in its makeup
- 3- General harmony of people coexisting together
- 4- Large space allowing a wealth of activities and programs

Brother Fouad emphasizes that people are more important than any bylaws. Focus on people and the community is the single most important factor in success after the blessings of Allah.

Management Structure

MCA has 3 governing entities:

- 1- Executive committee responsible for the daily operation of the organization and all legislative and policy issues as well
- 2- Board of trustees whose job is to manage all real estate properties including land acquisition. This committee does not set policy or oversee the executive committee
- 3- Fulltime school board committee responsible for managing the school. The school is an independent subsidiary with its own tax id and 501C3 tax exempt status

Role of the Imam and Managing Khutbah

MCA does not have a fulltime Imam. Rather they have 2 part time Imams and others who lead the Salah. They feel that is the best structure based on a bad experience they had over 20 years ago.

MCA use different volunteer scholars to lead the more than 25-30 Khutbahs they do per month. The schedule is posted on their website.

The different volunteers that give Halaqa, Khutbah and lectures serve as the cornerstone of their religious environment that is based on religious tolerance.

The Khutbahs are delivered in a mix of English and Arabic rather than a Bayan then an Arabic Khutbah.

Despite the large building size, MCA is not immune to the parking issues that plaques many other masajid.

Role of Women in Masjid Management

Further analysis pending Insha Allah

Role of Youth in Masjid Management

Further analysis pending Insha Allah

Membership and Election

Membership is open to the general public so long they pay the annual dues. Members become eligible to vote or work on the board after a period of 60 days becoming members.

Members actively seeking a position on the board are automatically disqualified by the election committee.

There is a term limit of 2 consecutive two year terms per board member. After 2 consecutive periods the board member must take at least one year of not serving on the board.

Only the president is elected as a role. Board members are elected simply as board members then their titles are assigned per a vote within themselves.

Election is held in one year for half the board members and the next for the other half.

Different Groups within the Masjid

MCA has a large number of community members attending the 5 daily prayers and the various programs offered by MCA.

Some community members belong to one or more of these groups:

- 1- Jama'a
- 2- Tableegh
- 3- Movement (closer to sophism)
- 4- Salafees

MCA allows some of these groups to conduct their own Halaqa in a corner of the masjid but without dominating masjid activities or culture.

MCA does not allow anyone other than themselves to conduct any fundraising activities in their masjid.

Subcommittees

In additions to the boards, MCA relies on a large number of subcommittees managing the various activities of the masjid.

Property Management

MCA has fulltime paid staff to manage the property and ensuring its cleanliness and fitness to their daily operations.

Ramadan and Eid and Moon Sighting

MCA follows the ISNA calculation based methods of moon sighting.

Communication

MCA utilizes the following methods:

- 1- Announcements after Jumaa: this is the predominant way of communicating activities to the community
- 2- Up-to-date website with Salah timing and activities
- 3- An automated phone system
- 4- Open meetings with community (is it scheduled or not scheduled)
- 5- Accessibility by the president and other board members to the community
- 6- Most events are planned a month in advance and, therefore, Jumaa announcements more than suffices

Two points:

- 1- MCA has a policy of replying to every email submitted to them through their website. This is evident by their quick response to my email request
- 2- MCA does not utilize email groups (whether private or public). There is a plan to do so in the future but not yet finalized

Communicating and Managing Financials

MCA prepares an annual report that is very detailed regarding the financial operations of the organization.

MCA has multiple bank accounts (operations, property acquisition, Sadaqa, etc.)

In the past year, MCA raised about:

- 1- \$430,000 in Zakat fund
- 2- \$80,000 in Fitra
- 3- \$700,000 for masjid operations

Interfaith

Further analysis pending Insha Allah

Working with Other Masajid and Muslim Organizations

Further analysis pending Insha Allah

Social Activity Analysis

Further analysis pending Insha Allah

Weekend School Analysis

I am hoping for brother Fouad to introduce me to a member of MCA's weekend school management members

Fulltime School Analysis

I am hoping for brother Fouad to introduce me to a member of MCA's fulltime school management members

Roswell Community Masjid (RCM)

Answers by Executive President Brother Bassem Fakhoury

<http://www.roswellmasjid.org/>

A Brief History of RCM

RCM was established in 1998 primarily as a place to provide Islamic lessons to the daughters of the founders in a clean and modern environment. Purchased and moved to current location in Dec 2012.

RCM as a Successful Masjid

What does the term “successful masjid” mean to you personally?

It is a place where everyone is welcome and is recognized as a source of true Islamic knowledge by the entire community, both Muslim and none.

