

# PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

## A CALL TO ACTION

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*We know a great deal about the personnel crisis, but have lacked the will to address the problem on a system-wide scale. This crisis will affect the Jewish community's ability to realize its potential. Its resolution requires the commitment of top volunteer and professional leadership.*

Stephen Solender has been a colleague and friend since we met while I was in graduate school in Baltimore. He has been generous with his time and guidance, as our paths have crossed at UJA-Federation in New York and United Jewish Communities. Professional development is one of the areas that he is passionate about, and I have admired how he has allotted time to teach in continuing education programs and to play leadership roles in AJCOP, JCSA and the World Conference. Steve's commitment to the professionals who serve our communities and agencies has been a central theme in his work and an example for all of us.

I learned one of my most memorable lessons about professional recruitment from Steve's father Sandy. I was months away from completing my MSW degree, and Sandy and Ernest Michel had just offered me the position of Director of Leadership Development at the then UJA-Federation Joint Campaign in New York. I asked them if they were sure they wanted to entrust this responsibility to a 25-year-old who was just out of graduate school. Sandy replied that someone hired him when he was just 25 for a responsible position in the JCC field, which started him on his illustrious career. He told me that it would now be my responsibility to hire other 25-year-olds who can make a contribution to the field and start them on their careers in the Jewish community. I never forgot the lesson or the challenge.

I thought of titling this article, "Professional Recruitment and Retention: *JUST DO IT.*" Articles about the professional develop-

ment and training of Jewish professional have appeared in this *Journal* and other publications for years. The cumulative index of the *Journal of the Jewish Communal Service*, 1982-2001, lists 60 articles under the heading of Training, Supervision, Recruitment, and Professional Education. Important scholars and teachers, including Norman Linzer, Marshall Sklare, Gerald Bubis, Bernard Reisman, and Daniel Thurz, are among the authors who have challenged us to think about the role of professionals and how to train them for leadership in the Jewish community. Volunteer leaders such as Shoshana Cardin, Esther Lea Ritz, Richard Wexler, and Mimi Scheirov have written with Stephen Solender, Jeffrey Solomon, and others about the challenges in the lay-professional partnership. Audrey Weiner has focused our attention on the issues facing women in the field, and we now have the Advancing Jewish Women initiative led by Shifra Bronznick. There have also been important surveys done on professionals in the field. The minutes from recent meetings and presentations at JCSA meetings and task forces reaffirm that we know a great deal about the "crisis," but have been able to do very little about it.

In 1987, the CJF Commission on Professional Personnel was established to study the personnel needs of federations and create an action plan to address them. The study process helped raise the level of awareness about recruitment, training, and retention in the federation system and throughout other fields in Jewish communal service. The

Mandel report, so known for the Commission's Chair, was entitled "The Developing Crisis." It identified several issues as a context for its recommendations.

- Campaign and endowment growth may provide opportunities for creative achievement.
- Training programs have not kept up with new challenges and responsibilities of professionals.
- The quality of lay leadership attracted and retained by federations is inextricably bound up with the quality of professional staff.
- The number of professional vacancies is growing.
- People are moving to new and advanced positions before they have developed skills or had an impact in their current assignment or community.

The report presented two fundamental findings. First, the magnitude of the problem called for greater involvement of lay leaders in the issue of professional development. Second, it called for a comprehensive personnel system and mechanism for addressing long-range concerns about recruitment, education, supervision, placement, career tracking, and counseling.

Finally the Mandel Commission's report outlined a set of objectives and recommendations in the areas of recruitment, continuing professional education, in-service training, counseling, placement, compensation, lay-professional relations, women, small cities, and the personnel situation in Canada. The proposed budget for these recommendations was \$835,000 over three years. The report concluded, "We confront a crisis in personnel posing a threat to the continued effectiveness of the Federation. Even more basic, it puts the quality of Jewish community life at risk."

