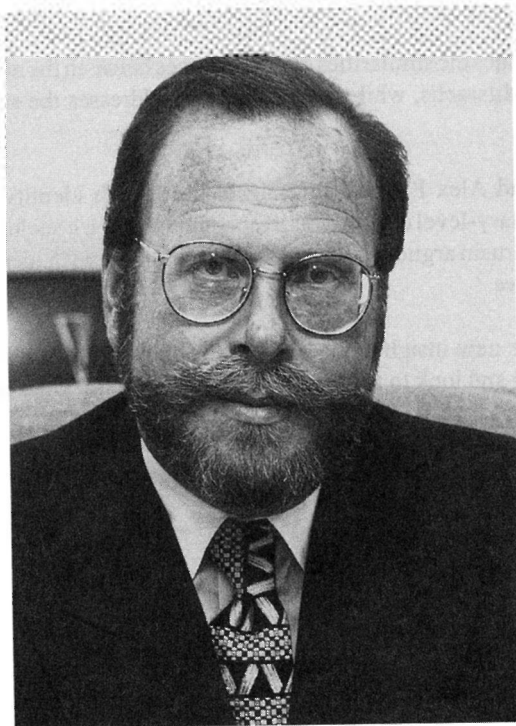




Richard L. Wexler



Jeffrey R. Solomon, Ph.D.

SETTING STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP AND THE PROFESSION

RICHARD L. WEXLER

and

JEFFREY R. SOLOMON, PH.D.

Richard L. Wexler, a member of the law firm of Lord, Bissell and Brook, Chicago, has held numerous important lay leadership roles in North American Jewish life. He served as the chairman of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, as well as the Jewish United Fund of Chicago. He was the president of the National Conference of Soviet Jewry, and chairman of the United Jewish Appeal (USA). Mr. Wexler was the first chair of the Campaign/Financial Resource Development Committee of the newly formed United Jewish Communities (UJC).

Jeffrey R. Solomon serves as the president of The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies. He had been the senior vice president and chief operating officer of UJA-Federation of New York, and served with a number of Jewish communal agencies in New York and Miami.

In Mr. Wexler's role as chair of UJA and Dr. Solomon's role as consultant to the merger of UJA, Council of Jewish Federations and United Israel Appeal, the volunteer and the professional developed an intense and complex relationship as they moved toward the restructure of these national agencies.

At the UJC General Assembly in Atlanta, November 1999, they agreed to begin a dialogue exploring issues of standard setting for volunteer leadership and the profession. The resulting exchange of correspondence identifies many of the critical lay-professional issues and suggests approaches in this growing area of concern.

The Journal of Jewish Communal Service is indebted to both outstanding leaders for their willingness to share their candid and insightful comments.

December 13, 1999

Dear Jeff:

You and I agreed that we would begin our exploration of the lay-professional relationship at the cusp of a new century by exploring the motivation that impels volunteers to participate in Jewish communal life. Strong Jewish roots, intensive Jewish education, and synagogue membership contribute mightily to creating the background necessary to becoming a valued volunteer in the community. In fact, my own experience over the years suggests that the more restricted the Jewish background of the volunteer, the more likely that that person will lack the *savlanut*—the patience—necessary to “stay the course” so

vital to the learning process that educates the volunteer in leadership, and creates the kind of commitment necessary to sustain that volunteer's role in Jewish communal life over time.

That which motivates the volunteer must be an incredible passion for Jewish life: for belonging to something greater than one's self. While Jewish volunteer communal service is a selfless task, unless “rewards”—psychic and otherwise—are offered to the volunteer, the chances of sustaining that volunteer's role over the long term are minimal. In an environment where the volunteer in Jewish life wants to see the direct outcome of his or her contribution—hence the growing reliance of our philanthropies on designated

giving—it is clear that the embrace of community itself no longer will suffice for a large number of our volunteers, and our community organizations must offer far more in terms of education, contact, training, and motivation.

