

# VEBDE REBDE

## Restrictions on a Former Employee

**Question:** A long-time rebbe at Yeshiva A left his job and now teaches at Yeshiva B, which caters to a similar population. May he approach Yeshiva A alumni, with whom he developed a relationship at Yeshiva A for assistance (money, ideas) in promoting his work at Yeshiva B? May he raise money for an NPO he formed personally? Do note that the rebbe had been unwilling to raise money for Yeshiva A when he worked for them. (The question is not intended to be used in deciding a dispute between the sides.)

**Answer:** We are unsure if the question is coming from the concerns of Yeshiva A's administration, the laudable conscience of the rebbe, or a third party. We will give a general approach to the topic, while stressing that we do not know how it relates to the specifics of a case we know little about.

Most of the answer is based on logical analysis of the morality of the situation, but we will start with a source. Jewish workers/employers are not allowed to build relationships that resemble slavery (we are servants only to Hashem - see Bava Metzia 10a). Included in this halacha is that a worker may quit his job without being financially penalized (ibid. 77a - see

Rashi ad loc.).

Therefore, a worker (including a dedicated teacher) may quit his job, and under normal circumstances is fully permitted to take a job with a rival of the first employer. If someone could not work in the same type of field and region, this would be restricting his livelihood and thus penalizing him significantly.

What about using "resources" he acquired in the first job? Part of the fringe benefits of many jobs are the skills, experience, and contacts acquired. Your question focuses on using the contacts. There is nothing wrong with doing so in a normal fashion. One does not steal anything from the first job. Everyone develops friends and contacts over the years, and one does not have to "erase" them upon leaving a job where some were cultivated.

In some ways, the matter is even clearer for rabbeim, for the following reason. Part of a rebbe's job is to develop real, lasting relationships with his students. Real relationships are real relationships. Let's say that ten years after teaching a student, the student sought out guidance or emotional support from his rebbe due to a life crisis. Imagine if the rebbe said: "I don't work anymore in the yeshiva where I taught you; I have no time for you." Imagine if his new employer said: "You may not help students from your past; they are a

drain on your allegiance to us." My words of criticism for one who would utter either statement are best to remain unwritten. (We are referring to cases in which time spent with old talmidim does not prevent the rebbe from fulfilling his present responsibilities competently.) A rebbe's responsibility for life stems not from his employment by a yeshiva but from Hashem who entrusted him to teach His Torah to children and students (=children; see Rambam, Talmud Torah 1:2; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 245).

Talmidim also have responsibilities toward their teachers (see Shulchan Aruch, YD 242). While a rebbe should consider carefully how to "use" their respect and gratitude, others do not have a right to intervene. This is more so when the help is requested for a good cause. All have a responsibility to help good causes and those to whom they owe a debt of gratitude, whether monetarily or with their time, talents and energy. A tzedaka recipient cannot prevent another from asking for tzedaka from his benefactor because it may cause him to receive less. The donor makes his own choices. Similarly, if the rebbe asks his students for help in new projects, they can be trusted to decide how much to help Yeshiva B and Yeshiva A, and hopefully many other good causes.

A former employee should be particularly careful not to bad-mouth

his former employer. He should also not take private information which he was privy to as an employee, (e.g., a detailed donor list of Yeshiva A). Working on a future job while still employed at the old one raises many questions and gray areas.

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