

In My Opinion

Leadership Concepts Revisited

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Many years ago, while still a college undergraduate student, I had the opportunity to participate in the Brandeis Camp Institute. Located then in Winterdale, Pennsylvania under the direction of its founder, Shlomo Bardin, the Brandeis Camp summer program brought together young adults from various parts of the United States and Canada for study, fellowship, work, and inspiration. Its primary goal was to intensify the commitment of its participants to Jewish life and to Israel.

The impact of my Brandeis Camp experience was powerful. In fact, it was one of the dominant factors that led me to enter the field of Jewish communal service. After that memorable summer, I resolved that I would one day replicate the BCI program within an organizational setting that would be guided by a pluralistic view of Judaism and would help teenagers assume leadership roles upon return to their home communities. The test of such a program's effectiveness was not how ex-

citing the summer experience might be, but rather the degree to which these young people could lead their peers after a summer in Shangri La.

The opportunity to develop such a program was given to me by the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO). Under the tutelage of Max F. Baer, then director of BBYO, the late Irving Cantor and I laid the foundation for what became the International Leadership Training Institute of BBYO. The site, where in due time an elaborate conference center was built, was Camp B'nai B'rith Perlman, located just 10 miles from the original location of Brandeis Camp. For 25 years, I spent my summers directing that program, which was staffed by rabbis of different denominations, social group workers, artists, and Israeli *schlichim* (messengers) of varying political ideologies. For a quarter of a century, I met each summer with several hundred teenagers from all parts of the world who came to the camp knowing that they could only attend once and who agreed to a contract that required them to follow a demanding schedule of study, work, and group endeavors. These young people were expected to give up—for one summer—their teenage culture for a discipline that was hard to anticipate.

If there was a guiding concept added to the BCI formula, it was one taken from social group work. The camp staff were given a simple directive: Love the teenagers, limit them, and help them achieve.

Integral to the leadership training curriculum was a document that I immodestly titled "The Ten Commandments of Leadership" (BBYO, 1971). It was last reprinted in 1971 almost two decades ago. When I reread it recently, I began to doubt its rel-

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evancy to the field of Jewish communal service today. I have not lost my belief in these commandments, but I am less certain of their efficacy than I was 18 years ago.

These "Commandments" raise what I consider to be the most fundamental issue confronting people of good will and our people especially. Do we teach the use of power, manipulation, and political bargaining in a world of competing interests, or do we continue to argue for a humane, self-sacrificing, sensitive, ethical approach? What works? Do good guys always have to finish last? How realistic is the approach I was preaching to these young people? Is it good for teenagers, but disastrous for the big game played by adults?

Our approach to leadership is embodied in these "Ten Commandments":

1. Know thyself as a human being, in relationship to others and as a Jew.
2. Have a vision. Identify with the objectives of the organization you lead, both short- and long-term goals.
3. Care about others. Every person is sacred and is not to be exploited. Learn to listen and to empathize with others.
4. Lead by example. Never ask someone to do something you are not ready to do yourself, and demonstrate this readiness.
5. Sacrifice your self-interest for the sake of the program. Being a leader means occasionally giving up a personal pleasure or comfort.
6. Avoid "macheritis." Do not make status the key concept in your life. Develop a degree of humility.
7. Try to deal with people openly and honestly. Do not complain behind their back, but rather confront them and risk hostility in developing a relationship of trust.
8. Be enthusiastic. Do not allow your own problems to infect the group. You can never lead others with a complaining or self-pitying stance.
9. Be a walking encyclopedia of options. Do not suggest one way of doing things, but have a lot of options from which others can feel free to choose.
10. Share leadership. Leadership is not the role of one person, but is an activity in which all can participate. All leaders are members, and all members can be leaders.

Although I am certain that we can improve on these various dictates, it is clear that the approach underlying them is democratic, liberal, and based on social work values and the teachings of Kurt Lewin and the other group dynamicists. Few of us can live up to all those expectancies, but what is wrong with that type of standard, of vision? Why the doubts?