What do you attribute the fact that some people already pointed to your masjid as successful?

Our focus on youth, our modern facility and our professional approach to doing things.

In your own words, what truly make you successful?

We are blessed with a very vibrant and energetic community. Many of our first generation sisters are involved in the youth programs. Many professionals (doctors, lawyers, business men, CPAs) volunteer. This has attracted many people who find what they are looking for, whether it is religious, youth oriented, special seminars or interfaith events. All our leaders are humble and leave their ego at home.

Services and Offerings

Educational services for children: do you have a weekend Islamic school, a fulltime school, Hifz, etc.? We have a daily Hifz program with about 14 students. Our Sunday school consists of lessons from the Quran and the prophets for kids of all ages.

Educational services for adults and community: can you list?

We have Tajweed class every Thursday, and Tafseer class every Friday. Visiting scholars on some weekends as well as legal lectures. We have one boy scout and six very active girl scout troops

Non-educational services: please list

We assist with Zakat and Sadaqua. We have Fajr pot luck breakfast last Sunday of the month and Pot Luck dinner on Friday quarterly. We also have a large multipurpose room that is available for private events (wedding receptions, graduations) and a well-equipped conference room for private meetings. We also have a counselor to assist people with individual and family matters.

Vocational and community: gym, play areas, food gatherings, etc.

We have a basketball hoop, a ping pong table and two foosball tables.

Management Structure

What is the organizational structure to your masjid? Do you have 2 board bodies and, if so, how is the division of responsibilities defined? What issues may have come out of that and how do you resolve them?

We have a board and an Operations team. The board is in charge of the vision and direction of the future (3-5 years currently). It consists of 7 members. The Operations team is in charge of day-to-day

activities and fulfilling the board's approved tasks. The operations team consists of several groups: Finance, Revenue, Facility, Education, Public Relations, AlBayan Institute and a scholar. Alhamdulillah, we have not had any issues, but our method to resolve them is by consensus. If it's a religious matter, we have a religious affairs committee in charge of researching the range of opinions and providing a recommendation. Please refer to the RCM Annual Report for more details

How masjid officials are selected to serve (elections, nominations, etc.)?

The board establishes a nominations committee. They go out and solicit names and filter against a few prerequisites. The board then votes in the new members.

What is the role of the Imam in managing the daily affairs of the masjid? Does the Imam sit on the board?

We don't have a permanent Imam. But he would in charge of all the religious and educational affairs. He reports to the Chair of the operations team, not the board.

In addition to the Imam, how many other religious figures do you have that deliver Halaqa and/or Khutbah on a regular basis?

At least four.

Do you have women on the board?

Yes. The by-laws specify at least two women at all times

Do you have youth on the board?

Yes. The by-laws specify at least one person under 40 at all times

What is the ethnic makeup of your community?

We do not have an absolute majority. Many of our members are indo-pak or Arab. But we also have many Americans, Asians, African-Americans and Turkish members.

What is the educational and income make up of your community?

Our community is very diverse and includes people of all educational levels and incomes. I would say the majority is upper middle class and has at least a college degree.

What issues do you encounter occasionally around management?

As a volunteer-led organization, I say we face the typical issues of finding the skilled individuals who can complete a project in the required time frame.

Communication

How do you communicate to your community: website, announcements, emails (private or open group)? How often and what is generally the content?

The RCM email distribution list is reserved for RCM led or sponsored events. Other general community announcements are made after Jumu3a prayers and posted on the website. Please sign up on our website to receive copies.

How often do you communicate using each medium?

The education announcements are at the beginning of the semester, the newsletter is monthly. Other items as needed

Who in the organization does the communication?

The school principal, the PR director and the Operations Team Chair

How is the website managed, Salah times, etc.?

Salah times are set by the religious affairs committee at the beginning of the year. Other updates are done as needed.

Who maintains the website?

A small group of IT people under the supervision of the PR department

Do you hold community open sessions (Q&A) and, if so, how often?

Twice a year on average, during the Sunday school.

How would a stranger visiting the area find out about your services and how easy to get an answer?

Visit our website or write an email to PR@roswellmasjid.org or ot@roswellmasjid.org. The email is forwarded to the appropriate individual for the most accurate and up-to-date answer.

Does the masjid have a phone number that is published on website and to community?

Yes. 770-640-1411

Do you have an answering machine, answering service or a live person if I called the number?

Answering machine.

How long does it usually take for someone to answer an email question posted on your website?

Usually on the same day. 24 hours maximum.

How accessible is the Imam to the community and how accessible board members are?

