

STOP WORRYING. . .JUST DO IT!

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In a time of continuing recession, the Jewish community is suffering from stagflation. Our current malaise stems from our inability to articulate and communicate a coherent vision of Jewish communal organization—a vision of a community not only of continuity but also of meaning and caring. To respond to the challenges of the 1990s, we must develop a new synthesis based on the principles of mission, engagement, resource development, intelligent decentralization, and coalition building.

In the wake of the continuing recession, a strange and unanticipated phenomenon seems to have gripped Jewish communal life. For lack of a better term, call it our own version of stagflation. Simultaneously, we are being faced with increasing overseas and domestic responsibilities, and decreasing human and financial resources. Rather than being energized as a community to respond to crisis, we seem fatigued and overwhelmed. Despite the financial achievements of Operation Exodus, there is a sense of malaise in the air. All of this comes, ironically, at a time of some of our greatest collective triumphs as an organized American Jewish community.

Throughout agency and federation circles, discussion of salary freezes and cutbacks and budget shortfalls dominate our conversations. Just when the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey calls for renewed commitment and a restatement of mission, our communal enterprise is mired in a series of seemingly unavoidable decisions that may weaken even further our capacity to meet real human and community needs. A decade of relatively flat community campaigns has left no fat in budgets, leaving no recourse but to eliminate programs and personnel. A serious recession has left many communities reeling from the combined effects of economic and overseas pressures.

With many lay leaders frustrated and many professionals insecure, we have every right to ask: What happened to our opti-

mism. . .our belief in ourselves. . .and our commitment to the future?

Our community structures seem paralyzed, waiting for the knock on the door bringing us the well-known Jewish telegram: "Start worrying. . .letter to follow." We have become frightened of budget deficits, of administrative overhead, and of long-term commitments. As a result we have adopted strategies of downsizing and limited response that in their narrowness and caution may cause us to miss the truly historic opportunities of our times..

THE 1980s: A PERIOD OF STAGNATION

Fund-raising research consistently shows that, as a Jewish community, we have not adequately engaged in "capital" formation: the development of the next generation of leaders and contributors. Apart from Operation Exodus, our most successful recent communal financial strategy has been endowment fund development, not the annual campaign. Although critically important both communally and financially, philosophically there is a defensive edge to this strategy. While we actively seek to hold onto the wealth of an older generation, we are inadequately developing strategies that will mobilize the present and future generations of contributors (Cohen & Ritterband, 1979). We are not engaged here in an either-or debate. All of our financial streams must be connected through a broader sense

of vision as we balance our energy and integrate our resources of human and financial capital.

Although we applaud the fact that our annual campaigns grew in total dollars during the 1980s, we often fail to compare those results with inflation and the general growth of American philanthropy. Between 1981 and 1989 philanthropic contributions in the United States grew from \$55.5 billion to \$115.9 billion — an increase of 109%. Furthermore, donations to religious causes grew by a whopping 150%. In contrast, during this same period the UJA/federation campaigns grew only 48%, barely keeping pace with inflation (Cohen, 1989).

The 1980s was a decade when the U.S. economy expanded dramatically, partly in inflated dollars. Philanthropy as a percentage of the Gross National Product went from 1.8% to 2.23%. Individual contributions continued to make up more than 80% of these donations (“Giving U.S.A.,” 1991).

The UJA/federation campaigns are heavily dependent on large contributions. In 1989, for example, 5% of the \$795 million campaign came from 1.6% of the 898,000 contributors (Kosmin, 1991). Put another way, whereas during the 1980s the number of contributors giving between \$0 and \$999 increased only 7%, the number giving over \$100,000 increased by 80%. Total campaign dollars increased by almost 48%, but per capita giving increased substantially only at the \$100,000 level (Council of Jewish Federations, 1989).