The Mandel Commission's report raised awareness and led to several enhancements and new initiatives in the areas of professional development and training. In federa-

tions and centers, there have been new continuing executive education initiatives, new executive orientation retreats, Israel seminars for professionals, and the use of corporate executive training programs. Brandeis's Hornstein Program, Hebrew Union College, CLAL, and others have provided research, curriculum development, and teaching faculty for many programs. The Wexner Foundation, through its Graduate Fellows Program and Israel Fellowship Program, has modeled new approaches to professional leadership development and research on the subject. There are also new programs for recruiting Hillel professionals, informal educators, and teachers.

Yet, few of these initiatives represent the kind of comprehensive, sustained approach that the Mandel Commission proposed for the federation system. The report did not achieve its larger objective of moving the issue of the community's professional human resources to a more prominent place on CJF's or the community's agenda and creating a comprehensive well-funded approach.

#### **WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF THE CRISIS?**

The current personnel crisis stems from the unprecedented growth in the 1990s in the size and number of communal institutions and programs. Supported by a strong economy, as well as the focus on Jewish continuity, JCCs and community campuses expanded; new synagogues emerged; day schools and community high schools grew; institutes of Jewish learning, study, and scholarship advanced; the Hillel system began its revitalization; and dozens of new creative initiatives were incubated. I believe that even if CJF had implemented the suggestions of the Mandel Commission's report and other systems had also responded to the challenge, we could not have prepared enough professional talent to respond to the professional needs and changing executive challenges that this growth presented. However, because the community did not sufficiently react in the 1980s, a crisis is upon us,

and we still have not rallied to address the challenge.

These pressures are neither new to Jewish community agencies nor unique to them. DRG's clients throughout the nonprofit sector have similar frustrations and concerns. In the boom economy of recent years, similar concerns were expressed in the private sector as well. Yet, other systems have been much more aggressive in addressing these challenges, and there is much we can learn from the experiences of other national nonprofit organizations and associations in implementing professional recruitment and education programs. This is an area where the private sector has devoted considerable resources and many of the human resource challenges and programs are relevant for nonprofit organizations as well.

#### **THE "CRISIS" AFFECTS VOLUNTEER LEADERS**

In recent years the word "crisis" has re-emerged in the discussion about the quantity and quality of professionals available to serve the Jewish community. Volunteer leaders ask who will lead our new synagogues, who will teach our children in our expanding day schools and community high schools, who will be our youth workers and camp counselors, and who will lead agencies that must meet the growing needs of families, the elderly, and disabled.

In my work as a recruitment consultant, I meet regularly with executives, senior volunteer leaders and search committees in communities across the country. They question whether professionals have the requisite training and experience to meet the new challenges of organization leadership. Old and new generations of volunteer leaders look to executives more than ever for guidance and fresh thinking about funding programs, the complex management of growing organizations, and the need to meet the expectations of multiple constituencies. They talk openly about how the pool of service providers (often called MSW's) do not have the skills to run the "organization's business"

as CEOs. They often contact DRG and others in the hope that we can introduce them to Jewish business professionals or executives in other public sector organizations who may have the relevant experience and requisite Jewish commitments to lead an agency. Their frustration has also led to a serious decline in the way those volunteers respect, interact, with and compensate their community professionals. In the nonprofit professionals' informal grapevine, Jewish community organizations have a reputation of difficult volunteer professional relations.

Nonetheless, other than several specific organization and community initiatives in recruitment and professional training, there does not appear to be any community will to address this issue on a system-wide scale. No organization, professional group, volunteer leader, or philanthropist has come forward to advocate and lead on this issue. There is a "disconnect" here that I find puzzling. In most organizations, the personnel costs represent more than 70 percent of the operating budget. Communities and organization leaders will conduct lengthy debates about policies and programs that represent far less of the community's resources. However, there is little discussion or debate and little action on the problem of the professional resources required to serve our institutions.