I was fortunate. My folks, though of modest means, were *very* Jewish—from the JNF blue box on the window sill, to the examples of their own lives in leadership of synagogue, to spoon-feeding me not only *kashrut* at home but enabling me to have a Camp Ramah experience. (It was only later in life that I appreciated how much the community was part of all of this in that it was the community scholarship I received at Camp Ramah that enabled me to have that incredible experience for so many years.) So my own passion for Jewish life was built at an early age. The flames of that passion ebbed through the early years of my marriage until Bobbi and I went on a Couples Mission to Israel in 1975. While I had been contributing fairly significantly to the federation campaign without knowing what my commitment was all about, it was that Mission that enabled me to see that “community” was that thing greater than myself to which I wished to be committed in the future.

In addition to the familial and educational background that provided me with these values, I had another critical component—lay and professional mentors who guided me gently into Jewish communal service. When I “joined up” in 1975, I was motivated by background and passion, understanding and, probably, real need, to serve on an agency Board, to work the trenches of federation committees, to participate in the Young Leadership Cabinet of United Jewish Appeal—to work my way up through our system. Today that form of motivation seems lost, as we find ourselves in an era of instant gratification where the volunteer aspires to a “significant leadership role” far earlier in the process and, failing to achieve it, is propelled either out of our system entirely or to another organization where the leadership path is both more clear and more direct.

So where does this leave us? Certainly, the Wexner Heritage Foundation Community Leadership Programs, the CLAL Leadership Devel-

opment Programs, community “Dialogues in Jewish Life” programs for young couples, and strengthened young leadership development programs all contribute to a deeper set of values and Jewish volunteerism. Broadening the availability of Jewish day school education and making Birthright a truly meaningful Israel experience can have a significant impact on young people in their “pre-volunteer” age groups. But most of all, making the volunteer experience meaningful and ensuring that the volunteer experience represents *real* engagement are the ultimate motivational means that will inspire others to follow the path now taken by so few.

Let me turn now to a subject dear to us both—the development of lay and professional communal and national leadership. I thought it would be appropriate to reflect on both the quality and quantity of the volunteer and professional leadership in our North American federated system—both locally and nationally.

We have both observed the exodus of some of the best and brightest from communal professional leadership. What causes this—is it burnout, dealing with lay leaders like me, the terrible pressures that our federated system creates, or other factors?

One of the greater tragedies that has been apparent to me for years is that in our system, with some notable exceptions, the pool of qualified professional leaders diminishes year by year. Even with the Mandell and Wexner Programs, and the potential of the Fisher-Bernstein Institute and Hornstein Programs, production is not keeping up with demand. Why is this? What do you attribute this to? I know that you and I both believe that Jewish communal service is holy work. If so, why do so few apparently aspire to this sacred service?

And where is the lay leadership for our communities and national organizations being developed? Steve Solender and I debated the professional and lay role at an AJCOP Conference several years ago, both of us noting the paucity of lay and professional leaders to refresh our system. Steve observed that he

was losing valuable board members in New York because “the work was getting too painful”—the decisions being made at a time of declining resources were too bitter for many lay leaders to confront. The joy of communal lay leadership service was disappearing as dollars available to fund vital programs diminished. And, yet, particularly in our large cities, financial resource development has today never been greater, while at one and the same time, finding leaders to serve has become more and more difficult. The thin veneer of competent, compassionate professional leaders is “matched” by an even thinner veneer of committed local lay leaders who aspire not only to federation leadership but also to playing a role in our national system. The reasons for this ever-thinning veneer are not, in my view, solely a matter of a lack of Jewish education, a lack of passion, or a lack of motivation.

On the lay leadership side, there has developed a mistrust of the communal instrumentality that has, in part, driven not only designated giving away from the umbrella of the annual campaign but has also fostered a growing sense that our systems are being professionally driven. In addition, there is a new imbalance in the lay-professional partnership that is pushing away lay leaders from our system.

How do we right that imbalance? I have a few thoughts, as I’m sure you do, as well:

- We must bring into professional leadership those who understand that our system is based on the lay-professional partnership. This will require not only training and education of lay leaders but also a real “re-skilling” of community professionals.
- Continuing professional education for community professional leadership *must be retitled Continuing Community Leadership Education*, with continuing education programs bringing together *both lay and professional leadership* in focus groups and well-led educational enterprises and retreats.
- Lay leaders must themselves accept the reality that they too require education. So often it has been our experience that when

we offer training programs to campaign lay leadership, the older the campaign volunteer, the more likely the response is: “What do I need this for, I have been doing it for years...” or something similar. That is true, but it is also true that many have been doing it wrong.