These statistics indicate that our current financial difficulties did not happen all at once. They have been creeping up on us in the last decade, camouflaged by the continuing success of major gifts campaigns, our historic ability to respond to crisis (as in the Operation Exodus campaign), and our unwillingness or inability to do more to create a broadened base of continuing support. We have accepted too readily myths about our ability “to take care of our own,” and we have done far too little to educate and

develop the next generation of communal leaders (Bubis, 1992).

REINVIGORATING OUR SENSE OF MISSION

I am convinced that an important reason for our current malaise lies in our inability to articulate and communicate a coherent vision of Jewish communal organization. Increasingly, professionals speak to each other about issues defined by technocrats and managers — about computers and market segments, about balance sheets and telemarketing strategies. These business-driven conversations are often disconnected from any political and social analysis of community development or the deep personal and institutional networks that give our communities life and vibrancy. And when we do discuss the emotional impact of the issues with which we are engaged, we fail to understand how to communicate that emotion in an enduring way and how to use it to strengthen communal cohesion.

Our “business” is building community. We do it by serving people with very real needs: emotional, physical, educational, and recreational. When we cut back on services, it is people who suffer. In a period when every year more and more children grow up in homes with only a single Jewish parent, the lost opportunities for the next generation are growing exponentially.

So how far do we take our business analogies? What is our product, and how do we sell it? If the community is our client, as we traditionally have thought, how do we restore healthy growth? Business efficiency is necessary to our complex communal organizations, but it should never obscure our real business. Companies may fail and be replaced. A community that fails does not necessarily get another opportunity to regenerate itself.

We must **stop worrying and start doing** again! How to do that is an appropriate communal debate. For most of us engaged in the helping professions predicated on delivering services to people in need—helping

to ameliorate and empower—the 1980s did not give us much to cheer about.

To reinvigorate our sense of community mission, we need to be guided by “new old” statements about the contemporary meaning of a covenantal community united by faith and even a messianic vision—a community that in biblical times tithed and left the corners of the fields unharvested for the gleaners, disciplined itself to restrict excess and ostentatiousness, and had a Jubilee year when debts would be forgiven. We have much social wisdom in our tradition to transmit that still relates to today’s complex, imperfect world.

Our charge is to develop a community not only of continuity but also of meaning and of caring. We should go beyond liberal and conservative politics to talk about a broader common social agenda. Even when we do not agree on specific policies, we need to recognize that there is authentic Jewish authority behind all of our viewpoints and a common agenda in the pursuit of justice. We have surmounted differences in perspective to forge broad-based support of Israel. We have an equal responsibility to work together on the social agenda of our society.

Seven years ago, William Kahn (1985) examined these issues of social justice in his keynote address to the Annual Meeting of the Conference of Jewish Communal Service: “*Jewish Communal Service and the Professional Today and Tomorrow*”:

We Jews have a history of compassion and social justice. We understand what it is to suffer, to be persecuted and humiliated, to want a better life for our children. . . . Therefore the Jewish communal worker must guide the Jewish community in the tradition of coalition—building. . . and must be aggressive advocates of positive action and use their skills to engage the lay leadership. . . . Professionals must think about and speak out on issues and must educate lay leaders so that they understand what the Jewish community has at stake in the domestic, political, and economic arena (Kahn, 1985, pp. 111-117).

The debate we are engaged in may be less about “what” we should be doing than about the “how” of action. For years we have given lip service to calls to broaden our base in the areas of fund raising, volunteering, decision making, and participation. Now we are downsizing our operations just when the needs for service delivery, fund raising, education, and social action are the greatest. What we once did instinctively because it was part of our shared culture now must be taught and professionalized if it is to be sustained.

Furthermore, what the Jewish community once pioneered, other groups in America now often do better in terms of technique and technology. Although our social service delivery systems continue to set standards for excellence, the same cannot be said about our community organizational structures. Management guru Peter Drucker (1990) writes eloquently about the Girl Scouts of America as a model nonprofit organization. Why? Because it is an organization that is not only well managed but one that involves vast numbers of volunteers in a process of human change—a transforming process both for volunteer scout leaders and for participating scouts. Through training, public service, and the transmission of shared values, the organization carries out a defined mission in an enormously cost-effective manner. Lives are altered, citizenship is enhanced, and many both inside and outside of the organization benefit.

