

THE FUTURE OF THE PROFESSION

A Lay Leader's Candid View

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The future growth and vibrancy of Jewish communal service will depend in larger measure than ever before on how lay leaders and professionals work together as a team to set the agenda of communal life. By providing relevant and valid information that is integrated with the Jewish heritage and tradition, professionals play a crucial role in enabling lay leaders to consider new options and risk new approaches to meet the challenges of today's rapidly changing environment. Professionals also play a vital role in the development of future lay leadership.

It is indeed a privilege for me to share my concerns and perceptions as a lay leader about the future of Jewish communal service as a profession and of professionals in Jewish communal service.

In preparing this article, I found myself in much the same dilemma as 10 years ago when I addressed a local symposium of Baltimore Jewish communal professionals. To be candid could be construed as "chutzpadik." To be less than candid would negate my purpose. Then, as now, candor won out—out of respect for you as individuals and for the covenantal mission we hold in common—the continuing development of a strong, vibrant, and independent Jewish future for *Klal Yisrael*.

My role is neither prophet nor prognosticator, but rather provocateur. Although I raise issues and express opinions, I have few "quick fixes" or solutions, for today's issues defy simplistic approaches and unidimensional responses. Therefore, consider my comments as a point of departure for further discussion and debates on the definition of roles and responsibilities, expectations, and aspirations.

A diversity of needs, new and often diffi-

cult client groups and subgroups, new modalities of service, varying terms of service of lay leaders, continental and international issues and concerns affect us almost daily. Once we could feign lack of information; today communication is swift, continuous, and relentless. Multiple issues bombard us, lay leaders and professionals alike. Yet, professionals are charged with responding immediately, imparting information quickly, setting systems and programs in place, and evaluating the responses to see if they are efficient, effective, and beneficial to both people and systems.

As a lay leader I recognize that the "developing crisis" as the Council of Jewish Federations (1987) titled their personnel study has already developed! The crisis exists, and the need for qualified professionals grows daily. We need more professionals in service delivery, as well as professionals capable of managing systems in flux, systems with huge budgets facing possible reductions in income while demands grow. The acknowledged shortage of qualified professionals may mean hiring from outside the traditional structures, and some have done that already. Indeed such action may help dispel the declining respect for professionals in Jewish communal service. When "alternate-track" professionals, who are often accomplished and successful in their original careers, enter the field, they show a sense

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of confidence that a future exists, both financially and professionally, in Jewish communal service.

The spate of recent resignations and firings is not symptomatic of ills limited only to Jewish communal service, but rather of greater societal changes in personal expectations, the desire for power, and the redefinition of roles and relationships. These changes have manifested themselves in the home and the workplace, in the political arena, in corporate suites, and in voluntary associations. They are not necessarily system dysfunctions, but realignment to today's realities, both human and material.

Our response as a community has been to study, to appoint a task force or commission in an effort to develop a neatly packaged and manageable infrastructure, one that is more often predicated on the past than attempts to embrace the future. There are no precedents, no texts, and in fact there is a lack of concurrence among lay leaders and professionals as to what is needed and how we should redefine our systems to be relevant to today's needs.

In this current state of confusion, professionals play a key role. You, as professionals, should blend the history of our common heritage with the knowledge, skills, and experience of your profession to enable lay leaders to consider new options, to risk new approaches as we address new challenges and changing options. You must help educate lay leaders to the fact that we cannot neatly package human needs and services for we serve people—men, women, and children—who do not always fit into neat pigeonholes.

To be certain that I understood what the term "professional" means, I consulted *Webster's Deluxe Unabridged Dictionary*, second edition. As an adjective, *professional* means "engaged in, worthy of, the high standards of a profession. Having much experience and great skill in a specified role." As a noun, a *professional* is a "person who makes some activity, not

usually followed for gain, such as a sport, the source of his livelihood."

To be judged a "profession" requires a discrete body of knowledge and skill and an articulated value base that differentiates the professional from others. I do not believe that Jewish communal service today is a profession. Rather, it is an interdisciplinary field in which numerous professions have adopted a structure that enables them to blend various disciplines into a shared future, based on a shared heritage and shared values. In my communal experience I have met many qualified professionals experienced and skilled in such diverse areas as human resource development, public relations, media, education, fund raising, business management, and social work, to name a few. All of these professions that are necessary for our diverse systems and for the development of a vital Jewish community require administrators and executives who can successfully manage highly complex systems.

Our communal mission has remained the same since Sinai—a covenant for Tikkun Olam, for repairing this imperfect world, for ensuring a Jewish future—and only the formulation and configuration have changed. The future growth and vibrancy of our mission, much more than the mere survival of our people, will depend in larger measure than ever before on how we conduct our mutual business, we lay leaders and professionals together. More than ever before, creativity and vision must be fostered from within. We are no longer dependent upon external forces to help set our agenda. We have come of age and can set our own agenda, a somewhat unsettling phenomenon.

We are, for better or for worse, no longer solely responsive to memories of the Holocaust, nor do we revel in the rebirth of Israel. We have an internal, somewhat self-indulgent approach to our agenda. And more often than not, the greater goal of the enhancement of Jewish life is ignored or forgotten for the sake of organizational or personal gain.

The communal structure we have inherited is a voluntary one by design, forged out of relationships between lay leaders and professionals. What is different today is that we have multiple options, much latitude in determining what to do and for whom, and a much more sophisticated, informed, and demanding laity. We have the challenge of shaping our destiny, of articulating a vision that is attainable. You professionals, as members of the communal team, must play a major role in assisting us to arrive at decisions based on valid, relevant, and current information fused onto our tradition and heritage. You are, as Gerald Bubis stated, "*Klei Kodesh*—holy vessels" (Bubis, 1978, p. 10), and we lay leaders look to you for guidance as we make our decisions.