- We must have lay and professional leaders who are committed to process, to the ownership structures that are at the core of our work, our communities, and our national system. Otherwise the mistrust of our institutions will grow and grow. The era when a communal or national professional leader can succeed merely by “stroking” lay leadership, and then do what he (and, in the main, these are nothing but “he’s”) already decided with his fellow professionals, must come to an end. I’m afraid that we have seen, locally and nationally, the “stroking method” of professional leadership perpetuated and even enhanced.

And, Jeff, our system must ensure that in weighing the current imbalance, we do not create a strong tilt in the direction of a lay dictatorship—nothing could be worse. The failure to recognize that the professional represents continuity, the failure to accord the respect due to professionals, the interference by lay leaders in the professional’s domain and prerogatives—all will ultimately doom the lay-professional partnership. We must create a situation in which any professional worthy of the name would never embrace a circumstance that demeans the position. It is reprehensible for a group of lay leaders to acquire dominance over a professional. Balance in the lay-professional relationship is what is required, my friend, and it takes strong—very strong—lay and professional leaders to create it.

In the past, we were able to attract the best and brightest professionals and a parallel group of best and brightest lay leaders because in those halcyon days of yore, there was mutual respect between the professional and the lay leader. Out of that respect came trust. From what I have observed, that respect has been seriously eroded, and with it the trust from

which our system has been built communally and nationally has sharply declined as well.

Best regards,

Richard

* * *

January 3, 2000

Dear Richard:

From reading your opening part of our exchange, I believe we may indeed be able to make a contribution to the dialogue on lay-professional relations in Jewish communal life. You remind us of the importance of the intense meaning of the enterprise for the volunteer. In human development, we know that at moments in our life we seek to integrate our being and values and wish to see meaning in our lives within a broader context. Clearly, Jewish communal service has provided wonderful opportunities for both volunteer and professionals to find that meaning.

In the twentieth century, this search for meaning has been even more intense as we stood by helplessly while a third of our people were decimated. The passion of our community in the latter half of the century was an attempt at redemption for our impotence during the first half. With our partners whose very lives were on the line, we helped rebuild Israel as a Jewish homeland. We fought discrimination against all and, as a result, brought anti-Semitism to a new low. We passionately fought for the freedom of our brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union and gained that freedom, seeing a mass movement that only rivals the Exodus from Egypt. Whether in Ethiopia or Syria, Jews at risk were reached by the efforts of our enterprise. I very much respect your perspective on this moment in the lay-professional relationship arena, but passion alone does not sustain our efforts. The following key factors, are, in my opinion, at the root of the perceived problems in lay-professional relations:

- We do not separate volunteerism from leadership. There are many wonderful volun-

teers within the Jewish community. To call each one a leader is wrong and, in fact, self-defeating. In a 1984 study by Egon Mayer of the next generation of Jewish philanthropists in New York, he discovered that the very use of the term "leader" turned off many young, affluent potential Jewish philanthropists because as one said, "You call any turkey who walks through the door a leader. Why would I want to associate with that?"

- Our current crisis is the crisis of being a normalized American ethnic/religious community. We built a volunteer-professional infrastructure on the excitement of crises, and those crises have been resolved. This very phase of normality forces us to reassess everything we do.
- We have no serious standards for either volunteers or professionals. We do not create a set of expectations for each, the achievement of which results in promotion, and the lack of which results in sanction. When was the last time we evaluated candidates for board membership across a series of clear criteria? In his recent book, *The Director had a Heart Attack and the President Resigned: Board-Staff Relations for the 21st Century*, Gerald Bubis uses the following criteria for board membership:

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| * Wealth | * Work |
| * Wisdom | * Wit |
| * Wallop | * People Skills |
| * Menschlichkeitism | * Commitment to Jewish Values |

Similarly, the capacity of professionals and criteria for professional performance need to be spelled out. To do so, there needs to be a clear understanding of the professional role and function and the definition of success in that role.

- We have never agreed upon functional definitions of the roles of professionals and the roles of lay leaders. While the textbooks in my graduate education courses stated that lay leaders were responsible for the setting of policy and professionals were responsible for its implementation, and my

early experience in functional agencies supported that approach, my work in the federation field found too much time and energy going to organizational maintenance because volunteers demanded roles far beyond those of policy setting.

