

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Toward a *Community/Corporate* Culture in the Jewish Communal World

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Women's underrepresentation in leadership positions in the Jewish communal world needs to be addressed and change must be effected. Having more women in both professional and volunteer leadership positions would create a community culture that would reflect women's values and leadership styles more than the current corporate culture. Ideally, a combined community/corporate culture would emerge that would combine the best characteristics of men's and women's differing ways of working. To this end, it is important for women to overcome inherent tensions and empower one another, through mentoring, to achieve leadership positions in the Jewish community.

In June 1994, I participated in a panel discussion on women in leadership in the Jewish community at the Annual Conference of the Jewish Communal Service Association. Audrey Weiner presented research findings on women and leadership in the New York UJA-Federation network (see her article in this issue); Billie Gold, president of JESNA; Elaine Sterling, who has pursued both a professional and volunteer career; and I addressed leadership issues from a more personal, anecdotal perspective, extrapolating from our own experiences as communal leaders.

The major themes of each of our presentations were (1) the need to expand the community's understanding of why women do not advance in the Jewish communal world and (2) the conviction that with a deeper understanding would come a firmer commitment to change the current reality—indeed, to change the *corporate* culture to one that would better reflect the values and attitudes of all its constituents. In other words, change would mean having more women in both professional and volunteer leadership positions who would then create a *community* culture for our philanthropic endeavors.

We panelists shared a common language, beliefs, and attitudes. First and foremost, we agreed that a *community* culture

would reflect our values more than a *corporate* culture. The components of this culture would include commitment, caring, collaboration, communication, and competence. It would include those skills and practices associated with "women's ways"—women's investment of time, thoughtfulness, and process; our ability to articulate and transmit our level of caring; our use of an interactive style of leadership that encourages others' participation and at the same time energizes others' involvement; our ability to seek consensus and articulate/communicate to others; our desire to have input, rather than a traditional "command and control"; and, finally, the industrious and thorough manner with which we address any task before us.

In addition, we all acknowledged the need for women to gain more comfort in political and economic areas that have traditionally been components of the *corporate* culture, such as networking, lobbying, managing, marketing, and mentoring. In other words, we all called for a combination of men's and women's differing ways of working—a culture that would embrace the aspects of both community and corporate worlds.

I have been addressing this issue of women and leadership in the Jewish communal world for the past decade. It was

heartening to hear my colleagues sharing the vision I have been articulating throughout the decade. The challenge before us was—and still is—how to achieve our objective. We each saw mentoring our professional counterparts as a means to achieve that objective, for it is by working together, whether lay-to-lay or lay-to-professional, that we would gain the strength to guide us through our challenges.

To transform our present cultures to this community/corporate model, women would need to network with women. We would need to create an “old girl” network whereby women will help women. This has been done in the political arena through the development and utilization of “Emily’s List”; in the philanthropic arena with the formation of the Ms. Foundation and the Women’s Foundation; and in the business community with the Catalyst organization. This empowerment of women-to-women is based on a shared vision of a mutual support structure.

However, the ultimate goal is not merely more women in leadership positions, but rather a change in the Jewish communal culture to reflect women’s values and ways of doing things, thereby achieving our vision of a community rather than a corporate culture. To achieve this ultimate goal, we must confront the tensions that are created in the process, tensions that create stumbling blocks that are manifested in unspoken ways and that hinder the very change we are trying to create.

What are these tensions, and how do we address this “dark side” of the process that often occurs, the contradictions that too often are unrecognizable, even to ourselves? These are the tensions between our envy and our pride, between our respect for one another and our competitiveness toward one another, between our teamwork and our betrayal.

These tensions create roadblocks and undermine our stated goal. They relate to what researchers Deborah Tannen (1990), Carol Gilligan (1982) and Jean Baker

Miller (1986) describe in their work as women’s consciousness that is focused on connection and intimacy. In all their data, women seem to be more comfortable talking about their wish for connecting, rather than about the conflicts that may arise when they experience competitiveness or a desire for achievement. Can we as women recognize our own envy when we are overlooked and another woman is moved into a leadership position? Do we know enough, as men do, to ask for a job that we want, or do we wait to be asked? As professionals, do we value what we do and go after the appropriate compensation? As partners, do we respect our professional counterparts enough to suggest that they be compensated appropriately, or do we let them know we value their job performance? Do we view ourselves as part of a team effort in pursuit of our philanthropic endeavors, and if we are team players, do we understand the complementarity of that relationship? These aspects of ourselves—envy, competitiveness, and betrayal—are too often denied by us, and we would rather talk about our cooperation, pride, and friendship.

These tensions revolve around our dilemma in making choices between how we think we should behave as women and what we believe are traits that appear to be male which we are reluctant to take on. Not only do we fear that the disruption of the connection, which would result in our feeling separate and perhaps alone but we also fear criticism rather than perceiving it objectively as merely a difference of opinion. In my experience with female colleagues, the motivation is more to convince the other to accept one’s point, rather than to listen to a different opinion and working through the difference. The paradox is that doing this results in our inability to recognize the richness of the dialogue, the creativity of thought that evolves when we allow for the difference. Our tendency in the name of sisterhood is too often focused on the desire to hold together and affiliate, rather than to accept that we might be very different.

We must begin to recognize these dilemmas as we move toward change. That recognition will inform our objective of creating a community/corporate culture in our philanthropic world. When we acknowledge the presence of these polarized forces, we will be better able to choose the path toward our common agenda. Being aware of our own dilemmas will help us support the efforts of our colleagues, both professional and lay, to move toward leadership. Using our influence, which we sometimes overlook, through the dollars we raise, the votes we have, and the comments that we can make publicly, our culture can change to be

a community/corporate model that reflects both men's and women's different ways of working.

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