During the years in which I was spending my summers with the teenaged leaders of BBYO, I served as a professor and dean of the School of Social Work and Community Planning of the University of Maryland. It was in that role that I was able to join Drs. Leivy Smolar and Ernest Kahn in creating a program of training for Jewish communal service—the Baltimore Institute for Jewish Communal Service, a joint effort between our school and the Baltimore Hebrew University. Our goals were clear. We felt that it was crucial for our students to develop an in-depth knowledge of Jewish civilization, history, philosophy, traditions, and current affairs. It was equally crucial for our students to understand their roles as enablers of the group process, to understand human behavior, and to adopt a philosophy of social work somewhat akin to the "Ten Commandments" of BBYO.

Did we prepare them for the reality of Jewish communal service? The answer is—it depends. In some settings, the roles of professionals and volunteers were clear. There was a partnership, and functions were delineated appropriately. In other settings, the professional was perceived as a "shammus" to do the bidding of the

volunteer leadership. In most settings, I am convinced that our students were thrust in political environments in which power struggles took place—some for ideological reasons but more often for turf or status. From that perspective, the tools and values of social work were either inadequate or worthless. We had clearly not prepared them for leadership roles in that milieu. The commandments of BBYO leadership training were antithetical to survival, not to think of winning, in that environment.

In 1976, I re-entered on a full-time basis the arena of Jewish communal service. I resigned from my deanship, gave up my tenure and classes, and took on the professional leadership of an international Jewish organization. In that setting, the system was clearly political, and the volunteer leadership, especially in more recent years, would have been puzzled if not bewildered by the expectations contained in the "Ten Commandments." Part of the zest, the energy created within the system came from the politics of the system, in which turf and status played important roles.

For a successful "marriage" between professionals and volunteers, there must be some degree of symmetry between the expectations and the training of the professional worker and those of the volunteers who provided the organizational context for that worker. Many years ago, Harvey Smith, writing in the *American Journal of Sociology*, stressed the dangers of exaggerated fictions about a profession. He wrote:

Every profession operates in terms of a basic set of fictions about itself. These provide the profession with a comforting self-image, some stereotypes to help meet and adapt to the varied and often dramatic contingencies of everyday operations. . . . These fictions help to define immediate functions; they help the professional person to relate to others in terms of some mutuality of expectancy; they are often primary foci for recruitment; therefore they perform a useful and necessary function. As with all

fictions operating in human behavior, however, unless there is occasional testing of reality, the individual or the profession is in danger. If the profession has come sincerely to believe in a set of fictions too grossly at variance with reality, the final contemplation of that reality may indeed be a shock (Smith, 1958, p. 413).

Today, there is an alarming degree of asymmetry between the philosophical basis and underlying concepts of Jewish communal service, which are taught to students planning to enter the field, and the view held by many in today's volunteer leadership. Too often, professionals and volunteers do not agree about their respective functions and responsibilities. The trend is for volunteers to perceive themselves as "owners" of communal agencies, rather than "trustees" on behalf of the community. In too many settings, volunteer leadership sees as its function the total control of hiring and firing of all staff and intervention in every administrative detail, down to the most minor ones. In this context, the well-known Jewish columnist, Yehuda Lev, addresses a key question to synagogues, but one that is equally applicable to all Jewish organizations: "If the synagogues set up a decision-making lay apparatus competing with the professional whom they have hired to do the job, who will want to work under those conditions?" (Lev, 1988).

Is there a way out? Can this dangerous trend in Jewish communal life be reversed, or should we abandon our views of professional leadership training as too deviant from the reality of practice in the Jewish community? Unless the values and skills of professionally trained personnel are perceived as crucial to the success of our agencies, it might be better for volunteers to employ people like themselves. There will be less problems in communication, in explaining process, or in defining roles. However, this return to an earlier format for delivery of services to a community would be, in my view, catastrophic.