I also believe you highlighted a very important concern: satisfaction for both the volunteer and the professional. How do we attract and retain the best and the brightest when the culture is one of dispute, contentiousness, and rarely of the sacred nature of the work in which they are engaged? Can we create a more meaningful environment by taking on the core issues noted above so that the agenda is moved forward more rapidly?

The early Chinese philosopher Lao Tse wrote, "A leader is where the people hardly know he exists but of a good leader when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, the people will say, 'We did this ourselves.'" The philosopher Edmond Bergson wrote, "A leader thinks like a person of action and acts like a person of thought." I would argue that in today's times, too much of the energy that goes into leadership management results in what the Japanese call *muda*—the use of resources (time, material, staff) for activities that do not add value to the customer. If the customers are the individuals and communities in need, what proportion of our work today is *muda* versus substantive valuable efforts that move the agenda ahead? Is this the price of Jewish communal service or is it an inefficiency that can be corrected? I look forward to the continuation of this exploration.

Warmest wishes,

Jeff

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January 5, 2000

Dear Jeff:

I was so pleased to receive your letter of January 3. It offers what I believe to be a provocative set of "key factors at the root of the perceived problems in lay-professional

relations." It won't surprise you that I am not in complete agreement with you or with even those you cite, impressive though they are. But I do agree, most emphatically, that we should begin to develop relevant definitions of leadership, so that those women and men entering our system, whether as volunteers or as professionals, will know not only what it means but when they will have achieved it. I also agree that far too much professional energy has been, and continues to be, dedicated to what you have correctly characterized as "leadership management"—what I describe as the "constant stroking process" that too many jaded professionals believe to be their primary responsibility. When there has to be so much time devoted to leadership management, Jeff, what kind of satisfaction can a professional really receive from his or her position, and what kind of substantive progress can we make in achieving organizational goals?

We today have such a thin veneer of committed volunteers within our system that I respectfully disagree with the conclusions you attribute to Egon Mayer's 1984 study. We do no one a disservice by calling someone who commits voluntary time, energy, and financial commitment to our organization a "leader." They are the builders of community; they are those who sustain Jewish communal life in North America; and they are in a very real sense the builders of Jewish "Peoplehood." Why shouldn't they be called leaders? We who hope to inspire volunteers to greater achievement must give them the dignity that their commitments deserve. Nonetheless, I think you and I would agree that there is "leadership" and then there are "leaders." And I think the distinction is both real and readily understood even by that single potential Jewish philanthropist who wouldn't want to be associated with all those other "turkeys." So I would like to provide you with my definition of what real leadership means in the ultimate sense. I rely on my own experience in volunteer work and in the reading that I have done as well.

Warren Benus established his expertise on leadership matters in his book, *On Becoming*

a Leader. According to Benus, real leaders possess real convictions—strong feelings that have built up within them over time. If those convictions match the requirements of a group of followers, Benus concluded, then great leadership emerges. I have found that leaders must operate at the far edge of the frontier, where the future is being made. They must have vision and the ability to create new things (or at least make the old things seem new). Real leaders must win the hearts and minds of their followers. They must exhibit constancy—staying the course regardless of the risks. Real leaders are so often creative, intuitive, passionate, and even articulate.

“The ingredients of leadership cannot be taught,” Benus warns. “They must be learned.” As I suggested in my first letter to you, Jeff, we need learning leaders and learned ones.

I know that both of us have experienced vivid examples of both the incredible success that leadership can be and of its incredible failures as well. A true leader of a communal institution must understand that where his or her vision conflicts with that of the polity, he or she must give way. Even today, there are those who believe their leadership requires them to threaten resignation whenever their own demands are not met, failing to comprehend that in doing so, they have weakened their leadership positions dramatically and have thereby placed their own interests ahead of the interests of the organization. There are leaders who have wholly failed to understand the difference between their own self-interest and those of the agency, as James Collins put it in an article he titled, “Change is Good—But First, Know What Should Never Change.” Due to the thin veneer of lay leadership (and of professionals), we have begun to “parachute in” leaders who, while possessing a strong sense of personal values and principles, may lack any familiarity with or, even worse, reject those core values and timeless principles that have brought volunteers and professionals into our system. How do we cope with that? Must the organizations then take on the values and principles of a transitory lay chair? And what is the impact on our systems if that were to be the case?

