

### III. THE BALANCING ACT



### IN SEARCH OF STAFF EXCELLENCE

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*Quality of service in any human service organization depends almost entirely on the training, skills, sensitivities, and overall quality of the staff. At Jewish Family Service agencies across North America, however, major changes are affecting the composition of agency staffs. Key personnel issues and their implications are addressed here: that of gender, as reflected primarily in the status of women in management; and of diversity, especially related to the integration of non-Jewish staff in professional positions and of non-social workers into what had been the almost exclusive domain of MSWs.*

The quality and effectiveness of the work performed by Jewish Family Service (JFS) agencies can be measured largely by the quality and effectiveness of their staff. Moreover, staff compensation consumes the vast majority of agency budgets—usually well over 80 percent. This article focuses on three personnel trends within JFS agencies: the issue of gender, as reflected primarily in the status of women as executive directors (CEOs) within local agencies; the integration of non-Jewish staff, especially in professional positions; and the movement from social work as the primary or even preferred degree in the delivery of key agency services.

#### THE GENDER GAP

Of the three topics, the most has been written about the role of women in Jewish communal leadership positions (though not necessarily within JFS agencies). To place this discussion in context, I begin with an anecdote: in anticipation of my own resignation this past winter as Executive Director of Jewish Family Services of Central Maryland, the agency's Search Committee considered 75 applicants for the job. Fewer than one-quarter of the applicants were female. Except for two internal candidates (both of whom were women who succeeded in becoming finalists), none of the female applicants came even close to demonstrating the qualifications of their male counterparts. While this may have been an extreme case, David Edell of DRG, Inc., an executive search firm that works with non-

profit organizations, including JFSs, confirms that it is typical. Even in agency systems where upward of 90 percent of the staff is female (as with many JFS organizations), Edell says that it is often difficult to identify female professionals whose experience qualifies them to serve as a CEO.

Why is that? Is it simply that good women simply have less motivation than men to move their families in search of career advancement? Are women not given sufficient managerial opportunities with which to obtain the experience necessary to prove their worth? Edell (1995) concludes that search committees increasingly seek candidates whom they perceive to be leaders, not just facilitators or executors of the Board's will. Thus, graduate degrees in business, management, and public administration are now as welcome as those related to the specific field-of-service, but these degrees may be found less frequently among female applicants. On average, women still earn less for the same or similar jobs as men, socialize differently from men, and have not been given the opportunity early in their careers to build a portfolio of entrepreneurial ventures or decision-making experiences (Aviv et al, 1993). But often search and promotion issues get down to ever more basic, core value judgments: Diana Aviv, Director of the Washington Action Office of the Council of Jewish Federations, cited a senior colleague who said that since marriage is the foundation of Jewish community life, he saw no reason to encourage women's professional advancement if it would come at the expense of their fami-

lies. Stating confidently that his views were shared by many leaders in the community, he further pointed out that the Jewish world faces a related dilemma in supporting the advancement of single women, lest it "legitimize" single life and allow it to find a place in Jewish communal life (Aviv et al., 1993).

It is not clear how representative Diana Aviv's informant is. Perhaps even more revealing, however, are the findings of Iris Cohen-Kaner (1995) in her research on the differences in perception within the Jewish community between female and male respondents as to the characteristics of effective managers. Briefly, men perceive successful managers as possessing characteristics that are more commonly associated with men than women—and they are likely to apply this perception in their role as either professionals or lay leaders (including their work on search committees). This is despite the fact that Jewish women are the best educated of any ethnic group in the country, and invariably rank among the most dedicated lay volunteers and agency professionals in all local agencies (Kosmin et al., 1991; Quint, 1995/96).