The Girl Scouts agency is a model for effective volunteer organizing that is very familiar to those of us who work in the Jewish community. We did blaze trails in the creation and development of lay-driven, professionally managed, nonprofit service organizations. We have an obligation to ask ourselves whether we still play that leadership role and whether we are still handing down that legacy and in what form.

Throughout America the central “umbrella” community campaign is under tremendous pressure. Ethnic diversity and fragmentation threaten old civic coalitions,

and economic recession has strained fundraising resources. Yet, at the same time, some wounds, such as William Aramony's excesses and poor judgment in leading the United Way, are self-inflicted.

As a Jewish community we created the concept that one gift could serve many causes both weak and strong; that a voluntary community could develop the wisdom to allocate scarce resources; that collectively we could do more good than we could do individually. This is not socialism, but simply social responsibility — one for another.

How do we take on such a task in a seemingly endless period of shrinking resources and declining expectations? Clearly by recognizing that, although change is inevitable, heritage and values can be eternal. The complicated task is to negotiate the changes while preserving the historic and necessary sense of mission. We can overcome our malaise only by reasserting what we know best — by doing more, instead of talking about why we must do less.

In part this means analyzing and understanding the environment, and in part it means sensing the real opportunities that are being presented. Through population studies and environmental scans, we know more now than we ever have about who is part of our Jewish community. Do we have the skill and the courage to understand the meaning of these facts? Can our institutions respond effectively to the realities of intermarriage, single-parent households, alternative lifestyles, dual careers, and the unaffiliated, unattached, and untouched? For years many astute theorists have agreed that the traditional integrating forces of the American Jewish community — anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and Israel — would not serve future generations in the same way. What have we done to redefine ourselves as a community in order to meet the future with a sense of meaning and purpose?

To attract future generations of leadership we need to get on with the business of redefinition and retooling. Barry Shrage

(1989) writes thoughtfully about new partnerships between federations and synagogues needed to pursue an agenda that encompasses both learning and service, not power and control. New people will be attracted to our institutions because of what those institutions do now — not because of what they once did for others in a different time.

There is still a great hunger for a community of caring that offers a sense of meaning. To create that community we need to look again at the roles played by organizational strength and volunteer and professional competency. Human talent is still our most precious commodity. We now have the ability to enhance that talent through powerful and increasingly affordable technology. How we merge the human and the technical is an area of great challenge.

As an example, for a number of years we have had the ability to enhance participation by using computerized data bases to track the skills, interests, availability and even the personal schedules of our volunteers and community activists. To assess service delivery, these systems can be used to measure a service's impact, identify its gaps, and even evaluate its results. In the same vein, modern telecommunications and videotape technology has greatly enhanced our ability to circulate Jewish films and resources to communities of every size. Teleconferencing not only saves hours of travel but also involves large numbers of people in the decision making and governance of our institutions. Interactive data linkages connect people and resources in undreamed-of ways. The key is not simply employing the technology but uniting these tools with the fundamental notions of human change, community development, and Jewish mission that undergird our work.

The 1990s will be the decade of the "information society" and "knowledge worker." Bureaucracies will start to remove layers in the middle, and old-fashioned command and control systems will

not be able to compete with more flexible systems that can adjust more rapidly. Complex problems will increasingly require multilevel strategies and more elaborately defined notions of community networks and structures. Computers will continue to provide even more power to individual professionals to gain access to knowledge, make decisions, and generate change. This environment will provide a great opportunity for the flexible Jewish organization that can become a catalyst and a convener and for the lay leaders and professionals who can use technology, gain access to information, and become a source of positive energy and initiative (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

A narrowly defined fund-raising agenda cannot create the levels of participation that this new environment demands. Volunteers and professionals want meaningful participation, whether it is in direct service or in matters of governance, policy, and decision making. Too many of our institutions have too often conducted themselves as the private domain of a few, rather than as public organizations that are governed in trust for the community as a whole (Elazar, 1980). Because governance issues are usually complex and arcane, they are rarely discussed widely. Yet, only by opening up can we take advantage of the available and greatly needed technical and human resources.