Collins has stated, “A true core value is something you would hold even if it becomes a competitive disadvantage.” I fear that today there are too many, in lay and professional leadership, in real leadership roles, who are willing to discard basic principles to follow the trends, to adapt to the demands of the few, or even to follow their own code of conduct, without regard to the institutional values and principles that brought them into leadership, that are at the foundations of our institutions, and that must guide us in our work or we will be lost.

So, Jeff, I agree that we must refocus our leadership in serious ways on values and principles and move away from the “leadership maintenance” in which so many of us find ourselves involved and by which so many of us are distracted. And we must do so with a serious sense of purpose, or we will lose not only our leaders—current and potential—but we will also place at risk the very institutions we want them to lead.

Regards,

Richard

* * *

February 10, 2000

Dear Richard:

I am pleased by the amount of agreement in our first exchange. What I would like to do is summarize some of the key points of agreement and challenge some of those in which you have not yet come around to the right way of thinking!

- The field should develop relevant definitions of leadership with clear expectations for both volunteers and professionals. These should be measurable expectations against which self or external evaluation can be completed.
- Less professional and organizational energy should be devoted to leadership/organizational maintenance (or, in your words, “the constant stroking process”).

As we look at some of the points of disagreement, you write, "We today have such a thin veneer of committed volunteers within our system." I respectfully disagree with that statement. In fact, I would argue that we have an excess of potential leadership and that our system feeds leadership to much of North American Jewish life and, indeed, much of civil society's activities. Each year thousands of young leaders are recruited, engaged, and trained, only to find that there is no place at the decision-making table for them. Some of the best and brightest and most motivated lose their patience and move on to other organizations, often resenting the creation of unfulfilled expectations. Because there is no definition of leadership and there is no rational human resource management system, happenstance often determines progress and placement. Further, Richard, if one looks into the annals of our movement starting in the first decades of the 20th century, one discovers a constant refrain of fear that the next generation is not there in either quantity or quality to continue the work of the generation in power. Could it not be that the dynamics of our personalities are such that we cannot see the effectiveness of those who follow us because we do not want to be pushed out of the way?

Benus's writings on leadership and convictions talk about the alignment needed between leaders and followers. One of the real challenges facing a voluntary system, especially one in which the ownership formally rests with constituent members, is the ability to balance operating "at the far edge of the frontier—where the future is being made"—with obtaining the consent of the governed. Not to be bold is not to progress. To be a leader without followers, as has been seen in American Jewish life in the last decade, is not to lead effectively in Benus's terms.

I totally concur with the need to have learning and learned leaders. At the same time, I believe that we need to heed the lessons of Peter Senge in the *Fifth Dimension*, by creating "learning organizations," where learning becomes a constant, and noble failure without a "blame frame" creates an environment in

which aligned risk taking emerges.

I would argue that another component that has effected the output of lay and professional leadership is the lack of laser-like focus in our activities. Netscape CEO James Barksdale recently was asked what the secret was to managing a successful firm in a rapidly changing industry. (I would argue that the UJC/Federation system is in a very rapidly changing industry.) He replied, "The main thing is to make sure that the main thing is still the main thing." To what degree have we oriented and trained our leaders to build alignment around the definition of focus, and have we used that focus to advance the agenda? How much of our training is strategic and how much is tactical? If we are talking about real leadership, shouldn't we be more aggressive on the strategic developments in the changing world of Jewish communal life?

Warmest wishes,

Jeff

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February 11, 2000

Dear Jeff:

Does your telefax of February 10 actually mean we have a real dialogue started? I am so pleased. I would like to expand on our key points of agreement by examining your letters more closely.

In your letter of January 3, you chastised me for loosely using the term "leader"; you suggested that conferring leadership on "anyone who makes a contribution" diminishes the value of leadership and even puts off some who might otherwise aspire to leadership within our system. I know that Emerson has said that "[W]ith consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do," but Jeff, you now suggest that the Jewish leadership cohort expands beyond the thin veneer I described by including every young person who graduates from a CLAL or a Wexner Program, or who participates in the work of the Young Leader-

ship Cabinets. That not only vastly overstates the leadership abilities that are installed as a direct consequence of that participation but, even if one were to accept your figures (and "thousands" is a vast overstatement, Jeff), it still represents only the thinnest of veneers.

