

# PROFESSIONAL LEADERS RESPOND

## A Response to the Manifesto

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The manifesto, "Principles of Jewish Communal Life for the New Millennium," emanating from the Irwin Daniels School of Jewish Communal Service at HUC-Jewish Institute of Religion, is clearly well intentioned. Its use of Judaic texts reflects the importance of Jewish learning that all too often has been a stepchild of Jewish communal service. Moreover, it acknowledges the reality that we are living in a changing Jewish world in which internal issues of continuity and peoplehood are becoming more central. Certainly we must credit the document's authors both for their intentions to advance the Jewish communal agenda and to furthering discussion on what we mean by Jewish communal service.

However, it suffers from trying to reach too broad a consensus. Consequently it is insufficiently rich in detail and programmatic thrust. Unlike the Reform movement's "10 Principles," which began with a strong ideological thrust, sparked a serious debate, and then found an acceptance that was considered too general by many of its most avid supporters, this Manifesto begins from an all-inclusive base and, therefore, *ab initio*, is too general to carry significant weight.

More specifically, many of the principles, particularly "Israel-Diaspora," "worldwide responsibility," "lay/professional partnership," and "democratic values," are all unobjectionable but also not particularly inspiring. In each case, the authors skirt divisive questions in a well-intentioned but misguided effort to secure common ground. Particularly, Israel-Diaspora relations (Principle 5), the meaning of a Jewish State, to say nothing of professional-volunteer relations (Principle 9), is conflict-rather than consensus-pervasive.

In Principle 1, "Transformation and Renewal," the authors are absolutely correct in

calling for change and innovation. However, they do not go far enough in underscoring the need for this change to take Jewish tradition and heritage seriously even if it comes into conflict with cherished American norms.

Similarly Principle 2 reads as a simple reassertion of classic *tikkun olam*. It says nothing about addressing aspects of American culture that may promote nihilism and run counter to Jewish values. Simply calling for greater governmental activism to combat poverty means little, absent a context of a culture of individual responsibility and self-help. If Jewish organizations are really concerned about *tikkun olam*, they have to be willing to articulate many counter-messages that will depart significantly from current policy and practice.

In Principle 3, "Personal Journeys," of course, we need to make our Jewish heritage accessible. However, we delude ourselves if we believe we can escape speaking a language of norms, commitments, expectations, and even demands. This statement makes it seem as if all we need do is open doors and then people will come. People will come only if the commitment has really been internalized. Otherwise, Friday night football is a more compelling activity than Shabbat dinner in terms of personal fulfillment.

In Principle 4, "Creating Communities of Jewish Meaning," the language that we are all "Jews by choice," while politically correct, remains theologically problematic. If we believe that the covenant of the Jews exacts obligations, then we are Jews by commitment and not by choice. The "pro-choice" language made so popular by the abortion movement and Reform Judaism is ultimately too loose to command adequate loyalty and allegiance among those who are uncommitted to it.

Principle 8 refers to operating by consen-

sphere so bland as to be devoid of content. Continuity requires conviction that a Jewish life is worth leading, even if it involves some degree of conflict with American culture. Inter-marriage is a good barometer of this conflict, but hardly an item for consensus politics.

In short, I believe the Jewish community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may not be well served by the culture of consensus that its organizations have been working with for the past 50 years. The price of securing Jewish continuity may be precisely the dissensus that this manifesto so assiduously seeks to avoid.



## Principles to Work By

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The concepts in "Principles of Jewish Communal Service for the New Millennium" are thoughtfully articulated by Jmarla Eglash Abraham and Steven Windmueller of the HUC-JIR Irwin Daniels School of Jewish Communal Service. It is difficult to disagree with the guiding principles presented because they do in fact address key challenges facing Jewish organizational life and are clearly tied to specific Jewish values.

Their article incorporates many of the values that have been crucially important to me during the span of my life's work. In three decades of devotion to *Tikkun Oalm*, I have been blessed with the opportunity to improve the conditions that affect the welfare of others. Throughout my career, initially in the public sector and then in the Jewish community, there have been countless moments of personal and professional fulfillment in "making a difference."