American Jews have developed a unique lay-professional partnership in our federation systems. When it works, that partnership is a source of remarkable strength and community influence. Like high-spirited teams of horses, forward motion can only be generated when those teams work in tandem, pulling in a coordinated and purposeful way.

Lay and professional leaders need each other as mentors and teachers, guides and confidants. As a new generation takes charge, these unique relationships must be communicated directly to new, emerging leaders. Without this transmission, confusion, distrust, and defensiveness often replace an effective and supportive synergy.

In a recent American Jewish Committee study of Jewish communal leadership (Ukeles, 1990), at least half of the comments of both volunteer leaders and professional staff expressed *negative* views about the volunteer-staff relationship and cited problems stemming primarily from *role confusion*. How strange this seems for a voluntary system that is still viewed by outsiders as an incredible demonstration of resourcefulness, self-reliance, and continuity.

Setting straight the lay-professional partnership must be at the core of our effort to retool and redefine our work. It is too superficial, and clearly incorrect to state that lay leaders set policy that the professionals then execute. Policy development and execution are shared and interwoven tasks.

A NEW SYNTHESIS

In defining an operating framework to respond to the challenges of the 1990s, a first step must be to accept the fact that we can and must do our work differently. If we are waiting for the recession to pass and for the clarity of the old ways we think we remember to be restored, we will wait in vain. It is time now to accept that some fundamental changes have occurred and to create a new synthesis for our work based on the best of our tradition — Judaic, communal, and professional — and the new realities of our times (Drucker, 1989). Crucial elements in this new synthesis are (1) mission, (2) governance, (3) engagement, (4) human resource development, (5) “intelligent” decentralization, and (6) coalition building.

Lay and professional leadership must work together to clarify and redefine in useful and specific terms the mission of each of our agencies, as well as our federations. This is not a one-time task. Mission statements must be reviewed and refined as part of an ongoing process. Only by looking at our work openly, thoughtfully, and with regularity can we be sure that we are meeting the needs of our communities.

Too often, issues of governance are not given the serious attention they deserve.

Our agencies are public trusts, established to meet human needs and to further communal and Judaic purposes. Those who govern our agencies have both a sacred and a historic role to play. Board members can only fulfill this role when they have a true sense of ownership and are engaged in policy development, not micromanagement.

We all share a mythic sense of the past—how it must have been in “the good old days.” Nonetheless, we must not assume that the history and ideology of our institutions are being transmitted by osmosis from one generation to the next. This transmission must be carefully orchestrated and must be open for discussion and interpretation. This process is a crucial part of *engagement*. More must be done to engage our lay leaders and our professionals in the historic work of our institutions and in the evolution of that work for a new generation. This engagement should not only include policy development but also Jewish education and enrichment. Both volunteers and professionals become involved in communal activities because of what they can do for others and what they can gain for themselves. The more we create an enriching, learning atmosphere that meets the needs of those who are involved with our work, as well as those we serve, the more successful we will be in creating true participation and ownership.

The new synthesis relies greatly on human resource development. Whether on the lay or the professional side of this equation, our recent past seems to be filled with stories of effective people who were “burned out” or “turned off” or “turned out.” For a community that is so concerned with involving the next generation, we have done a poor job of listening and not a very effective job of educating and engaging. Supervision, mentoring, and personal growth opportunities should be built into our institutions for both lay people and professionals at all levels. Implementing such a philosophy requires resources, talent, and some new ideas, but above all, there must be a fundamental commitment to “doing.”