Often, career advancement depends on simply being in the right place at the right time. In her study of the Federation world, Audrey Weiner (1995) found that female CEOs are ten times more likely to have followed a female predecessor than are their male peers. In general, the movement by women to top leadership positions has occurred more rapidly in smaller Federations and agencies than in "group A communities," those with Jewish populations of 50,000 or more. In smaller communities, agencies are more likely to hire from within (which tends to benefit female candidates); moreover, these agencies generally have less complex corporate and funding structures and so may not require the advanced business and negotiating skills that have been historically associated with men. Despite the many obstacles faced by up-and-coming women executives, Weiner concludes that, on balance, the higher women rise in management, the further the ceiling rises. While some speculate privately about the increased "over-feminization of the field" (i.e.,

the result of most graduate students in Jewish communal service being female, and the fact that many previously sacrosanct positions are, for the first time, in the hands of women), these voices—like the senior colleague cited by Diana Aviv—seem to be finding themselves increasingly out of sync with the prevailing point of view. Overall, many women in Jewish communal service today hold jobs that are above where the glass ceiling existed a decade ago (Weiner, 1995; White, 1992).

Once a woman attains the CEO position, however, sensitivities related to gender perception may persist. Weiner (1995) found that women executives in a wide range of New York area Jewish agencies thought that gender had a more significant impact on virtually every aspect of their role than men did. Many times in my thirteen years as Executive Director, I recall how I planned carefully whom I would take with me to close a tough negotiation or appeal for a budgetary increase: more often than not, I would strive to take at least one male colleague who could sing the same tune and "play with the big boys" in ways that remained beyond my reach. Time and time again I rehearsed my ability to speak "sports-talk" with the boys or made sure to invoke examples of various hard-nosed management principles I implemented—all to a degree that would not have been necessary had I been male. Conversations with other female executives at various professional conferences confirm this experience. For women to be hired and to succeed as executives, the expectation by external stakeholders appears to be that they act like men, rather than demonstrate a differential style of leadership.

The great irony is that JFS staff below the executive level tend to be almost entirely female—probably to a greater degree than in any other branch of Jewish communal service. Given our large pool of talented women employees, one might think that JFS agencies would be well positioned to lead in the creation of female CEOs. Although the situation is considerably better than in 1983 when I became only the second female to head a large JFS agency, today only 8 out of the 28 largest ("group A") agencies belonging to the Asso-

ciation of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies are headed by women.

Recognizing this gender bias at the CEO level, Gerald H. Silverstein and Rachel E. Tannenbaum (1995) also argue that more emphasis is needed on facilitating opportunities and mentoring those women already in agencies who seek advanced employment opportunities in the field (see also Aviv et al., 1993). But here the burden also falls on women themselves: Women need to take the power we already have, both economic and political, and use it to make change—to pressure for fairness of opportunity, to render our workplaces more family-friendly, and to develop policies on a state and national level that benefit women and the issues we care most about (Lewis, 1993). In this way, we will be responsible for our own destinies. Like it or not, unless women are also willing to take on the increased responsibility, the longer hours, the inherent risks, and the occasional decision to move their families to another community for the sake of a leadership job, we cannot just blame the male establishment. No one ever claimed that being a pioneer would be easy.

A permanent cure to the problem of staff gender imbalance, however, requires an even great overhaul of our system. Ironically, our disproportionately female staffing pattern at the lower and middle levels contributes heavily to the gender gap at the top of the hierarchy. This is because, in most communities, the pay at JFS agencies is notoriously poor. In fact, if it were not for the highly desirable nature of our work, the flexible hours, and advanced training opportunities generally offered within JFS agencies, most agencies could not even begin to hire competitively. And when we do, it is almost invariably women whom we attract, not men. Time and time again, I have had the experience of male candidates turning down a potential offer because of salary, while an equally qualified but less demanding woman accepts it. Given the rules of supply and demand in the JFS field, good men can practically choose their career opportunities (and often their salaries), whereas women have to settle for what is available.

Although JFS agencies have been able to employ highly qualified professionals for relatively little money, this strategy has failed when it comes to attracting sufficient numbers of career-minded people who could—and want to—work their way up the system. Thus, over the long haul, a bottoms-up approach would clearly constitute the more successful route: that is, a shift in compensation levels and responsibility that attracts the best and the brightest from both genders at *all* levels of the agency, and not only in senior management positions that pay relatively well. If we were to succeed at having more men at the lower and middle ranks of our professional hierarchy, one benefit might be less gamesmanship at the top—and our communities would be better served, particularly in work that requires role modeling, as with children and adolescents. Thus, the best way to serve and promote women in leadership positions is to create an environment within JFS agencies that attracts the best men as well.