Most lay leaders understand the problem and have addressed it time and again in their professional lives. Many are familiar with the latest trends in hiring, performance evaluation, and incentive compensation. They have been exposed to the best thinkers and trainers who often consult to their companies. Much of the recent material on organizational change and growth focuses on the management of talent and the role of executive leadership as essential qualities of successful companies. David Packard, co-founder of Hewlett-Packard, articulated Packard's Law, which states that no company (read organization) can grow revenues (read funding and programs) consistently faster than its ability to get enough of the right people to implement that growth and

still be a great company. The implications for Packard's Law to the Jewish community may mean that if our growth has exceeded the available talent required to operate in this new environment, the effectiveness of many of our organizations and their programs will be limited significantly.

Where are the corporate executives and philanthropists who have built successful organizations by focusing on recruiting and developing talent? How can we engage them and bring their knowledge, experience, and leadership to help the Jewish community address this human resource crisis that affects the core of our ability to lead change in the community?

### **THE "CRISIS" AFFECTS JEWISH PROFESSIONALS**

Professionals also sense that the personnel crisis affects their professional lives. After choosing to work in the Jewish community because of their passion for its mission, the day-to-day reality of professional life in community organizations is often disheartening. Studies reveal professionals' concerns about lack of supervision and training, limited opportunities for professional growth, compensation that does not allow young people and families to live the kind of Jewish life that they chose or are expected to model, and blurred boundaries in their interactions and communications with volunteer leaders. We hear about professionals feeling undervalued, undersupported, and underrecognized. They see that their peers in other professions, which may not be as meaningful or fulfilling, have more balanced and manageable lifestyles. As they build careers, the decision to stay in the field or leave it is complex and emotional, especially for younger professionals.

Here too, I see a "disconnect" that is puzzling. How is it possible that the Jewish values and program effectiveness that professionals encourage in our community building and service activity are not always reflected in the Jewish communal workplace? Today agency senior executives face

unprecedented challenges and pressures. The result is that they are often more cautious, mentor others less, and model best practices less. By ignoring the basics of staff leadership, many executives have allowed organizational cultures to emerge that do not support professional and career growth. Our professional leaders also share responsibility for the crisis as it has developed.

### **THE CRISIS AND THE COMMUNAL SYSTEM**

We have seen a significant weakening of systems that were once central to the field of Jewish communal service. The literature describes past, collaborative, system-wide efforts at recruiting professionals for positions throughout the field. Colleagues remember organized efforts to meet graduating college seniors and camp counselors, via visits and job fairs, to present the opportunities of work in the Jewish community.

In recent discussions, many have noted how important the annual conference of the JCSA (then Conference of Jewish Communal Service) was to the field. It was an opportunity for over 1,000 professionals from all fields and disciplines to meet together to share experiences and knowledge and to strategize. It was a relaxed environment, without the pressures of accompanying volunteer leaders, where networking, learning, and support were key. With its demise, there is no setting where professionals can experience the scope and breadth of the corps of those committed to work in the Jewish community.

Because the professional development budgets of many of the national organizations have been a target in the politics of budget cutting, local communities and organizations have had to develop programs and resources on their own. While many organizations continue to be creative in developing new programs and resources, most communities lack the central leadership, best practices models, and resources for addressing the needs of their professionals.

Even the communities that were once the

role models for professional development for their fields do not provide the leadership they once did. In each field there was a federation, a JCC, a JFS, or youth movement that was known to be the best training ground and a credential for building careers. These agencies accepted responsibility for training talent for the field, not just their community. We often heard about Cleveland and Baltimore as the places where so many of today's senior executives in communities across the country began their careers. Today, even the best communities can only think about training professionals for their agencies, rather than the field. Agencies are more protective of their staffs and are resentful when executives leave for advancement or new challenges. In general, the professional associations, national organizations, and major communities have not been successful in building an approach that articulates actions and standards regarding professional recruitment and retention in Jewish communal service.