To make some progress in reducing the gap between the values of our social work training and current reality, I believe that we first have to open a frank dialogue on the issue. Thus far, the subject has been skirted. Witness the report of the Commission on Professional Personnel of the Council of Jewish Federations (1987). It is an excellent report that argues clearly for more effective recruitment, continuing education and in-service training, counseling, and placement and for higher levels of compensation. Yet, its only comment on the lay-professional partnership is to call for greater lay involvement and leadership in personnel planning, including such activities as recruitment, standard setting, and criteria for staff evaluations. The report states: "We need an infusion of lay leadership into the appropriate aspects of personnel planning, policy making, and *oversight* (writer's emphasis). . . . Historically, we have been comfortable assigning personnel responsibilities largely to Federation executives. This approach is inadequate" (CJF, 1987, p. 9).

The report contains many important recommendations, but clearly missing is a discussion of the training of volunteers to understand the roles of professionals and their own roles in management. A successful resolution of present frictions requires the definition in specific terms of the responsibilities, power, and constraints of each partner.

The partnership can only work if both professionals and volunteers are reading from the same text. In a most useful monograph, Ralph I. Goldman, now the retired executive vice president of the American Joint Distribution Committee, detailed the role of the professional in developing and shaping Jewish communal policies and strategies (Goldman, 1981). He outlined the components of Jewish professionalism, emphasizing the need for Jewish commitment and knowledge. A similar demand must be placed on our volunteer partners. Management skills are another essential requirement for the professional, regardless

of his or her specific training. Similar training should be required for those who hold volunteer posts within Jewish communal agencies. Lawyers, physicians, or builders are not automatically proficient in the operation of systems nor do they understand the function of nonprofit boards. Even those in business may not be willing to apply their knowledge and experience to organizational life. Too often we hear the refrain, "They would never operate their business this way."

Above all, there must be a shared vision of the kind of Jewish community that they wish to perpetuate and strengthen. Both the volunteer and professional leaders must understand the nature of trusteeship. They both must seek the skills that will bring others into the system. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of their joint work is the recognition that they are temporary custodians and that the most important part of their work is the search for able men and women who will continue the task. Volunteers and professionals will be in short supply. Their commitment to the agency involved or the Jewish community cannot be assumed. It will have to be won—the hard way.

Ralph Goldman recognizes the difficulty of defining leadership, but does identify some traits: "A leader should be a font of new ideas, of inspiration, of motivation, of encouragement to change in the light of changing times and changing needs" (Goldman, 1981, p. 14). These are goals for both sets of partners in Jewish communal service.

Leadership in organizations is elusive and changing. In a recent book, Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus (1985, p. 21) assert that the problem with many organizations is that they tend to be overmanaged and underled.

They may excel in the ability to handle the daily routine, yet never question whether the routine should be done at all. There is a profound difference between management and leadership, and both are important.

"To manage" means to bring about, to accomplish, to have charge of, or responsibility for, to conduct. "Leading" is influencing, guiding in direction, course, action, opinion. The distinction is crucial. Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing.

Bennis and Nanus conclude their study by emphasizing the role of leaders in creating a vision that is clear, attractive, and attainable. Yet equally essential is the empowerment of others. In major corporations, according to these authors, shared leadership is still a viable and valuable concept.

The modern literature on both profit and nonprofit organizations suggests that we should not abandon some of the philosophical underpinnings of professional practice developed so many years ago. Our ability to develop Jewish communal institutions will depend to a great extent on creating a climate in which trust can be maintained: the trust of professionals and volunteers in each other that will permit both members of the partnership to perform their leadership roles with autonomy and joint accountability to meet goals that

they share. The vision that will propel both must be based on a common heritage and a process with clearly defined steps to follow.

Perhaps today's leaders can still be guided by "The Ten Commandments."

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