#### ON THE INTEGRATION OF NON-JEWISH STAFF

Consider this question: If you had to hire a JFS child therapist, how important would it be that the therapist be Jewish? Or, could pass as one, as someone knowledgeable about Jewish issues, has a Jewish-sounding name, or the like? And, to what extent would your answer change if you learned that only some—perhaps the minority—of the clients served by this therapist would be Jewish?

Federal law prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion in most circumstances, with the result that many agencies have adopted a variety of camouflaged approaches to their recruitment efforts. For example, one often sees newspaper ads that say something to the effect of "Knowledge of, and sensitivity to, Jewish issues required"—a criterion that could, at least in theory, be equally fulfilled by a Jew or gentile. In his survey of religiously affiliated child welfare agencies, Monsma (1994) reported that twenty agency heads nationally (both Jewish and non-Jewish) said that they gave preference in hiring to persons of their

religious orientation in a subtle and indirect fashion. At JFS agencies, the issue seems to be more complicated. For programs that serve large numbers of non-Jews, however, most directors with whom I spoke feel that religious diversity does not pose a significant dilemma. By contrast, insofar as it may lead to other forms of diversity (e.g. racial, ethnic, and country-of-origin), this form of targeted diversification may end up strengthening the agency's reputation and quality of service with key constituent subgroups and oversight bodies.

But, on balance, most Jewish clients coming to JFS expect to be served by a Jewish professional. If a good relationship has already been established between worker and client, then the realization after the initial sessions that the worker isn't Jewish seems to make little or no difference to the client. But where the professional is obviously not Jewish, sometimes it takes an additional effort—on the part of both the worker and the client—to establish a good relationship in the first place (personal observation and discussion).

On a macro level, however, this issue of non-Jewish staff has broader implications: In predominantly sectarian agencies as well as in mixed organizations, as the number of non-Jewish "new hires" grows, at a certain point the historically Jewish culture of the organization begins to change. At last year's winter holiday party at JFS of Central Maryland, for example, many Jewish staff feared that we would be forced to "neuter" our traditional celebration of Chanukah in deference to the growing number of staff who celebrate Christmas, Kwanzaa, or other holidays. (In the end, we agreed to publicly acknowledge the range of holidays celebrated by staff members in their own homes and communities while asserting that the agency itself followed a Jewish calendar, for which Chanukah remains the appropriate expression of communal identity.)

Increasingly, long-time staff have complained to me about how they have had to stop using Jewish cultural or Yiddish expressions in department meetings and can no longer assume that colleagues understand what they

are saying about certain holiday or life-cycle events. (Non-Jewish staff in turn complain that these expressions are off-putting and exclusionary.) The obvious response here is to instill a rigorous, ongoing training program for all staff—both Jewish and gentile—about Jewish history, culture, and religion as it affects our work. Yet, all the cognitive knowledge in the world can't make up for the natural empathy that results when both clients and staff share a certain background or past experience. Finally, in our staff Ethics Committee, where rabbinical input is often sought, the question has arisen as to whether and how we should include Christian or Moslem clerical representatives in those discussions that address staff performance issues or potentially affect all agency clients, including those who are not Jewish. Perhaps most critically, these concerns beg the question of agency mission and identity and the value base, Jewish or generic, on which major Board and staff decisions are made. Unless one constantly stands guard, this issue threatens to take local JFS agencies down a slippery slope, from which it will be very difficult if not impossible to return.

Agency staff are becoming increasingly diverse, which in larger agencies increasingly reflects the diversity of our society as a whole. By way of background, we know that, by the year 2000:

- White males will comprise only 15 percent of new additions to the U.S. workforce
- Nonwhite ethnic groups will make up 29 percent of those additions—two times their current percentage of the population
- 60 to 65% of all women over age 16 will have jobs, and will therefore constitute more than 40 percent of the labor workforce (Smollen, 1991)
- The percentage of working-age Jews will shrink due to declining birthrates, increased assimilation, and the rapid aging of our community (Kosmin et al., 1991)

The growing reliance of local JFS agencies on public funds increases the pressure on them to serve the "whole community"—a euphemism

that refers to predominantly non-Jewish constituencies—which almost invariably leads to the hiring of disproportionately non-Jewish staff for those programs. Often, however, this trend seems to spread agency-wide, even into those service areas that still serve a primarily Jewish clientele.

