

## SULAM

### A Ladder for Women in Jewish Communal Service

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“Mommy Track,” “Second Shift,” “Sticky Floor,” “Glass Ceiling”—there is no lack of terms to describe the growing number of work-family-life conflicts women face in the workplace.

The dramatic rise in women’s employment over the last few decades has generated substantial discussion of the imbalance between parenthood, especially motherhood, and career growth and development. Some businesses have taken the initiative to develop “family-friendly policies” aimed at attracting and retaining female workers. Many other organizations, including those in the Jewish community, do not have formal policies in place. Yet, recognizing that women do bear greater responsibility for family matters, “organizations will face increasing pressure to do something to support, rather than undermine family life” (Kanter, 1993, p. 319).

Although Jewish communal organizations have yet to respond en masse to this pressure, growing numbers of Jewish women are choosing to enter Jewish communal service. Female professionals in the field are ready for change. Will federation, agency executives, and leadership at other Jewish institutions be ready and willing to move forward?

Entrenched barriers impede women’s advancement. A review of the literature identifies several obstacles preventing women from rising to the top, including lack of sufficient role models, the challenge of balancing career and family demands, gender biases and attitudinal barriers, exclusion from informal networks, differences in work styles, and skills deficits. Across professional fields women are excluded from top management. Despite comprising 46.5% of the general workforce, they make up only 12% of all

corporate officers (Ahmed et al., 2002). A 1995 report by the Glass Ceiling Commission documented that among the biggest corporations (Fortune 1000 and Fortune 500), 95 to 97% of the senior managers were male.

In Jewish communal organizations, the problem is particularly acute. Among the Large City Federations, a group that exercises considerable influence system-wide, not one woman joins these 20 men around the conference table. Only 2 of the 39 largest federations are directed by women. The inequalities in the Jewish communal profession also extend to salary and job responsibilities. The Jewish Communal Service Association 1999 Membership Survey found that women in top positions earn less than men, by an average of \$20,000. Increasingly, women hold positions and titles at the senior level, yet according to search committees and recruitment staff, the scope of their responsibilities does not enable them to learn the skills needed to advance to the most senior echelons (Edell, 1995). Many would argue that the “old boy’s network” often keeps women from gaining access to general management or work experiences that provide valuable learning opportunities.

Complicating the problem for women trying to gain new opportunities in the workplace is the need to simultaneously juggle out-of-work responsibilities. Research shows that women in management positions often choose between family and work; they must “restructure their domestic lives so they can shed responsibilities for childcare, cooking, and housework,” and put in the long hours necessary to maintain their competitive edge in the workplace (Wajcman, 1999). In the Jewish communal world, efforts to achieve this balance present an even greater struggle

for staff. As Cindy Chazan (2002), a former federation executive director, notes, "The demands of the Jewish workplace contradict the very values that we strive to establish in others through our work."

Research completed by the Progressive Jewish Alliance demonstrates that managers often fail to recognize that these concerns lay the groundwork for unhappiness, stress, and inevitable departure from the field. They see the problem of conflict between work and family as an individual problem; however, individuals in the field know all too well that it is a "collective, social problem, to which a collective, structural solution is appropriate" (Glass, 2001).

These issues are problematic, and without solid efforts to engage female professionals, the field of Jewish communal service stands to lose talented women. Today, greater numbers of Jewish women have advanced degrees and seek challenging careers, and the field of Jewish communal service appeals to their commitment to Jewish values and desire to help the Jewish community. However, the absence of clear paths to career advancement will contribute to decisions to leave our field. Moreover, without a supportive work environment, one that assists and accommodates women in managing their work and family responsibilities, these women will be attracted to other sectors that have advanced more rapidly with policies and programs to support and promote women.

Many leaders in the Jewish communal field emphasize the need to take concrete steps to create change. This structural solution can only occur through challenging the executive leadership and the field of Jewish communal service to develop new policies. These measures will build a work organization compatible with Jewish family life and create a work environment supportive of women's advancement.

