

WOMEN IN JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

A Reflection

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Clearly, there is a glass ceiling in Jewish communal service, particularly in large communities and in large-budget agencies. It exists despite the written commitment to bring about gender equality made by national organizations. Institutions need to make gender-blend hiring a priority.

It was a pleasure to be invited to be a contributor for this Journal of Honor. I was even more pleased that the issue of women as Jewish communal professionals was viewed as so central and so important to the mission and future of the Jewish Communal Service Association (JCSA) to be included in this journal.

Just as this special edition commemorates success, recognizes the past, and celebrates the future, so does this article. Its goal is to briefly review the status of women in the field, examine that within the context of women professionals in both the nonprofit and business sectors, understand the realities of the various commitments made by several national and international Jewish organizations, and, more importantly, outline steps by individuals and organizations that can bring us closer to the goal of gender equality.

Currently, there are some noteworthy initiatives within the Jewish communal world. For example, the 1999 Membership Survey (see the article by Sheldon Gelman et al. in this issue) undertaken by JCSA gave serious attention to gender-specific issues in the Jewish communal field. The World Council of Jewish Communal Service has identified, as one of its goals, equality in the number of male and female board members by 2002, when its next quadrennial will be held. United Jewish Communities has, with the Association of Jewish Community Organization Professionals (AJCOP), created a serious training endeavor for women, the Women's Professional Advancement Initiative. This program emerged from a recent intensive recruitment effort to find women candidates for

the Mandel Executive Development Program, which found a lack of women in the pipeline for executive positions. The goals of the Women's Professional Advancement Initiative are "to address the institutional obstacles to the advancement of women and to provide 15-20 women with management responsibilities and career ambitions a year-long program that will empower them to seek recognition and advancement in professional careers in Jewish communal service. This two-pronged approach is viewed as a necessary strategy for stimulating institutional change." Unfortunately, the Initiative remains only partially funded as of this date. Additionally, the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* endeavors to include on a frequent basis articles about women's career advancement in the field.

Recent conferences provide additional examples of progress toward gender equality, including inclusion on the 1996 European Council of Jewish Communities conference agenda of the topic, "Women in Leadership—An Agenda for Tomorrow" and a distinct track on women's issues at the 1998 WCJCS Quadrennial. The inclusion of these sessions suggests an increasing awareness and willingness to focus on issues relevant to gender equality. However, although important and noteworthy, this is but a beginning.

THE GLASS CEILING EXISTS IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

There is no shortage of research on women and career development. In fact, from 1971 to 1997, 8,403 studies were conducted on this topic (Korn/Ferry International, 1995).

Within the past decade, there have been rich and varied studies done on women and career development with the Jewish community as well. The emergence and importance of women as donors (Pickett, 1993; Schneider, 1993), women's leadership styles (Cohen-Kaner, 1995), women in volunteer leadership roles (Ma'yan, 1998), and women in Jewish life in general (see for example, the National Commission on American Jewish Women, 1995) have been studied in an informative manner. Women professionals in Jewish communal services have also received attention from national organizations, including the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds (1975, 1979, 1986 and 1993), the American Jewish Committee (Isserman & Holstein, 1994), the National Commission on American Jewish Women (sponsored by Hadassah and Brandeis University, 1995), as well as from individual researchers and practitioners—Salguero in Latin America (1998) and Silverstein and Tannenbaum (1999), Weiner (1995), and Weiner & Wartenberg (1997/98) in the United States. While the work has been of a consistent high quality, unfortunately the data and results have suggested that the recommendations have neither been broadly implemented nor desired results achieved.

Several factors keep the glass ceiling in place. The existence of an "old boys network" that guides and influences promotions and hiring patterns, stereotyping of women as not capable of leading, the difficulties women often have in relocating, and low turnover in top positions have all been suggested as contributing to women's real under-representation in key executive roles (Council of Jewish Federations, 1994; Isserman & Holstein, 1994). The lack of role models preventing women from imagining themselves in a management role (Gibelman, 1998) is another factor.

Clearly, there is a glass ceiling in Jewish communal service. Whether it exists by design, desire, accident, or as a vestige of historical patterns in the workplace remains unclear. What is clear is that, although the ceiling has indeed been raised, it remains

most pronounced in large cities and in agencies with large budgets.

Of the 12,000–15,000 Jewish communal professionals in the United States, 60 percent are women. However, they do *not* comprise 60 percent of the executive staff. For example, in 1994, of the 90 UJA-Federation agencies in New York City, 20 percent were directed by female CEOs (Weiner, 1995). In 1999, this number has risen to 30 percent, with progress seen in the smaller budget, coordinating council, and community relations agencies, where the proportion rises to 46 percent with female executive directors.