Historically, it seems as though agencies have entered into the nonsectarian arena consciously, albeit with caution (see articles by Miller, Goodman, and Siskind in this issue). In 1959, Martha Selig reported on a study of 74 Jewish family service and child guidance agencies, only 10 of which indicated that they received government assistance, totaling on average less than 5 percent of their budgets. By contrast, in 1993, more than 40 member organizations reported to the AJFCA that they received public funding, totaling well over \$60 million and constituting about 35 percent of their annual budgets, exclusive of refugee resettlement (Steinitz, 1995/96). In 1989, Shirley Raphael Imber already noted that a large number of agencies are using non-Jewish staff in all their programs, with the possible exception of Jewish Family Life Education. She concluded, "How much emphasis is placed on sensitizing both Jewish and non-Jewish staff to Jewish issues is greatly influenced by the inclination and commitment of agency leadership."

In many ways, our agencies and constituents can benefit enormously from the broadened knowledge base and range of backgrounds provided by a changing and increasingly diverse workforce. In ensuring a centrality of mission and core commitment to issues of Jewish individual and family life, however, staff diversity must be balanced with a clear vision and set of values to which everyone in the agency can adhere. This balancing process begins with the hiring process itself. At JFS of Central Maryland, I have tried to screen for value-based issues in my interview with all prospective professional employees. I begin by offering a brief presentation on what we mean by the "J in JFS" at the agency, often referring to a ten-point guideline that staff and Board developed several years ago that tried to measure and identify the extent to which

Jewish values govern our decision-making process on both a policy and clinical level. Could the prospective employee live with this approach, I ask. Then I talk about my observation of who tends to make a successful transition to agency life and who doesn't; namely, that we have found our most satisfied professional employees to be those who come with a strong value base (regardless of religious background) and who are interested in Judaism, the role of culture in people's lives, and the development of personal identity. Staff who do not welcome these discussions and who are not open to looking within themselves regarding issues of personal values and professional practice will likely have a hard time at the agency. More than once, prospective interviewees (both Jewish and non-Jewish) chose to take themselves out of the running at this point. Since introducing this approach, I believe that staff commitment to Jewish learning and discussion on these issues has increased significantly.

Upon hire, the agency's orientation and training program should similarly reflect a "J in JFS" vision and value base that includes a commitment to Jewish continuity and community-building. Such an approach may include an introductory course for all staff on issues of contemporary Jewish life, both affective and cognitive learning about Jewish customs and traditions, and a willingness to introduce Jewish issues and referrals within the clinical setting, as appropriate to the situation. By also creating periodic opportunities for non-Jewish staff to share their own practices and experiences with other employees (and similarly for Jews from different backgrounds), an organizational culture of openness and mutual respect can be preserved.

#### OTHER IMPLICATIONS OF STAFF DIVERSITY

Increased staff diversity is not just a Jewish issue. In an interview last December, Reed Henderson, Senior Vice President for Programs and Services at Family Service America, spoke of the difficulty in an era of rapid change for all agencies, regardless of affilia-

tion, of developing and maintaining a core value system and consistent organizational culture. "Increasingly," he said, "people come to work at local family service agencies with different skills and a different orientation. Some even traverse both the non-profit and for-profit sectors." According to Henderson, the family service movement has done a poor job dealing with diversity issues, which in addition to limiting our impact with clients and our communities has caused us to miss market opportunities.

Depending on local political and funding pressures, the agency's lay leadership may also be asked to diversify. Given the demographic shifts in many of our communities, both the Council on Accreditation for Services to Families and Children and some local United Way agencies have started urging JFS agencies to restructure their staff, volunteers, and—increasingly—their Boards in order to better reflect the characteristics of their service population. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, in particular, nonsectarian agencies reported major changes in their Boards' composition to include many more business people, more people with special skills, and more minority representation (Alperin, 1993b). In response to a 1994 survey of member organizations in the AJFCA, 53 organizations reported that they had received pressure from the United Way to diversify Board membership. Three agencies—Phoenix, Gulf Coast of Florida, and Madison, Wisconsin—stated that they already had non-Jewish/ethnically diverse Board members. Others were considering the request or else appealed it on the basis of their Jewish affiliation.

