

REVISITING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER MARKETPLACE

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I continue to believe marketing to be a very valuable method within a Jewish community center, just as I continue to view social group work method as a valuable tool in a JCC. However, it can be effective only to the degree that it maintains the role of enhancing rather than corrupting the basic purposes of a JCC.

PREFACE

Some years ago in this Journal I argued for the need to redirect our normal non-competitive perspective and move more in the direction of competing with "other vendors . . . [who], in the minds of many of our potential customers, offer similar products."¹ In that article, I embraced the field of marketing as one of the most promising means of helping JCCs to better compete in the increasingly competitive and open marketplace.

While I have not shut my eyes to the marketplace reality, I now wonder about the wisdom with which input from the field of marketing is being incorporated by many not-for-profit agencies. With hindsight, I would counsel more caution today in terms of how marketing ought to be used in a JCC.

Unfortunately, I did not adequately consider at that time the effects of marketing upon basic institutional purpose, nor did I adequately distinguish in my own mind the fundamental differences between what I refer to in this article as "method" and "purpose." The following is

an effort to explore further this aspect so basic to the work which Jewish community centers do.

ON METHOD AND PURPOSE

The current surge towards incorporating various facets of marketing into "not-for-profit" agency work has caused me to think further about method and purpose in institutions and how easy it is for the human animal to continually blur the distinction between the two or, worse, to shunt institutional purpose aside altogether.

Purpose, on the one hand, speaks to the very being of institutional existence. In a JCC, it even transcends the normally articulated articles of incorporation. The three-fold "G-d, Torah and Community" aptly summarizes whence and to whom JCCs ultimately derive and account for legitimacy. It is the shared purpose of all Jewish community institutions.

At least one of these three must always and consciously be at the core of JCC policy-making if there is to be Jewish relevance. This legitimacy—some may view it as a franchise or trust—stems from our biblical tradition in an unbroken linkage which can be traced back for over 3000 years. Because of this binding to our heritage no Jewish agency, particularly a Jewish community center, can for very long separate itself from the flow of Jewish history, religion, values and peoplehood.

Ideally, all institutional decision-making

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1. David Eskenazi, "Understanding the Jewish Community Center Marketplace . . .," this *Journal*, Vol. 58, no. 4 (1982), p. 315.

should stem from and be consistent with this tradition. Even when there are differences of opinion, as there often are, the dialogue should stem from Jewish sources.

Method, on the other hand, is a specific way used to achieve purpose. Method derives legitimacy only when it flows from and is consistent with institutional purpose. Unless the various methods used are related to the central purpose or purposes of the JCC, there will be a continual tendency to trivialize what the Jewish community and the JCC are all about.

"Purpose" and "method" are not the same, and purpose must always be, in the long run, primary. Even when a particular method flows from a field of practice with its own specific behavior expectations and code of ethics, where value or other conflicts may occur, it is institutional purpose which must ultimately prevail. Judaism goes to great efforts to distinguish between these two (purpose and method). In at least one instance, with relationship to G-d (as purpose) and idolatry (as method), Judaism has considered the confusion of the two a capital punishment.² In a Jewish community center it is critically important to stay related to the purposes found within Judaism and the Jewish community.

Some examples may better illustrate how easy (or tempting) it is to confuse purpose with method:

Perhaps the better known example involves Aaron, Moses, G-d and the Israelites at Mount Sinai.³ With Moses gone but for only a few days in order to receive the Torah, the children of Israel lose faith, congregate before Aaron and demand a new god. It is clear that the populace knew what it wanted, although perhaps not what it needed. The biblical text makes no mention of Aaron doing anything which might dissuade the people. Rather, he responds to the wants of the populace and

conducts the first recorded Jewish capital campaign, a highly successful one, and builds an idol (the golden calf).

We know that the immediate consequence, although known neither to Aaron nor the Israelites, is their near elimination as a people by the wrath of G-d. Only Moses' intervention alters the fate of this newly formed nation. Ironically, upon his return, Moses instructs the Levites to slaughter those who worshipped the golden calf. This results in the slaying of three thousand Israelites.