In the federations, progress has been slow and also primarily in the small cities where, for example, from 1982 to 1993 the percentage of female CEOs increased from 17.2 percent to 35.9 percent. Similarly, in Philadelphia's study of Jewish organizations and synagogues, 18 percent were directed by women (Isserman & Holstein, 1994).

This low percentage of female CEOs exists despite the fact that women professionals are highly educated, experienced, and deeply committed to Jewish communal services as a career (Isserman & Holstein, 1994; Weiner & Wartenberg, 1997/98). It exists despite the continued written commitment and challenge to remedy this inequity in leadership articulated by key national organizations. And it exists despite the recognition that women are an important, talented resource in the Jewish community and that there is not an adequate pool of creative, inspired managers and leaders available and able to meet the challenges of today's Jewish community. The article by Jeffrey Solomon in this issue addresses that reality.

I also believe that women's gender and parity issues will never be the top agenda item of our Jewish communal institutions or agencies. That priority is given to service delivery, fund development, strategic planning, budget reconciliations and indeed, often, institutional survival.

There is no one reading this journal who is not deeply committed to the work of our agencies—*tikkun olam*. Yet, while we are engaged in that very work, we cannot afford

to ignore the critical nature of women's gender equality and parity.

However burdened our agencies are, it is both shortsighted and self-defeating to ignore this issue. The development of effective and true leadership is one of the real gifts we can give to the next generation. By excluding women consistently and systematically from the highest ranks of leadership, we are denying our communities at least half of the future leadership they will both need and deserve.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE NONPROFIT AND BUSINESS SECTORS

To enable a better understanding of the issues affecting gender equality in Jewish communal service, it is important to understand the role of women professionals in both the nonprofit and business worlds and to use those arenas to identify qualities, characteristics, traits, and actions that have been of value.

The status of women as measured by pay has improved in the past decade. Blau (1998) notes that in 1979 women earned 60 cents for every dollar that men earned for similar work. That amount rose to 73 cents in 1994.

Yet, the glass ceiling identified in the Jewish communal world is also noted by Gibelman (1998) in her study of human service agencies. In 75 representative nonprofit and human service agencies with 4,549 professional employees, men were disproportionately represented in management, most especially upper-level management.

Fisher (1999) is more optimistic in her book, *First Sex*, suggesting that women are emerging as a powerful force in the nonprofit sector. She challenges us to "honor gender differences, thereby enabling women's natural talents to flourish in the workplace." She suggests that without fundamental collaboration between men and women, both sexes are cheated. More importantly, she notes, society is cheated.

Presenters at the *Working Women's Second Annual 500 Conference* (Grey, 1999) suggested that government rules and regulations, most particularly the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), can

only go so far in remedying gender inequality. Rather, they argued that women themselves bear some responsibility for this inequity. Women sell themselves "cheaply," and companies take advantage of this. The vast majority of women at every level do not price their skills at market value. Confidence in one's abilities and risk taking continue to emerge as personal traits critical to achieving gender parity.

Other personal impediments to women's advancement have been suggested. Fisher (1999) argues that perhaps the single largest personal stumbling block for women on the way to the top is the "perfect syndrome," the need for perfection in all aspects of one's work and professional life, which can be overwhelming and may make actual achievements more difficult. The commitment to family responsibilities remains a primary hindrance to women's professional growth within business circles (Fisher, 1999). It has also been suggested that women's nurturing behaviors may prevent them from moving up in the organizational hierarchy.

Yet, these arguments are themselves stereotyping—and that is dangerous for everyone. White (1992) suggests that such terms as "the Mommy trap" and other subtle forms of stereotyping are themselves forms of sexism, and lower women's expectations of themselves and each other.

WHAT HAS HELPED WOMEN TO SUCCEED?

A useful body of literature is emerging that identifies the key factors that do contribute to a woman's success. For example, at *Working Woman's Second Annual 500 Conference* (Grey, 1999), speakers identified four traits that female business leaders had in common:

1. *Optimism*. These female leaders knew that they would be successful; they "reached for the stars and never gave up."
2. *Uniqueness*. These women used their individuality to a competitive advantage.
3. *A strong work ethic*. They believed they have always had to work harder and be smarter than their male counterparts.

4. *Fearlessness*. Women leaders kept their anxieties in check and were not afraid to fail. Indeed, they recognized that, unless one has failed repeatedly, one is not taking enough risks.