You and I do agree, I am certain, that those same graduates of young leadership programs represent the future of Jewish leadership and, for some, its superstars. But, Jeff, we can no more parachute a young leader into the top leadership of our communities than we can do that to the old; there must be training, experience, and an understanding that communal leadership is vastly different from running one's business or foundation.

And I definitely agree that we have created "unfulfilled expectations" for those who aspire to leadership arising directly out of the reality that "there is no definition of leadership and there is no rational human resource management system." This in turn leads to another reality: that "happenstance often determines progress and placements." So, our system would be well served if we immediately developed a set of rational, self-evident standards for leadership—standards that encourage commitment, learning, and creativity and that do not discourage criticism or even timely constructive opposition as our current "go along to get along" system so often does. We also need a true mentoring process (which I think may go a long way to ease the pain of "making way"). In my own leadership roles, I have had the privilege of serving with, and promoting to even higher leadership levels, young men and women who have demonstrated by deed rather than word their abilities to serve as role models for those both older and younger than themselves. It can be done.

We must have solid measurements that ensure that those who lead us, young or old, appreciate not only the big picture and the big idea but also the pointillism of policies and consensual governance and bureaucracy, which too often seem not only to elude our leaders but also to leave them bored, dazed and, ultimately, disinterested. The bureaucrats and technocrats who are too often the professional leaders of our communities today

have either helped create or perpetuate just the maze that often forces the lay leader with big ideas into a box from which he or she cannot emerge. The result is that the big ideas are tossed aside as that leader charges up one blind alley after another; boldness and risks are not taken for fear of offending, and whimpering substitutes for the bold statement and concept. That "laser-like focus," you and I agree, is critical and is lost as the eyes glaze over from the flood of paper and the burden of not just building consensus, but of building unanimity. Our institutions today too often function more out of fear of the new than out of courage and passion; what true "leader" wants to participate in them? The leader who can focus and "be more aggressive on the strategic developments in the changing world of Jewish communal life" has to take the long view. He or she has to understand that, in today's Jewish communal world, decisions can no longer be made as one does in one's business or private foundation but that one can still put forth the bold vision and the big idea and fight for it and gain satisfaction from the fight, recognizing that one will not always win.

If one views Jewish leadership as a journey rather than a destination, one can take satisfaction in putting forth ideas in the hopes that others will coalesce around them and that then they, together, can bring a new vitality to Jewish life and leadership in a world that cries out for both. And isn't that what leadership is all about?

Regards,

Richard

* * *

April 7, 2000

Dear Richard:

I believe we are now getting at some of the core issues that both unite us and separate us in our views regarding the governance and management of the precious enterprise. We agree that "our system will be well served if we

immediately developed a set of rational, self-evident standards for leadership—standards that encourage commitment, learning, and creativity and that do not discourage criticism or even timely, constructive opposition as our current ‘go along to get along’ system so often does. We also need a true mentoring process.”

What are some of these standards that we might seek? I recently received a copy of one person’s view of “followship.” Perhaps, if we explore what this author suggests a follower needs, we will better understand the standards required for leadership.

I Will Follow You, If You...

- Treat me with respect.
- Inspire me with your vision.
- Teach me.
- Be tolerant of my mistakes.
- Talk with (and listen to) me.
- Allow me to grow.
- Don’t give up, or change course arbitrarily.
- Have the courage of your convictions.
- Tell me the truth, and practice what you preach.

You also state “the bureaucrats and technocrats who are too often the professional leaders of our communities today have either helped create or perpetuate just that maze that often forces the lay leader of big ideas into a box from which he or she cannot emerge. The result is that the big ideas are tossed aside as that leader charges up one blind alley after another; boldness and risks are not taken for fear of offending, and whimpering substitutes for the bold statement and concept.” I wonder whether we are not witnessing a time of negative synergy in which the combination of process-oriented professional and unaligned lay leadership leads to the prevailing Jewish genetic disease of our time: consensus building! Consensus worked effectively when our movement was that, a movement: a mobilization to fulfill life-saving activities in the context of massive agreement about the prevailing issues and solutions. With those crises resolved and with contemporary issues, while critically important, being less dramatic, the

consensus culture needed for successful mobilization becomes the albatross around our collective communal neck. We fear noble failure so we do not take the bold steps. We move toward the safest approaches, those that garner the least negative reaction.