Aaron's leadership at that point appeared to confuse "purpose" and "method," in this case by failing to reaffirm the need for the community to be constant in their relationship with G-d and Moses. By attempting to offer a short term response (or solution) through the golden calf, Aaron could have directly contributed to G-d's destruction of this budding Israelite community.

Another example is the late 50's movie classic "The Bridge on the River Kwai," which tells the story of a British brigade commander's resolve to maintain the morale and fighting spirit of his troops as they are held prisoners of war by the Japanese during World War II. His purpose is to keep his troops in fighting trim, so that if and when they are able to escape, his troops will be able to engage immediately in battle against these same Japanese.

To achieve this purpose, his method is to agree to have his troops work together with the enemy on the construction of a bridge which will allow the Japanese to transport arms and men more efficiently. Initially, he is absolutely committed to creating havoc amongst the Japanese. As the story progresses, we see the commander become more and more involved with the construction and completion of the bridge. Ultimately, British saboteurs are sent to prevent the bridge's completion. At the climax, the commander is directing his troops to fight together with the Japanese against his fellow British military (saboteurs) to prevent the bridge's

2. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 74 A

3. Exodus 32.1-7

destruction. By the end of the film, he, his troops, the Japanese, the bridge and most of the saboteurs are destroyed.

In both of these examples the leader, Aaron as the High Priest and the British Commander have the best of intentions. Also in each instance, the leader's commitment to "purpose" became confused, transferred or lost and, as a result, there were dire consequences.

While I do not predict such consequences for JCCs and their leaders if we stray too far from basic purpose, nor do I embrace Moses' absolute and rigid commitment to purpose which resulted in the killing of 3,000 Hebrews,⁴ I use these as examples of how easy it is, even with the best of intentions, to forget why we do the things we do.

Returning to Aaron and Moses in the existing account, it appears that Aaron did not struggle enough with the tension between individual wants and community needs. Perhaps because of this he yielded too easily to the pressures of the populace. Similar issues and dilemmas continue to emerge in contemporary community life and, often, we also yield to similar pressures. I would like to think that Aaron's behavior in this century would have led to instant termination for malfeasance or misfeasance of duty from his position of Priest—or, at the very least, to extended probation. G-d and Moses had "more liberal personnel practices" than may be allowed today.

Our professional role requires that when we are tempted to act as Aaron we should be reminded of Moses. (Ironically when we feel we want to be as rigid in our principles as was Moses we should remember his decision to have over 3,000 of his group slain.) Bert Gold reminded us nearly three decades ago that we carry the responsibility, by virtue of our professional roles, of being both priest and prophet. We cannot be one alone, we are both—

simultaneously. The traditional prophetic role may be described by the Hebrew word *Yashar* which means "straight," "upright" or "just." Gold's concept of "priest" was more akin to today's manager. It would be the manager's role to deal within the realm of *Shalem*. *Shalem* refers to system wholeness which, even as various components change, seeks to maintain internal balance.

THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN JCCS AND SOCIAL GROUP WORK

This confusion between method and purpose is reminiscent of some of the issues facing the Jewish community center movement in the 40's and 50's when social group work was among the major fields from which career JCC professionals were being drawn. I recall, while a young and idealistic social group worker, being among those who not only argued for the viability of social group work as a method but also assumed JCCs to be "social group work agencies." I believed that when value conflict arose between "my profession" (social group work) and the needs of the JCC, it was the needs of the JCC which were expected to be placed on the back burner. At that time, social group work represented for me the road to the future and served as the only model of acceptable social behavior and values. It was several years before I could comprehend that social group work in a JCC was a method, a *way* of doing things. Even though social group work had a view of the world which was expressed through a code of ethics as well as a method (the method was the message), when values (purpose) between the two came into conflict in a JCC, the JCC had little or no option but to reaffirm its purpose (values).

It must have been perplexing for some of our elders to watch while what at one point was viewed to be a helpful tool, intended to help get the tasks of the JCC done, bid fair to re-do the entire fabric of the Jewish community center field. While

4. Exodus 32:27-28

social group work did have an impact upon JCCs, it was ultimately the needs of the Jewish community which continued to determine the basic direction of its community centers. Most practitioners who could not integrate their social group work practice into the needs of and for the Jewish community chose to practice in other settings.