Women in Gilbelman's (1998) focus groups noted characteristics they thought contributed most to their career advancement, including the following:

- seeking help from above
- the desire to succeed
- the ability to manage subordinates
- the willingness to take risks with one's career
- a track record of achievement
- the ability to be tough, decisive, and demanding

Having a mentor and a support system, being politically astute, and "knowing when to be quiet and listen" were also important attributes.

In her in-depth interviews of ten female vice presidents of large Northeastern insurance corporations and ten matched men, Schor (1998) explored the quality of mentor relationships. She noted that more executive women than men had mentors, and they had more mentors during their careers than men. All of the women reported having one to four mentors in their careers, but only 50 percent of the men had even a single mentor. Women also reported longer mentoring relationships (five years versus two years for men). Female mentors tended to be more highly placed within the organization, typically in influential positions several levels above their mentees. In addition, men perceived their mentors differently than did women. Men saw them as role models, individuals to emulate and who could "pick up pieces from along the way." In contrast, women viewed mentors as sounding boards who were supportive and encouraging, and who had the ability to pave the path for them.

In addition, women expended greater effort in building and maintaining their support networks. Their relationships were more work-based than men, who had opportunities

to network within a more social environment including golf and tennis and socializing with their wives.

The advice shared by women in Matilda Cuomo's (1999) book about mentoring is valuable. Consider these two descriptions of what mentors provided.

1. "(They) filled my life with possibilities and through examples gave me the belief there was nothing I could not do or achieve."
2. "I learned the value of questioning the status quo—the power inherent in an individual."

The successful mentor/mentee relationships described by Cuomo were not part of larger institutional or organizational-based efforts. Rather, they were the results both of the efforts of younger women seeking guidance and direction and of grounded and experienced professionals identifying talented young women. This is indeed a responsibility we all share and would do well to make a personal-professional priority.

The importance of mentors and networking is raised consistently in the literature and is noted repeatedly by women in Jewish communal service—in the United States, Israel, and Western Europe. Unfortunately, institutionalized mentoring efforts within the Jewish community have not yet succeeded. We need to make the promotion of mentoring the portfolio of a high-level leader within leadership development divisions of our agencies and organizations. It needs to be a responsibility valued and viewed as important. The measure of success will *not be* the number of paired mentors mentees, but rather the achievement of executive roles by the mentees. Outcome, not process, is the goal.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

There is no question that Jewish communal enterprise and work would be enriched if gender parity was achieved within executive-level positions. The real question is what to do now—from both a personal and institutional perspective—to achieve that goal.

Institutions do need to make gender-blind hiring a priority. While gender parity should become a key issue for funding, accrediting, umbrella organizations, and indeed each of our agencies, I am not naive enough to believe that this will occur simply because it is important to our future. Perhaps this is because most Jewish communal agencies do not require accreditation from some national body, such as JCAHO, that mandates adherence to a set of objective and measurable standards. For many agencies, there is no relationship between the achievement of organizational goals, including excellence, human resource practices, and the like, and funding.

Although adoption of gender parity as a priority must be done by executives and agencies, if the past is any indication, women serving as mentors and mentees, women creating and supporting professional networks, women taking control over their careers, and women understanding the risks and requirements of executive advancement will ultimately become the key to achievement of that goal.

The Jewish communal field also has the responsibility to create environments that are supportive for working parents of both sexes. Telecommuting and flexible hours are key. It also means identifying the best and brightest women and putting them on a fast track, so that they will become, by communal design and desire, the leaders of the twenty-first century. It means becoming mentors and finding time to network. The inflexible, "old-boy" network-bound institutions are themselves bound for failure because the same creativity and risk taking required for gender equality are required today for institutional and agency success.

The Jewish community should also follow the example of business and publish our accomplishments and rankings; for example, the 50 most influential women in Jewish communal services to demonstrate success and offer role models (*Fortune* magazine) and an annual listing of the 100 largest and most influential Jewish organizations in the United States, listing chief executive offices and chief operating officers, by gender, which

would provide an annual rating of our accomplishments to achieve parity.

But within all of this, we should heed the advice of female Harvard MBA graduates on their twenty-fifth reunion (Morris, 1998): "We were raised to think that we could do anything—you can do anything but you can't do everything. Choose carefully....the trick is having the wisdom to know the difference."

Perhaps the final advice for our Jewish communal world is that we too cannot do everything. But, as we choose our priorities for the next millennium, assuring that there are qualified professionals for the next generation must be one of our priorities. It is not enough for individuals to choose carefully; our Jewish communal institutions have to do that as well.

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