Richard, are we perhaps dueling the age-old question of whether the times make the person or the persons make the times? Has our very success come because of the dramatic times in which that success occurred or are we impeded by that culture? Similarly, are you too quick to blame the technocrats for creating the culture, or in fact, do the technocrats reflect the culture that has been created within the context of normalcy? Further, why would a bold professional leader want to take on the challenges of changing such an entrenched culture involving so many people? I recall when I was considering joining the New York federation, I consulted a serious leader, who ultimately became a president of the federation. He described my job as the second hardest in New York after the Mayor. He said you can either do nothing, which after a time will be discovered. Or you can do what needs to be done. And, with every success, you will erode parts of the very power structure that gives you the ability to do your job until your success will have totally eviscerated the power structure. While I did not find that formulation to be exactly true, there were numerous times when in making changes, I had to confront unhappy volunteers who lost a piece of their portfolios (or power) with the statement, “Either let me do my job or fire me.”

Richard, as always, I look forward to your response.

Warmest wishes,

Jeff

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April 24, 2000

Dear Jeff:

Thanks so much for your letter of April 7. I thought I would take a break from some meet-

ings that have brought me to Jerusalem to sit on my terrace here, overlooking the Old City, and respond to your well-focused letter.

I love the “standards of followship,” and while I have given some thought to supplementing those with several more (e.g., a sense of humor, evident commitment, etc.), I decided instead that if I ever ran into a leader possessing all nine of the “standards,” I should just say *dayenu* and leave it at that. In an era of Jewish life that is too often characterized by the finesse, the attitude that “I will tell you what you need to know to make the decision I want you to make,” the backdoor deal, wouldn’t it be great if we could inculcate all leaders with the cited standards?

We have to grow a new leadership, find those currently leading our system who demonstrate the standards, and allow them to mentor those who will follow them in meaningful ways. I have written to you about my sense that there is only a “thin veneer” of real leadership; you have responded with criteria for defining leadership, Jeff, that would further reduce the number of those who might be eligible. And if one adds in the nine criteria of “followship,” I’m not sure we would have any who would qualify. Those conclusions appear to me to be as applicable to professional leadership as they are to lay leaders.

With regard to the maze one enters in consensus building, I couldn’t agree more with the “negative synergy” running rampant in Jewish organizational life. An unfortunate example arose two weeks ago at the United Jewish Communities Owners’ Retreat in Washington. A series of questionnaire answers with regard to “stakeholder ownership of the system” gave rise in certain instances to responses with either a 75 percent positive or negative response rate. Yet, because there were wide swings in the “opposition” votes, the consultants found that a 75 percent vote did not represent consensus. Even more dangerous is the current use of “consensus” as a weapon by some lay and professional leaders to delay, obfuscate, and even prevent the “successful mobilization” of our system so critical to change, to the development of new policies, and to

responding to new opportunities. We are witnessing a tragedy, and it appears no one is doing anything to forestall it.

In your penultimate paragraph, you raise some extremely provocative questions:

- “Are we perhaps dueling the age-old question of whether the times make the person or the persons make the times?”

Certainly, over the course of the history of our communal institutions, the issues of the day have often inspired our leaders to rise to the occasion. In our own lifetimes, with the birth of the State of Israel, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, confronting Jewish poverty in our cities, freedom for Soviet Jewry—leaders emerged and took courageous stands, with distinction. Those were the days of “mobilization to fulfill life-saving activities in the context of massive agreement about the prevailing issues and solutions,” as you have so well characterized that bygone era, and they certainly helped make leadership all the more easy. This leads me to your next question.

- “Has our very success come because of the dramatic times in which that success occurred, or are we impeded by that culture?”

Interesting, in the context of developing the “case for giving” at Campaign/FRD for the UJA Federation’s 2001 Campaign, our professionals are lamenting the fact that we seem to lack a “cause”! The aliyah from the former Soviet Union, the potential aliyah from Argentina, the reality of the real occasion of the aliyah of Cuban Jewry—these are not enough. The struggle to provide free day school education to every Jewish child who desires it; the struggle, once again, to fight Jewish poverty and spousal abuse in our midst—these are not enough! And as the federation system is asked to embrace Birthright—that is not enough. And what about basing that campaign on Torah, on those values and traditions that have sustained community around the Jewish world throughout history. Why can’t that be enough?! So, yes, I think we are

impeded by a culture that has not dealt with the current realities, even with the "warning" that Israel is on the cusp of peace while in the midst of some degree of prosperity (notwithstanding the 600,000 who live below the poverty line and the government there being so fixated on the peace process and on building and sustaining their coalitions). We had better stop looking for crises upon which to frame our incredible financial resource development efforts and begin to respond to the new philanthropic models that are all around us.