Fortunately, the methods, views, and values which were a part of the social group work method were remarkably congruent to what the Jewish community through its JCCs was seeking at that time. It was easy, therefore, for me as a young professional to confuse the purposes of the Jewish community center with the methods and values of social group work. I had not understood that professional disciplines in institutions come and go while basic institutional purposes generally do not.

Today it would appear that the same relationship and congruence exists between the Jewish community, its JCCs and the marketing field.

MARKETING CAUTIONS

The purpose of the preceding statements is to try to develop some dialogue on marketing, one of the newer methods in our agencies. There is little doubt that in recent years marketing concepts have swept the nation, and, with them, our field. Having been one of the earlier advocates for introducing some form of marketing method into JCCs, I feel qualified to review a few of the potential and actual pitfalls which may come from embracing marketing methods too enthusiastically and without due consideration to where the Jewish community center field (or movement) may go. Without a consistently clear understanding of the long term purposes of a JCC, it becomes easy to substitute the achievement of short term goals (i.e., gaining more members or users, and continually increasing income) as ends in themselves.⁵

5. Often the achievement of the short term goals

Without caution the short term (and measurable) goals may overtake and overwhelm the long term purpose.⁶

A. It is of continuing wonder to me how, when a fad takes hold, language appears to blur rather than to clarify distinctions. Too often, the terms "marketing" and "selling" are wrongly used. They tend to be used in order either to meet the particular needs of the speaker or interchangeably. "Marketing" and "selling" have very distinct and different meanings in intent, objectives and values. Theodore Levitt distinguishes between "marketing" and "selling" in the following manner:

1. ". . . Marketing . . . views the entire . . . process as consisting of a tightly integrated effort to discover, create and satisfy customer needs."

2. ". . . [Selling] is not concerned with the values that the exchange is all about . . . the customer is [viewed as] somebody 'out there' who, with proper cunning, can be separated from his loose change."⁷

While it may be acceptable, if not always desirable for "for-profits" to sell, it seems to me questionable that any responsible and mature social agency (I consider a Jewish community center as one would consider the seeking of income through selling as a primary purpose. Certainly survival requires financial and other resources. However, to make the seeking of income primary, or even an end in and of itself, would appear to be totally con-

appear to become so important that ethical considerations are set aside. For example, should a J.C.C. employee or volunteer be encouraged to do comparison shopping by misleading the "competitor" into believing that he/she is a potential customer if such is not the case? Should a "competitor's" mailing list be taken in a way that is unknown to that "competitor."

6. It is ironic, parenthetically, that employees of the Jewish community are normally evaluated for performance in achieving measurable goals and not often enough in what they contribute to long term purpose on a conscious and planned basis.

7. Theodore Levitt, "Marketing Myopia," *Harvard Business Review* (HBR Classic), Sept.-Oct. 1975.

trary to what JCCs say they are about (and what the granting of a tax exempt status implies). While the definition of marketing, therefore, may not be inconsistent with JCC purpose, I would argue that selling, as defined by Levitt, is.

B. Perhaps one of my most basic concerns is the strong tendency of JCC marketing and other staff to focus totally, primarily, and enthusiastically upon marketing techniques rather than consciously using these techniques to integrate current need with institutional purpose. In JCCs there is the continuing possibility that the intangible purposes to which I referred above may become secondary in order to achieve other, more tangible, but short term benefits such as increasing income or users of the service without measuring those against the overall and long term purposes.

Although an agency's basic purpose may not change, its encounter with methods designed to help achieve those purposes does and, perhaps, should have an impact. In some ways this process is similar to what has happened to various Diaspora Jewish communities as they became a part of host communities. The Jewish communities temporarily "flourished." They might even have become enriched. However, when they were not clear on what and who they were they became endangered and, in many instances, were absorbed into the larger populace, ultimately disappearing.