Nationally, focused attention on the lack of equal access to opportunities and resources for women's advancement has given rise to several initiatives. Advancing Women

Professionals and the Jewish Community aims to achieve gender equality within Jewish institutions, federations, and other Jewish social service organizations. The project has selected four organizations – Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, and the UJC-Joint Research Collaborative – to serve as pilots for developing policies and programs that will begin to expand opportunities for women. They have also launched a collaborative research project with United Jewish Communities (UJC) to analyze barriers and opportunities for women who seek to become CEOs of federations. In addition, the 2001 JCSA Teleconference helped bring this issue of gender equality in Jewish communal service to the forefront for local communities. Nearly 1,300 professionals across 34 communities throughout North America participated in the interactive telecast.

At the local level, in Chicago, 40 individuals attended the JCSA Teleconference. The ensuing discussion led to a consensus that efforts addressing gender issues in the field needed to be launched in Chicago's Jewish community. Championing these efforts is the Jewish Communal Professionals of Chicago (JCPC), an established professional association devoted to enhancing skills and knowledge, facilitating networking and collaboration, and advancing the field of Jewish communal service.

With seed funding from the Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, JCPC launched its project, *Sulam: A Ladder for Women in Jewish Communal Service*, in 2002. It is led by JCPC's Steering Committee, all of whose members—22 professionals from Chicago's Jewish communal organizations—serve in a volunteer capacity. Through a strategy of incremental steps and buy-in of key stakeholders across the system, *Sulam* is initiating change to enable women to advance beyond the current glass ceiling.

Shifra Bronznick, director of the Advanc-

ing Women Professionals Initiative, has said, "There are lessons to be learned from the successes of others" (2001 JCSA Teleconference). Although differences exist between the cultures of the corporate world and the Jewish communal profession, the solutions to shattering, or at least breaking through, the glass ceiling remain the same.

In its first year, *Sulam* commissioned consultants to create a manual of best practices in work-life balance and gender equality from both the Jewish community and the secular corporate world; they surveyed Jewish communal agencies, non-profit organizations, and for-profit corporations across the country to identify these best practices. In its draft form, the manual incorporates best practices under these areas: organizational culture, career planning, mentoring programs, networking, flexible work arrangements, and child care and leave benefits. Describing specific programs contributing to the professional development, recruitment, and retention of women, the manual provides models that have been successful in creating positive change in such companies as Deloitte & Touche; Baxter, Ernst and Young; and Abbott Laboratories, as well as Jewish communal organizations including Baltimore's Jewish Vocational Service, the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County, and UJA-Federation of New York. Ultimately, the goal of the manual is to encourage the integration of initiatives for breaking the glass ceiling and achieving greater work-life balance into the policies of Jewish communal organizations. In the near future, Chicago's Jewish community and other Jewish communities will be able to use the manual as a resource for examining existing models and to facilitate discussions around the feasibility of replicating select best practices.

Key to creating change in Chicago's community is *Sulam's* Advisory Council. Leveraged support from lay leaders and other professionals in the field who are supportive of efforts to advance women will assist

*Sulam* in gaining access to those positioned to effect change and developing a meaningful dialogue. This strategy is in line with Bronznick's (2002) Step 7 – "Enlisting Allies in the Talent War for Women: To bring the issue of gender equity front and center, we need to engage our volunteer leaders." *Sulam's* Advisory Council includes male and female representatives from mid- and senior-level management, as well as federation and agency board members. This Advisory Council meets quarterly to provide strategic direction and oversight to the *Sulam* initiative.

An emphasis on skill-building and professional development rounds out the *Sulam* initiative. In an attempt to equip women with the skills needed to advance to positions of increasing leadership, *Sulam* offers educational workshops on areas most commonly cited as skill deficits for women, including budgeting and financial management, presentation skills, and negotiation.

In only two years, *Sulam* has generated much momentum toward change, and it continues to garner additional support among both lay leaders and professionals. Building on Chicago's model and the best practices manual to be completed and made more widely available in the near future, we need to increase our efforts at the national and local levels. Reviewing policies and model programs that have transformed the workplace is a critical first step. Initiating skill-building programming is a second step. Addressing the culture of Jewish communal organizations is still another. Farther up the ladder of change is having staff work in concert with lay leaders to establish forums for discussion and to begin creating and implementing pilot programs. Incrementally, these concrete steps will shatter the glass ceiling and establish greater gender equality within the Jewish communal service field.

Understanding that this feat will neither come easily nor quickly, let us, with renewed commitment and focus, continue to lay the groundwork for success.

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It is our pleasure to join in congratulating our esteemed and valued colleague for all that he has accomplished on behalf of the Baltimore Jewish community and the federation movement in North America.

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