- You ask whether I am *"too quick to blame the technocrats for creating the culture or, in fact, do the technocrats reflect the culture that has been created within the context of normalcy? Further, why would a bold professional leader want to take on the challenges of changing such an entrenched culture involving so many people?"*

You know me, I am quick to judge and with a rarified and too often misplaced confidence in my own judgment, I am often wrong, as well. I see no reason why, if you accept my definition of "technocracy," a bold lay or professional leader cannot say, "Wait a minute, this far and no further." Jeffrey, if one views the "entrenched culture" as incapable of being changed, then all will be lost. I have always found great challenge in changing people's views. If we go back now to "followship," the lay or professional leader who exhibits those characteristics that you and I might define as leadership, will, in leading others, bring them along, and the result will not be the "evisceration" of extant power structures but, instead, the building of new ones. What could be more exciting than that? Sure, in that construction, there will be those unhappy volunteers who object and often in visceral ways. A strong lay-professional partnership can, I believe, overcome those challenges. Today, we are finding the response to attempts to implement change to be to "refer to committee," "let me get back to you on that one," or "we have to

process this, we'll get back to you." That would sure discourage me.

Jeff, *Chag Pesach Sameach* to you and your family. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Warmest regards,

Richard

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April 28, 2000

Dear Richard:

It strikes me that the spirituality of Jerusalem mellows you as your letter of April 24th finds me in more agreement than we have had to date. I totally concur with your additions to the "Standards of Followship." A sense of humor is absolutely critical for survival in the field.

I would, however, question whether we have only a thin veneer or whether we have not effectively recruited, trained, promoted, demoted, and fired, both on the lay and on the professional levels. I have both experienced and observed that where there is positive synergy between true lay leadership and first-rate professionals, each side influences the other for greater achievement. Similarly, we all know of situations where there is negative synergy. Inadequate professionals attract inadequate board members and visa versa, with the institutional constituents being the ultimate losers.

I think your responses to the questions that I've raised reflect the kind of thoughtful contextualization that is needed in true leadership.

I have given a great deal of thought to your question of whether we can base a campaign on Torah and on those values that have sustained community throughout Jewish history. I would argue that doing so, indeed, can be enough. We have so saturated our giving market with crisis that we have failed in having it understand the opportunities that exist when external crises do not dominate the land-

scape. Think about a campaign based on those core Jewish values that have sustained us:

- *B'tzelem Elokim*—the concept that each human being is created in the image of God and therefore has infinite value.
- *Tikkun Olam*—healing the world—our responsibility every day to partner with God to make the world a little better.
- *Ahavat Yisrael*—love of the people Israel—a building of a sense of peoplehood that transcends borders and has us connect to one another like the family that we are.
- *Medinat Yisrael*—rebuilding our home in Israel—continuing the miracle that we have been a part of in partnership with the citizens of that State.
- Think of how our homes for the aged and family services could benefit from a successful campaign based on the differences that they make in sustaining the core principle of *L'dor v'Dor*—from generation to generation. We provide our children and our children's children these values and the teachings of our people that have sus-

tained us through the grimmest of times and carried us forth as a people.

We are the people of the Book, the people of the Land, and the people who recognize the power of community—of *Clal Yisrael*. Indeed, perhaps we have reached a time in which we must stop selling the sizzle and must start recognizing that the beef rests within our core beliefs.

This leads us to return to the question of boldness. Are we indeed bold enough to turn a corner? In this era of Jewish affluence and influence, of unprecedented normality for the third of world Jewry that lives in North America, can we turn the corner in which we say that we no longer need to be on a mobilization footing or look over our shoulders? We can and must reinvent our Jewish communal institutions to look ahead with focus and a vision to a Jewish life built on the principles of our past and firmly rooted in the confidence of our future.

Warmest wishes,

Jeff