Finally, even our training and scholarship programs, many which have been in place for over 30 years, have not provided sufficient manpower. The field of nonprofit management education has exploded in recent years. DRG's recent webzine focused on this issue. Today there are over 200 graduate degree programs offering degrees in nonprofit management that are housed in schools of business and public administration. Many of those responsible for hiring in the Jewish community question whether the programs that we sponsor provide the training required for leading in the complex environment of today's nonprofit world.

#### **BEST ORGANIZATIONS TO WORK FOR**

In a recent article on DRG's website entitled "Becoming a Magnet Agency: Lessons from Inside a Fortune 100 Best Company to Work For," Ellen Deutch Quint discussed how companies compete each year to be on *Fortune Magazine's* Best Companies to Work For list. The criteria include clarity about the organization's mission and culture,

internal communications, human resources standards, accountability and metrics, retention strategies, opportunities for career growth, and support for learning and development. She explains that companies compete to be on the list because those on it become "magnet agencies" where the best talent seeks to work and chooses to stay. Those human resource strategies have become central to the company's culture and operation. The entire staff is challenged to perform in these areas and understand the benefit of the listing and the talent it enables them to recruit. They recognize, as Packard did, that it takes the best talent to become a great company.

Deutch Quint suggests that a similar competition be held in the nonprofit sector to select the best organizations to work for. What are the measures and standards that we could set in the Jewish community for our organizations? How can we recognize communities and organizations that have chosen to become magnets to attract the best professional talent? JCSA recently sponsored a panel discussion where professionals, new to their careers, discussed recruitment and retention. Adina Danzig, Associate Director, Hillel at Stanford, described her criteria for a Jewish community organization that would be good to work for:

A culture of integrity and respect is important to me. Effective communication is terrific. A place that balances organizational needs with individual talent and recognized it and helps it flourish. Opportunities for cross-training so that you can excel in what you love and what you are good at, but you also get to push the envelope in other areas. A place where new ideas are encouraged and understood as the potential of organizational strength and effectiveness. A place that trusts its employees. An organization that invests in its employees. An organization that supports the work/family/life balance.

Danzig's measures are practical and attainable. Her voice echoes dozens of talented motivated young professionals who are pas-

sionate about Jewish life. Today's challenge, not unlike past years, is to recruit hundreds of them and to create the work environment and resources that encourage them to stay and even more important, to succeed.

#### A CALL TO ACTION

The conclusions of the 1987 CJF Commission on Personnel are as relevant today as they were then. The issues and obstacles have not changed significantly, and the recommendations apply not only to federations but also to many of our systems and organizations. We must recognize that this is a crisis that will affect the community's ability to realize its potential and its dreams. It is a system-wide crisis and not just a problem unique to one field of service or community. It is a crisis that will not be resolved without significant volunteer leadership awareness and education about the implications. It is a crisis that will not be resolved without a group of volunteer leadership advocates who are prepared to present the challenges at the

leadership tables where the priorities are set and the funds allocated. It is a crisis that requires leadership from the top of each organization, with executives establishing standards, performance, and expectations that support and encourage professional growth. It is a crisis that requires a commitment of funds. It is a crisis that requires a leader, a plan of action, and a sustained effort. It is a crisis that "puts the quality of Jewish community life at risk." It is a crisis that the Jewish community has the knowledge, skills, experience, and resources to address. Thus far there has not been the leadership or community will to do so. Let us hope that all of the prior research and discussion about the "crisis in professional recruitment and retention" is the foundation from which a new effort will develop. Let us hope that this is the last article about the crisis in personnel recruitment and retention. If we succeed in recruiting, developing, and keeping talent for our community, just imagine the possibilities.

In recognition of a professional  
leader, mentor and friend  
**Steven D. Solender**  
whose dedicated service to the  
Jewish people around the world  
will continue to be an example for us all

*Robert Aronson*



This is Federation

