

# Jakob the Liar

Columbia Tristar Home Video (1999)

**PG 13**

**Audience:** Tweens and older

**Leadership Themes:** Hope/vision  
Credibility/followership  
Creative thinking  
Risk taking

**Plot:** In wartime Poland (1944), a Jewish ghetto begins to have hope because of the belief that one of their members has a radio. Jakob Heim finds himself in the middle of a charade that reestablishes hope in the ghetto. Although he is normally just another member of the sad community, believing he risks his life to keep a radio instantly elevates his status. The movie follows what happens as Jakob spins daily news reports, seeming to create history in the making.

Although this is a fictional tale set during the Holocaust, other nonfiction films and books on heroes from the Holocaust could supplement the leadership discussion.

Select from these questions to discuss this movie in the leadership context:

- Why is the premise of this film—lying—considered okay?
- Consider current events where people began to believe the lies of a leader (or leaders) even when the truth came out that they had been lying? Why did people want to believe that the situations were the truth?
- When Jakob's status within the community rises, so does Misha's because he is affiliated with Jakob. Think of similar situations in real life. How can this be positive and negative for both individuals?
- It is clear that Jakob is considered credible by some and not credible by others. How does this impact the belief and behaviors of members in the community?
- The professor realizes that Jakob does not have a radio, yet encourages him to continue spinning the news. Discuss this turning point from the perspective of each man.
- Discuss the statement regarding the need to destroy the radio before it destroys the ghetto, especially in light of the fact that something which could bring so much hope is seen as being so detrimental to the group.
- When the group decides to organize for the resistance movement, Jakob is officially selected leader. How does he use his position of leadership within the group?
- The descriptive terms when selecting Jakob as leader are that the person must have physical and moral courage, take risks, and have brought hope and dignity to the ghetto. In your life (or within your organization), if these are the measurements you would use to select a leader, who would you choose?
- When the professor is summoned to help the German general, he finds himself with two ethical dilemmas. What are these and what do you think of how he dealt with them?
- Why does Jakob choose death over telling his people that the radio didn't exist? What do you think would have happened if he had told them the truth?
- At the time of Jakob's death he laments that he did not get the chance to be the big hero and make a speech about freedom and not giving up. Discuss the irony of his thoughts.