Some board members are regular Musaleen. All their names and contact information is posted in the Masjid.

What type of questions generally asked?

Finances of the masjid and education programs. Muslim resources in the area for people considering a move to the area. Questions about Islam by non-Muslims. Requests for monetary assistance.

Do people come to you for questions on jobs, housing, social issues?

Yes, but we are not necessarily always prepared to answer them ourselves. We refer them to others.

Financials**Do you have one or multiple bank accounts and who manage them?**

Multiple. Managed by the Finance director under the supervision of the board treasurer

How many people can write checks?

Two. One person on the finance team and the treasurer

Are your taxes prepared by a community member or a third party, non-Muslim organization?

Third party

Are any aspects of your financials communicated to the community or the public?

All our finances are open to the public. Our operating income and expenses are posted in the masjid.

How do you track and distribute Zakah and Sadaqa? What is the average Zakah/Sadaqa distribution per year?

One person is in charge of these accounts. It is around \$40K per year for everything.

How do you verify someone is actually in need?

We work with Share.

How often do you do fundraising for your own?

Twice per year. In the spring and in Ramadan.

Do you allow fundraisings for other organizations and if so how often?

No. We only allow them to announce and provide an information table and poster if requested.

How did you respond to the floods in Pakistan few years ago, the famine in Africa, the Syrian and other refugees?

We allowed individuals or small groups to announce to the community. We helped them collect by putting boxes when requested. We opened the facility if they needed to handle the clothing donations.

Volunteers and Community Involvement

How many regular volunteers do you usually have that are recognized by the general community?

About 10 or 12.

How responsive people are when you ask for additional volunteers for a specific event?

Very. Alhamdulillah we average over 30 volunteers at events.

What can regular Mussalleen do or not do? Please answer based on their perception and not simply a statement of policy.

They are free to suggest improvements to all aspects of the masjid, including starting new programs, improving the processes and participating on the Operations team. All the proposals are reviewed by appropriate committee for further action.

Islamic Environment

What are your thoughts on the 4 school of Fiqh, Salafeesim, and sophism and where does your masjid stand?

We have people who fall all over the spectrum who help make decisions.

Do you subscribe to as a masjid to a single school of Fiqh?

No.

How often do you bring speakers from outside your community?

At least once every two months.

What are your rules on women? Where do they pray, what are they mandated to do? Are there different rules for Salah vs. school or social events? How do you enforce these rules?

The women's prayer room is next to the men's. There is a small prayer area for women with small children. The genders mix in social events and in the school. Sometimes a portable divider is used to isolate a small group if requested.

What subjects do you usually teach to adults and what subjects do you usually teach to children?

Adults get tajweed and tafseer. Kids also get Arabic reading and stories of the prophets.

How often do you hold non-scheduled events?

Never.

If I were as a stranger come to your masjid, how would I feel?

Welcomed. We have nothing to hide.

What is the likelihood that people who live closer to other masajid would come to your events?

High. Alhamdulillah we tend to attract high caliber speaker and run good events.

How well respected are the Imams or religious figures in the surrounding areas?

Very. We have several interfaith programs with neighboring churches and synagogues. We also hosted the mayor, the chief of police and a local GA senator.

Physical Structure and Building Maintenance

Do you own or rent?

Own.

How big of a land and building(s) do you have? What purpose each area serve?

The property is about an acre. The building is about 11,000 square feet. The building is divided into a musallah, a school and a community area. Each of those is about a third of the building space.

Do you have a full time or part time janitor?

Part time.

How often is each area cleaned?

Twice per week and after events.

How would you characterize your building as: upscale, middle class, in-need of major upgrades?

Middle class

Do you serve food inside the premises and if so how often or do you have a designated area for food?

Food can only be served in the multipurpose room, the café and the kitchen. Mostly on weekends

Issues, Mitigations and Resolutions

What are typical community management issues and how often do they arise?

We had one person conduct unapproved classes and had to put an end to that. When they refused to provide detailed information about what they were teaching.

How would you handle these issues when they happen?

Treat everyone fairly and refer back to the policies. No exceptions. Those create bad precedents. The founders and board members are the first ones who follow the rules.

How would you describe your community: peaceful and loving, generally peaceful or divided?

Peaceful and loving. A few who disagree have self-selected other masajids .

Interview with ADAMS Center

Brother Wael Alkhairo, Executive Director

www.adamscenter.org

Personal Note

I went to Hajj for the first time back in 2002 and Imam Mohammed Magid of ADAMS Center was the Imam in charge of the group. I was extremely impressed with his knowledge and his personality. It is rare that you see such a great combination in a single man.