My personal description of the lay-professional relationship is that of a team, not as partners. Partners may have minority or majority shares, may pull away, or remain immovable, but a team can only proceed and progress if all produce, if all participate, and if all know the game plan. Tensions and temper flaring in the now perennial lay-staff discussions will not be resolved by a consultant's prescription alone. There needs to be a *modus operandi* for each team, which is discussed and interpreted and which recognizes the individual personalities of each member. Too, the work of the team must be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. It was certainly easier to be the chief professional officer when lay people were less informed, and not as entrepreneurial, when lay leaders did not hold professionals accountable as they do today, when community responsibility was based on altruism, and when agendas were clear. It was easier when budgets were in five or six figures, not in eight and ten; when staff numbered not more than 20 to 30; and when volunteers were volunteers and not lay leaders.

I subscribe to the theory that lay leaders set policy with the informed advice of the

professional, and the professional implements the policies so determined. I do not see that role definition as a power play or authority of one over the other. As a lay leader I scrupulously avoid interference or intervention in the daily management of the agency. My responsibility as a lay leader is to develop policy in keeping with the mission of the agency, convey and interpret the policy and attendant decisions, and leave the implementation and management to the chief professional officer. It is to that officer that I look for proper and effective management, and it is that officer who is held accountable for implementation and administration. The watchword today is accountability. Although the reality is that the chief professional officer serves at the pleasure of the lay entity, however defined, few lay leaders delude themselves that they can achieve their personal and organizational goals without competent professionals. That recognition should be public, and the freedom to function as a professional must be exercised. Lay restrictions on the professional will also have a deleterious effect on the organization and the services provided.

The complexity and diversity of today's communal agenda challenge leadership, both lay and professional, to keep pace with rapid and continuing changes. As a lay leader, I look to professionals to keep me informed, to clarify the history of tradition, to define the options as well as the implications and ramifications of each, to challenge my perceptions, and to engage in discourse when you disagree with my opinion as I will engage in discourse with you.

Because Jewish communal service is different from general civic, cultural, and academic service, it requires its own criteria and standards for professionals and for effective lay leaders. Today's lay leader, as well as today's professional, is expected to be Jewishly informed, au courant, and responsive. I look to you to develop future leadership, both lay and

professional. You have a vital role to play in that development, for many Jews will touch the Jewish community only through you and your services. You are therefore engaged in community building, as well as service delivery. Opportunities for growth and upward mobility are primarily in your hands, although lay leaders should also be involved in that team effort. When an organization lacks informed and effective leadership, it is often the professional who perpetuates that state. The professional controls the flow of communication and often sets the agenda, two vital and powerful tools. It is my firm belief that the most effective organizations are those where lay leaders and professionals are both strong and dynamic.

I would urge you to assist in minimizing turf battles and to return to the high ground of building the community, the *Kehilla*. The energies directed at turf issues deplete vital resources that would be better used to achieve communal and global objectives. Help us articulate our special relationship to Israel. Help us develop some order in national and communal agendas. As an example, everyone is rushing headlong to the Soviet Union to buy or sell Yiddishkeit. There is no discipline and little coordination. It is you, the professionals, who should help lay leaders, in their eagerness to be involved, to act in a disciplined manner. The missions of agencies and organizations have a tendency to become all encompassing, often to the detriment of their core agenda issues. Your experience can help contain unbridled enthusiasm by identifying those entities already engaged in those issues and by focusing on your particular organizational mission or by collaborating with other groups with similar agendas to yours.

What does the future hold? Major efforts are being directed at enhancing professional service in the Jewish communal field through more effective recruitment, training, salary review, retention, and continuing education. Major efforts must be made by lay leaders and professionals alike to pro-

mote the positive aspects, the special responsibility, and the expertise evidenced in Jewish communal service. The status and position of professionals must be enhanced and recognized. The salaries at the top of the communal ladder are reflective of both the complexity of today's agenda and the laity's appreciation for competent and dedicated professionals. However, disparities between responsibilities and salary level remain elsewhere in the field.

More than ever, I am mindful of the position of Dr. Lloyd Setleis (1989) who wrote, "No matter how effective lay action may be in particular short-term situations, it is the professional who carries the continuity of the organization in the fullness of its past, present and future—in all its dimensions as a viable social instrument of the Jewish community." Because of that belief, more than before, you will have to prove worthy of the trust and responsibility with which lay leaders invest you.

The future of our Jewish community and *Klal Yisrael* will in fact be shaped in great measure by you, although you may not be in the forefront or limelight. It is you, the representatives of the continuum of Jewish communal life, who must help transmit the values, the heritage, the tradition, and importance of community. You must assist in clarifying the role that you play in a society in flux, a world in turmoil. You must encourage lay leaders to address difficult issues, to share concerns sooner rather than later, and to risk change when circumstances change. As each generation before us, we have a challenge hitherto undefined, uncharted.

You, Jewish professionals in Jewish communal service, are our interpreters and managers in the new "civil religion" as identified by Dr. Jonathan Woocher—"a system of shared beliefs and public rituals defining and symbolizing the nation or polity as a moral community" (Woocher, 1986, p. 14). The deliberations of the 91st Annual Meeting will determine in large measure the configuration of the 100th An-

nual Meeting. As an optimistic lay leader who knows and respects your knowledge, your talents, your commitment, and your dedication, I know the 100th Annual Meeting will celebrate a vibrant and positive Jewish community, an integral part of *Klal Yisrael*. And because of you, tomorrow's vision will have become a reality.

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