Human resource development means “investing” more in teaching, supervising, and training. More specifically, it means not only valuing people over the long term but also looking at our structures to see how we can open up more avenues for participation in decision making and ownership. Our narrow hierarchical organizational pyramids are inadequate structures on which to build. We need to investigate how to decentralize and empower our communities and our institutions. Doing so will entail quite a few risks and require a lot of trust, but it will be essential to unlock those opportunities to generate power within our systems.

Our times clearly call out for leadership that can help our communities transcend traditional institutional barriers. Jewish family services, Jewish Community Centers, synagogues, schools, and organizations need to rally around and support one another. There must be a sustained effort to develop coalitions and joint projects, to put turf wars to rest, and to openly discuss joining forces to develop a community of meaning and of value. The only way to do so is around specific programs and initiatives—cooperative ventures and even entrepreneurial ideas that demonstrate our ability to think and act creatively and to involve new people and new expertise. We should be sharing technology and expertise, as well as educational resources. Social services should be delivered in synagogues, as well as storefronts; Jewish children should be educated wherever they can be found and by the best and most talented people we can find. Our seminaries and institutes of higher Jewish education should be active in the community, not reserved for a small and removed elite.

Federations and community relations agencies must make a commitment to developing public forums and inclusive community planning initiatives. Creating volunteer-based community service projects should be an ongoing part of our strategic thinking.

Obviously, forging consensus in an open

environment is a demanding, perhaps impossible task. Yet, perhaps we do not need consensus as much as we need more public dialogue to shape our agenda and more projects to energize that public so that we move from talk to action. If we live in fear of controversy, what hope do we have of engaging our next generation? It is only when we stand for principles and actions of fundamental importance that we will command the honor of our youth. Respect is earned, not simply given, and we need to work harder in these difficult times to demonstrate that we are still a community of great stature, capable of providing leadership for the future.

Any ideas for greater participation require an ongoing commitment to their funding. It is here that our resources seem most strained. For too long we have talked about broadening the base without seeing the task as integrated into a comprehensive community organization and community development strategy. Our new donors are more sophisticated and more demanding. They want information and "hands on" participation. The key to success in working in this environment will be to define linkages between donor participation and social change—between funding and results. Working with a variety of funding sources, we will need to integrate these streams and communicate communal priorities and directions for change. Then by associating major donors, foundations, and groups with those initiatives, we will be able to leverage both giving and participation.

Doing so will require sophisticated thinking and planning and a much greater sharing of information among lay and professional leaders. It will mean doing endowment and grant development, planned giving, and annual campaigning in an integrated fashion; it will mean seeing fundraising staff as community development teams, fully aware of our planning and allocation structures and the impact of their work on service delivery issues. In this way "donor designation" — our latest

buzzword — can work on behalf of our communities. When donors are involved in issues that are identified as community priorities, they will feel more not less empowered, and their resources can be mobilized to provide that power of social change.

CONCLUSION

In the long run we will be judged by both the details and the overall results of our work. How well did we work with one disabled child? Were we able to help a young immigrant or comfort a widow in grief? How passionately did we transmit the meaning and variety of Jewish life? Did we teach by example the need for concern with the fundamental issues of our society? What were our priorities, and how much did we engage our communities in public discussion and dialogue?

Calls for change are always long on slogans and rather short on specific actions. The issue is not simply dreaming about what should be done. For many of us, the fundamental issue is creating the community "know how" — the organizational technology — to make our dreams into a reality. The test is in "the doing," not in the "talking about doing."

There is an action agenda in our work that can attract and excite a new generation. It can be "high tech and high touch" at the same time. Moreover, it can be an agenda filled with caring and meaning — with generosity of spirit and hope for the future. By building this kind of community we become again models of pride and resourcefulness, of independence and interdependence. It is a contribution we make proudly as a Jewish community to the tapestry of American life.

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