The tone and ideology articulated at the Board level permeate the entire agency. Thus, to the extent that an agency chooses to retain or reject a strong Jewish orientation and staffing focus (regardless of whether the agency serves or hires large numbers of non-Jews), the Board's vision and leadership are essential. Examples of where this plays out include the development of marketing strategies, the choice of agency priorities, and the selection of the agency's CEO. Although it is certainly possible to retain a Jewish focus with sensitive

non-Jewish Board members present, there are many difficulties inherent in such a situation. Even with all-Jewish Boards, the balance and sensitivity required in addressing these concerns depend, in large part, on the Board's choice of and relationship with the agency's CEO.

But what if the CEO isn't Jewish? Over the past fifteen years, two AJFCA agency executive directors have been non-Jews, both of whom were selected because of the Board's perception that they were the best candidates available for the job at the time. Importantly, both individuals were extremely open and sensitive to Jewish issues. One has to wonder, however, whether in their selection process, these Boards had abandoned all hope for a Jewish vision of leadership and ideology, or they had not even considered this issue as very important in the first place. At any rate, I suspect that it will become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for these CEOs to steer their agencies through the delicate conflicts that will inevitably emerge in the next century as our organizations attempt to straddle two very different ideological worlds.

Management journals urge agencies to take a wide view of "diversity" by including diversities that arise from lifestyle differences, which may be chosen or enforced. This broadens the scope of diversity to include (1) age range, (2) gender and sexual orientation, (3) physical and mental disadvantage, (4) education, (5) social network, and (6) regional or national background—as well as the more conventional designation by race or religion (Channels, 1991). Within this context, I became fascinated with the "Cultural Competence" initiative undertaken in 1991 by the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCS) in New York City. Motivating this process was a strong sense at JBFCS that their profile of users had changed beyond what management realized. There emerged the concern that agency professionals were not sufficiently knowledgeable and sensitive to how users who were not from traditional Jewish family backgrounds were being served. Agency leadership knew, for example, that they had dramatically increased services to

the African-American community, to the gay community (via their AIDS services), to families with single-parent female-headed households, and to African-American and Hispanic children in their residential programs. But to what extent did staff realize the implications of the change? Finally, JBFCS acknowledged that their future relationship to public funding agencies depended, in part, on how their capacity to serve a more diverse patient population was perceived by the public. Four task forces emerged from this initiative: (1) cultural/clinical integration, (2) staff development, (3) gay and lesbian issues, and (4) religious diversity issues ("Cultural Diversity Initiative," 1994). While significant steps were undertaken to train staff on issues of religious and cultural diversity and to recruit and retain minority professionals (including "people of color" and people from nontraditional family situations), no consensus was reached on what was meant by the term "Jewish" in the agency's name or mission-statement.

As Jews, we face diversity issues within our own community as well. Increasingly, we are no longer an exclusively Caucasian group; moreover, the range of religious beliefs and practice *within* Judaism sometimes feels as wide as the span across the different religions of America as a whole. Jeffrey Korbman (1994) addresses specific dilemmas in the Jewish communal field for Orthodox and traditional professionals; at the other end of the spectrum, I recently had a conversation with a colleague who just learned that one of his new key employees was a Hebrew-Christian. Clearly, as issues of agency diversity stretch the bounds of personnel management, organizational culture, and client service wider than ever before, the range and depth of dilemmas posed to agency administrators and individual staff members will likely continue to increase well into the 21st century. Herein lies our greatest challenge, for without a clear understanding of the inherent issues and implications embedded in the changing nature of our workforce, our agencies are destined to overlook both the potential strengths offered by staff diversification and the potential erosion

it may bring to our historical Jewish mission and values.