The concern here is whether today's JCC staff and volunteers are clear enough on JCC basics in order to measure continually the consequences of any and all decisions with whatever is deemed important and vital to the long term interests of the Jewish Community. We owe it to our Jewish community continually to integrate and measure our choices into and within our tradition. In this regard, it is helpful to be aware that purpose tends to be unique and methods universal. Methods can be used in almost any setting. It should be no wonder that professionals with common training can function in institutions

and societies whose purposes may appear to be at opposite ends of a spectrum.

C. There is often a tension between what individuals want and what communities need. Many times they are not the same but are juxtaposed. Marketing focuses upon meeting wants and needs of "customers," most commonly defined in a JCC as individual members or users. However funding bodies (i.e., Federations and United Ways) may also be viewed as legitimate customers, particularly in this era of program funding. This attitude is clearly consistent with the current "purchase of service" mentality of many funding bodies. While neither United Ways nor Federations may legitimately claim to speak for a total community, they do articulate legitimate concerns for substantial community segments. Although there has been a declining percentage of dollars from Federations and United Ways into JCC coffers, it has also become "too easy" to take these customers for granted. They continue to provide substantial sums of community dollars to reinforce their views. Moreover, they have been more loyal to the JCC—more like members—than are individual customers, consumers or other users.

The customary tension between the perspective of Federations, United Ways and each individual's wants and needs has been critical in maintaining the balance which JCCs have found necessary to meet their remarkably diverse roles within, for, and to the community. We should consider whether current approaches to marketing in JCCs tend to over-emphasize individual wants and, perhaps, may not adequately consider vital overall community needs as they relate to fundamental institutional purpose.⁸

8. It is important to note that the American Marketing Association has a code of ethics which emphasizes its obligation to the community and society as a whole. Were this code consistently applied to situations within the J.C.C. many of the dilemmas which I am addressing would probably be minimized.

D. A graphic example of how at least one major marketing theoretician views contemporary marketing methods ought to be of concern. Phillip Kotler appears not to share this view of sectarian community concern.⁹ He states "[marketing's] concern is with entering and maintaining profitable markets and to develop means to do so . . . and the use of power to do so." It seems to me he is testing the ethics¹⁰ of his own profession with this view. His concern is clearly in his view of marketing's purpose (the 4 p's: product, price, place and promotion to which he currently adds two more, power and public relations). It is clear that this well known thinker and teacher of marketing for the not-for-profit sector is focused, at least in this article, on the non-value-oriented techniques of marketing (selling?) and is not concerned with the values which not-for-profits may never distance themselves.

This confusion is more common today than only a short time ago. It is probable that not as many JCC professional and volunteer leaders today view the Jewish community center's starting point as a "search for a Jewish ethical and life view" as they embrace a "marketing" or a "for-profit" business view.

I am more comfortable with Maurice Gurin's perspective¹¹ when he comments upon a Richard Steckel quote ("Preserve your organization's dignity"¹²) by responding "that's precisely why I am so opposed to the commercialization with which marketing has infested, as well as confused . . . the voluntary organizations it serves . . .

[through marketing's] insistence upon viewing our educational, social service, health, arts and civic organizations as markets and merchandising marts . . ." Gurin recognizes the concern for values with which agencies must always operate. It is not at all clear to me whether it is in the background of most marketers also to operate in this same arena without the same extensive (and expensive) orientation to which many persons trained for Jewish community work have been subjected.

Earlier, I referred to the use of the term "Jewish" in an agency's title as the equivalent of being granted a franchise. I believe this to be so. As with any other franchise, there are standards, expected institutional behavior and some degree of replicability. The "Jewish franchise" demands a continual encounter with Jewish purpose which stems from ongoing interpretation of universally recognized and legitimate Jewish sources such as the Bible and commentaries. While there may be substantial differences within the Jewish community in each generation and from generation to generation on what these sources may say, the dialogue should stem from common sources and texts.

E. In a lengthy *Newsweek* article, Greg Easterbrook comments¹³ upon the vulnerability of the poor when he states "to the extent that the (medical) system is increasingly driven by market forces, it can be trusted to serve the typical patient well because the typical American is middle-class and the American middle-class commands a vast quantity of money that the market seeks. But by the same token, a market driven medicine will flow [away] from the poor. That's basic business logic."