Brother Wael Alkhairo

There are very few people that one “clicks” with both intellectually and personally the way brother Wael and I did. Brother Wael was not only candid in his input but I found him to have great passion for serving the community and the talent to execute on that vision.

ADAMS Center as a Masjid and an Organization

This text comes straight from ADAMS website and it serves as a great illustration about their history:

“All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) was established in 1983 by a small number of families in the Herndon/Reston area in Northern Virginia. Over the past two decades it has grown to be one of the largest Muslim Community organizations in the Washington metropolitan area. Today ADAMS serves the town of Chantilly, Centerville, Sterling, Great Falls, Ashburn, Leesburg, and McLean in addition to Herndon and Reston. ADAMS' main interest is the upbringing of Muslim children. Monthly potluck gatherings provide the children with opportunity to know one another and bond together. The Sunday school has been established for the purpose of building Muslim character with strong faith and knowledge of the proper way to perform rites of worship.

It is a membership organization registered in the State of Virginia as a non-profit, tax exempt corporation and is affiliated with the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA).

ADAMS membership is continuously increasing and has reached about 2,200 individuals. However, it serves close to 5000 families in the area. The Sunday school enrollment is almost 500 students.

The organization is managed by an elected Executive Committee. The Committee reports to the Board of Trustees which is formed thirteen elected members.

ADAMS Center is currently located in Sterling at Sugarland Road. The center is 25,000 Sq ft and has a masjid for 750 people, 375 parking spaces, weekend school for 500 children, a community multi-purpose hall, library, and a gymnasium.

ADAMS also owns a cemetery which is available to the larger Washington metropolitan Muslim community.”

ADAMS has the following services:

- 10- 3 Jumaa prayers
- 11- Fulltime school from toddler to second grade
- 12- Sunday school
- 13- Daily Quran reading
- 14- Daily Quran memorization
- 15- Youth education
- 16- Social activities including marriage, funeral and healthcare
- 17- Gym
- 18- Library

Keys to Success

Brother Wael lists the following as keys to a successful masjid:

- 5- Integrity in applying the core message of the center: excellence, transparency and integrity
- 6- Providing a nurturing loving environment measured by people’s overall happiness and satisfaction with the center

Management Structure

ADAMS has 2 governing entities:

- 4- Executive committee responsible for the daily operation of the organization and all legislative and policy issues as well
- 5- A responsible for the overall vision, goals and policies of the Masjid

You can find ADAMS strategic plans on their website:

http://www.adamscenter.org/Files/ADAMS_Strategic_Plan_FINAL.pdf

In that plan they define the following goals:

- 1- Manage growth
- 2- Improve stakeholder education
- 3- Achieve financial self-sufficiency and sustainability
- 4- Improve organizational excellence and operational efficiency
- 5- Improve members’ and stakeholder’s satisfaction
- 6- Nurture American Muslim identity and strengthen relationship with society

Role of the Imam and Managing Khutbah

IMAM Mohammed Magid is a fulltime Imam and is responsible for the overall religious education. Imam Mohamed Magid was for a long time not only the Imam but also the executive director. So he held both religious and managerial duties.

The center decided to split the roles of religious and social services from the managerial role. The task at hand with a community this large demanded more than one dedicated resource.

Brother Wael was then hired to be a fulltime executive director managing all the day to day activities of the center.

There is a huge demand on finding qualified Khateeb since ADAMS has 3 Khutbah per Friday and they also have 11 other affiliates to manage. This may close to 30 Khutbah per Friday. Brother Wael actually wrote a book on “Effective Khutbah” and held training for those interested in serving the community in such a role.

Role of Women in Masjid Management

ADAMS has women on their boards and they play an important role. Women pray in the main hall and have access to the full facility. While there are some furniture separating the area of women and men, it is not curtain like obstructing full view.

Role of Youth in Masjid Management

ADAMS hired a fulltime youth director with the sole purpose of focusing on the youth and serving their needs

Membership and Election

People living in the proximity of ADAMS Center need to fill an application form and provide two local references. Management reviews every application and may grant or deny membership based on their discretion.

Ramadan and Eid and Moon Sighting

ADAMS follows the ISNA calculation based methods of moon sighting.

Communication

ADAMS utilizes the following methods:

- 7- Announcements after Jumaa: this is the predominant way of communicating activities to the community
- 8- An automated phone system
- 9- Accessibility by the president and other board members to the community
- 10- Emails sent every Friday to the email group listing the names of people delivering Khutbah at the various times and locations
- 11- The website is a little bit out of date and still has old information (2010 Annual Report rather than the most recent)