#### AN INTERDISCIPLINARY MIX

To complicate matters further, Jewish family agencies are hiring fewer social workers today than in years past. Formerly considered the bastion of MSWs, today's JFS agencies will just as likely employ marriage and family therapists, former teachers, nurses, disability specialists, psychologists and psychiatrists, attorneys, and a wide range of human service paraprofessionals. While reflective of the increased range of specialty services offered by many agencies (which is a good thing insofar as the community can now receive broader range of services), to the extent that social work and social work values previously constituted a framework for most staff discussions and client-based decision making, this aspect of organizational culture is also undergoing enormous change.

Within the Federation world, Joel Daner, Associate Executive Vice President for Human Resources and Personnel at the Council of Jewish Federations, has noticed a similar trend: many Federations have "reconsidered their reliance on the MSW as the union card to the Federation world" (Daner, personal communication, 1996). Though on balance Daner does not believe that Federations are any worse for this change, it has posed new challenges, such as the need to provide additional training on group dynamics and issues of confidentiality.

Among non-Jewish family service agencies, there has been a concomitant shift away from MSWs. Beginning in 1980s, Family Service America noted that agencies were moving into new service areas, such as literacy, job search, retraining, career planning, in-home services, school-based programs, family preservation work, elder care, and child care services—each of which required its own specially-trained staff (Stewart, 1991). The cause, once again, appears to be fiscal: as income shifted away from a heavy reliance on United Way and sectarian sources in the 1970s toward a more even mix of fees, public sources,

charitable giving, and other sources in the late 1980s and 1990s (with government, on average, providing the major source of dollars), agencies faced new requirements, including the need for a more specialized workforce (Alperin, 1993a and b).

In addition, Felice Davison Perlmutter and Carolyn Teich Adams (1994) found that many family service executives blamed the scarcity of resources for their loss of MSWs. These respondents (overwhelmingly non-Jewish agency directors) complained about the high turnover and the lack of staff competence they experienced because, as they described it, the for-profit sector was in a more advantageous position to recruit and retain high-quality job applicants. These directors replaced departing professionals with people who had lesser credentials and experience and, in some cases, volunteers (see also Alperin, 1993b).

Throughout the 1980s, most JFS agencies tried desperately to fight off the pressures toward the deprofessionalization of the field, often using sessions at their annual conferences to figure out strategies by which to provide additional incentives (often non-monetary) to retain or attract qualified personnel. For years, at Baltimore's Federation allocation meetings, I recall fielding innumerable questions on why we couldn't replace trained staff with less costly staff or well-meaning volunteers. Stubbornness on the agency's part, combined with increased regulations and the requirement to be "on call" 24 hours a day, eventually succeeded in quieting this debate. But it did little to address the underlying cause of these personnel pressures in the first place, which was the need for additional money to ensure the consistency and high quality of service expected by our clients and our community funders.

Beginning in the 1980s, family service agencies that sought programmatic or financial growth have had to reduce their dependence upon traditional strategies for both budget and programs. This has had enormous implications for how agencies defined their missions, structured their service delivery systems, and staffed their agencies. Insofar as the demand for new services appears to have been

greatest in areas of domestic violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, and elder care, agencies hired staff accordingly with the appropriate background and certification (Alperin, 1993a). In the 1990s, this trend has further expanded to include a wide range of in-home support services on behalf of multi-problem families-at-risk, people with disabilities, and the chronically mentally ill, with the result that more JFS agencies now have psychiatrists, nurses, psychologists, and education specialists on staff—often taking up the offices that previously belonged to MSW therapists.

### CONCLUSION

The conventional notion of JFS agencies as a bastion of Jewish social workers who provide counseling and little else is gone forever. But the core issue of how to attract and retain the best and brightest personnel for our agencies remains, echoing themes of long ago. Thirty years ago, Judah J. Shapiro (1968) posed the challenge that the (negative) image of local Jewish agencies may repel the potentially best workers, resulting in a "manpower shortage in Jewish communal service." Even earlier, Frances Taussig (1923) urged that personnel standards and increased compensation be adopted in accordance with the changing expectations by community leaders of Jewish social work. Today, the vision of doing whatever it takes organizationally to strengthen Jewish individual and family life propels us forward into the twenty-first century. We realize that, above all, our quality of service depends on the quality of our personnel. While we have come a long way since Frances Taussig's plea almost seventy-five years ago, the road ahead will prove equally challenging.

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