If we now take out the word "medicine" and substitute "Jewish community center," and also substitute "Jew" for "American," another very real value dilemma for JCCs

9. Philip Kotler, "Megamarketing," *Harvard Business Review*, March/April, 1986, pp. 117-124.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Maurice Gurin "Is Marketing Dangerous for Fund Raising," *Fund Raising Management*, January 1987, pp. 72-76.

12. Richard Steckel, "Nonprofit Piggy Goes to Market: Building New Sources of Revenue for Your Organization." *NSFRE Journal*, Vol. XI, I. Also Maurice Gurin, *Ibid.*

13. "The Revolution in Medicine," *Newsweek*, January 26, 1987, pp. 40-74.

becomes clearly apparent. JCCs have derived a major portion of acceptance and strength from a traditional posture of insisting upon inclusiveness. JCCs should continue to be available, as is the Jewish community, to every Jew, regardless of income. This is a legitimate extension of basic premises found within Judaism. Pressure to raise fees and to target markets inevitably leads to exclusiveness not inclusiveness and drastically alters the nature of the clientele served.

A brief anecdote from another Newsweek article¹⁴ tells of a class of 14-year-olds in a specialized camp studying to cope more successfully in this business-and-competition-focussed society. "In response to this problem, 'your rent is due in two days, your checking account stands at a record low and your somewhat unreliable best friend needs 25 bucks,' do you give him the money?" "No way," say most of the campers—except for one who might lend the money, but 'with interest.' After the class sessions were over, the instructor poses one last question: 'If you could do just one thing differently, what would it be?' While some responded, 'I would have made more money,' in keeping with the spirit of the class, one person had a response that offers a little more hope for humanity: 'I think I would have loaned my best friend the money.'"

WHY THIS PRESENTATION?

"Effectiveness, however it is defined, must be morally defensible."¹⁵

I have attempted to differentiate between method and purpose. "Purpose" is a relative constant and central to why an

organization exists and what it is about. "Method" is just that. It is a way of helping to achieve purpose. There are many methods which are helpful—even critical—in achieving institutional purpose. Often, when persons representing diverse disciplines work in a large organization (such as a Jewish community center) there is a struggle between the inputs of the various professions and fields, each with its unique view of the world and its own code of ethics. While each may have an effect upon the agency's purpose none may totally redirect or assume priority over agency purpose.

I continue to believe marketing to be a very valuable method within a Jewish community center, just as I continue to view social group work method as a valuable tool in a JCC. However, it can be effective only to the degree that it maintains the role of enhancing rather than corrupting the basic purposes of a JCC, to which I referred above. Worse yet, when ethics or purpose are forgotten, survival becomes the only rationale—not enough for an agency which assumes among its major functions enhancing Jewish values, Jewish education, Jewish survival and Jewish history.

I continue to believe that as Jews and as the "Children of Israel" we have accepted an inherent and inherited responsibility to wrestle with issues. To be a part of "Israel" (*Isra-El*) is to accept what goes with the name. Central to the name "Israel" is the notion of wrestling with G-d and self. It speaks to the process of struggling with issues, not solutions or shortcuts. If we truly accept the rigor of wrestling, we must begin with ourselves, our practice, and constantly struggle. Ultimately, this constant process of searching transcends any short term, temporary solution or method.

As a professional I often feel as if I have to wrestle with whether I am part of a tradition and stream of thought to which, through the Jewish community center movement, I lovingly refer, and I believe

14. Annette Miller with Dody Tsianter, "Greed on Sesame Street," *Newsweek*, July 20, 1987, pp. 38-40.

15. Rino J. Patti, "Managing for Service Effectiveness in Social Welfare Organizations," *Journal of the National Association of Social Workers*, Volume 32, #3 (September-October, 1987), pp. 377-381.

accurately, as "the oldest profession," which began when G-d and Adam first met and started a relationship.

Ultimately it is not how we refer to our work which is significant. It is how and why we choose to approach what we do—either through a context of history

and values or merely on a situational and opportunistic basis.

As you wander on through life, brother,
whatever be your goal—
Keep your eye upon the doughnut
so you'll not forget the (w)hole

Author unknown