Drawing on these experiences, I respectfully offer the following reshaping of the Abraham/Windmueller principles in my own version of *Principles to Work By*.

### 1. NEVER TELL A LIE

The most fundamental element in a relationship is trust. Trust is built on the solid foundation of dealing truthfully, decently, and respectfully on both an individual and institu-

tional basis. By adhering to standards of ethical conduct, we preserve and promote personal and organizational integrity.

Dr. Norman Linzer eloquently probes this principle in his article in the Spring 2000 *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* entitled, "Should Jewish Communal Workers Be Held To A Higher Standard?" He notes that the actual meaning of the chosen people is the idea that there are special obligations of decency and kindness and justice. "As Jewish communal professionals, we are bound by Jewish and professional values that regulate moral and ethical behavior. We are to treat [all] people with dignity, respect and honesty...in our dealings...on and off the job."

### 2. LEAD BY EXAMPLE

There are several elements intertwined in this principle. Let us begin with "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." From there, we move forward by leading with enthusiasm and optimism, raising the half-full glass high. Many, if not most, of the major goals we pursue are not easily reached, prompting recollection of the motto posted in my fourth-grade class: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." And when we do achieve the desired goal, we must remember to take the time to celebrate and acknowledge the effort of all those who contributed to the outcome. A

more subtle but no less critical component of this principle is to be aware that even when you are following, you are leading.

An organizational development consultant once provided me with a sticker, which I prominently displayed in my office, bearing a simple but profound statement: Expectations Influence Results.

### **3. BE GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE**

Service is the way we offer ourselves to the causes and ideals that reflect our highest values and commitments. Those of us who are Jewish civil servants should be mindful that we are truly privileged to apply our skills, knowledge, talents, and energy on behalf of our own community and its efforts to make the world a better place. By engaging in our noble work, we are also contributing to strengthening the civil society in our local communities, in America, and throughout the world.

This principle was recently put into perspective in an interview with a major investment manager, a man who has extraordinary influence in the global financial markets. However, when questioned about how he viewed his achievements, he commented that he did not take himself too seriously because his work did not involve really significant work like saving lives. How often do we stop to think about the fact that our work continuously presents the possibility of at least changing, if not saving, lives?

### **4. SEE THE BIG PICTURE BUT DON'T IGNORE THE DETAILS**

We have been told that our greatest leaders are visionaries, women and men who see around corners and into the future. Implicitly or sometimes explicitly, these "big thinkers" are described as leaders who do not need to focus on the details; details are seen as distracting, confusing, and therefore best left to others. In my experience, the most effective leaders are those whose vision focuses both on the big picture as well as on the individual details.

As Dr. Jonathan Woocher, Executive Vice President of JESNA, said in his speech, "Looking Forward: The Jewish Community in the New Millennium" at the recent JCSA Annual Luncheon on June 22, 2000, "The differences are made in the little encounters." We must think and act holistically and systematically. It is crucially important not to lose sight of the macro issues and goals, while remembering that, to paraphrase, "G-d is in the details."

### **5. RESPECT THE DIVERSITY OF OUR INSTITUTIONS AND THE INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THEM**

We must recognize that individuals possess different skills and styles, and create the opportunities that allow each individual to make their best contribution to the enterprise. By empowering our professionals and lay leaders to engage in meaningful work that utilizes the full range of their skills, we help bring organizational performance to its highest level.

Just as the Jewish community benefits from the diversity of the individuals within its institutions, it also draws strength from the wide range of institutions serving the needs of the community. We magnify the benefit to the community when we build relationships among organizations, promoting collaborations that draw upon the unique strengths of each institution.

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As we enter the new millennium, we are experiencing a new era of massive change, brought about by the information revolution and advances in technology. The change is so rapid and profound that its impact can not yet be fully understood. (My personal frame of reference is to imagine life before and after the invention of electricity.) As our institutions struggle to harness the power of these advances, we may find some security in timeless principles—whether the Abraham/Windmueller observations, the Garrett version, or another variation—that help us express our core values and commitments as Jewish communal professionals.

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