

The World, the Workplace and the Worker*

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THE continued vitality of the Jewish community center concept is evident from the fact that more than one-third of the Jewish communities served by Centers have recently completed, or are now planning, some form of JCC capital expansion. At a time when communities are making difficult choices about how dollars will be spent, this expansion is particularly significant.

Yet, the ability of Jewish community centers to fulfill their missions is being jeopardized by the lack of a sufficient number of highly qualified leadership professionals capable of providing the kind of efficiently delivered, sophisticated service our communities demand. The complex task of developing and maintaining a quality professional staff is ongoing and is a topic to be carefully considered both by professional and lay leaders. This paper will provide background for these considerations and will highlight developments in three areas:

1. General societal factors as they impact the JCC and its professionals;
2. The Jewish community center environment;
3. The professional and what he or she brings.

In other words: The World, The Workplace and the Worker.

I. The World

A. Economics

Current economic conditions are

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subjecting not-for-profit institutions to extraordinary pressures. Until recently, inflation in general, and spiraling energy costs in particular, have diverted dollars from staff and service lines. In 1970, Jewish community centers spent 62 percent of their budgets on staff salaries.¹ By 1981, even with budget increases, the dollars allocated to professional salaries dropped to 50 percent. In effect, we have relatively fewer staff, and (or) they are being paid salaries which are less competitive.

Moreover, current U.S. government policies place an added burden on the private sector to provide, and pay for, services previously assumed by the federal government. This has affected and will continue to affect allocations to functional agencies by central funding sources (Federations-United Ways.)

B. Women

The changed and changing place of women in our society has affected a variety of areas that impinge on Jewish community centers. Women today have many more employment options. As a consequence, they are less likely to seek or remain content with dead-end jobs. This takes on special importance for community center staffs where, in the past five years, the ratio of women to

¹ Emanuel Berlatsky, "An Analysis of Trends in Jewish Community Centers: 1970-1972," in Koppman, Lionel (Ed.), JWB Year Book 1972. New York.

men has increased from 50-50 to 60-40.²

Other aspects of the significant entry of women into business and the professions are: 1) the small number of women available for volunteer work, and 2) the impact of a two-career family on potential mobility. These factors will be discussed in the following sections.

C. Mobility

Over the years, most Centers have benefitted from an available corps of trained professionals in other North American Centers. In fact, upward mobility in the Jewish community center field is often possible only if an individual is willing to move to another community. Several factors have combined to slow down this movement. The first is the slightly increased tendency of professionals to stay in the same community. A working spouse, particularly one with a career of his or her own, is often an impediment to movement. A family must now consider the impact of any move on overall family income.

Beyond the family income, more young families are making what they consider "quality of life" decisions that also affect mobility. Such decisions may be based on a pre-disposition toward the location or climate, or the inclination to put down roots, or the desire to remain near one's friends or family.

Perhaps the most significant factor in mobility reduction has emerged only recently. Current high interest rates make buying and selling a home difficult. This has dramatically increased the cost of any move since the interest differential may equal \$10,000 or more. Some communities have responded by pro-

viding mortgage assistance to newly hired executive directors. Such assistance has not generally been forthcoming for those below the executive position. Unless conditions change or communities modify their approaches to professional hiring, this mobility limitation will have serious long-term consequences for the field.

D. Attitudes Toward Career and Work

Most observers of the college campus report that student attitudes today bear a marked resemblance to those of the 1950s. There is a concern with "making it" and careers are being selected on the basis of salary opportunities. The recent drop in enrollment in schools of social work is, no doubt, reflective of this attitude.

There is also some evidence that as a society, we are undergoing a change in attitude toward work. In a study called "American Workers Evaluate the Quality of Their Jobs," authors Staines and Quinn compared data from a 1977 survey with similar studies made in 1969 and 1973.³ They found evidence of an overall decline in all components of job satisfaction in all segments of the work force for that eight-year period. They suggest that the most likely reason is the raised expectations workers have for their jobs.

II. Workplace

The Jewish community center environment itself contributes to its attractiveness as a place in which to work and perhaps to career selection as well. There are aspects of the Center's environment that deserve special attention. They are:

² "Current Statistical Reports—Professional Salaries and Employment in Jewish Community Centers and YM-YWHAs," JWB, New York, 1977 and 1982.

³ Graham L. Staines and Robert P. Quinn, "American Workers Evaluate the Quality of Their Jobs," *Monthly Labor Review*, January 1979.

- A. The Changing Nature of Lay Leadership
- B. The Nature of the JCC's Mission
- C. Working Conditions

A. Lay Leadership

The nature of Jewish communal lay leadership has changed over the last two decades and these changes have affected the JCC environment. Consider the following:

1. Twenty years ago, most individuals who served in key Federation positions previously served on boards of constituent agencies, a good deal of the time in JCCs. Interpreting to funding bodies the importance of JCC service was easier because lay leaders had a familiarity with the service. Today, there has been an increased tendency for Federations and UJA to draw lay people from the community at-large. This tendency is often most expedient from a fundraising standpoint, but carries with it a drawback. Individuals who are now making decisions do not have a sense of community history, an insight into functional agency goals and objectives, and a knowledge of relationships.

2. More and more lay leaders are individuals who are either in the professions or are employed by others. Twenty years ago there was more of an entrepreneurial flavor to the leadership. In my opinion, that leadership had a greater capacity to fund a particular service in which an individual might be interested.

New leadership has brought with it an orientation which tends to focus much more on how efficiently the service can be delivered rather than on the nature of the service itself. Frequently, today's lay leaders do not come with an orientation that provides them with an understanding of lay-professional roles. They, therefore, may come with unreal expectations as to their own respon-

sibilities and those of the JCC professional staff.

3. Finally, with the increase of women in the workforce, women have devoted correspondingly less time to decision-making volunteer work. This has made it more difficult to fill key committee assignments. Conversely, women now have increased opportunity to rise to top leadership positions. Those who have done so have frequently been professional volunteers with the ability to devote significant time to their positions.

B. JCC Mission And The Nature Of Its Work

The Jewish community center has, with increasing success, sought to be what its name implies. A *Center* which is *community* focused and *Jewish*.

A *Center* where people of all stripes within the Jewish community can meet each other and develop appropriate services to enhance and enrich their lives. As such, it has enormous potential for community building.

Community focused—The Center's community focus is both conscious and growing. Its pivotal place within the community enables it to identify unserved populations or newly developing needs. Thus, it can reach out to serve these, both within and without the Center's membership structure. Then, too, the community has turned to its Center to be the coordinator and operator of major community-wide programs.

Jewish—The need to give new meaning to a vigorous approach to Jewish education in informal settings has produced a range of innovative and exciting services and programs that continue to make the JCC a stimulating place in which to work.

The mission statement alone suggests a professional staff that is Jewish in commitment and knowledge, skilled in

the planning and delivery of a broad range of social, cultural, educational and recreational services and imbued with an understanding of community and a determination to strengthen it. That alone would be a formidable demand on a group of professionals, but, in addition, Center workers have had to staff an agency which is increasingly complex and is likely to become even more so.

The demands on executives for cost efficient service delivery, for containing energy costs, for fundraising and for integrating a continuous flow of new information from fields as diverse as marketing, insurance, data processing, and money management have forced them to delegate functions to others within the agency. The result has been that staff at all levels is asked to do things at an earlier stage in their career development. Further, the same time pressure has meant that elements such as supervision, evaluation and training which heretofore served as a quality control, are often dealt with superficially. As a consequence, professionals are frequently not as prepared as they should be to fulfill key assignments.

Thus, the Center as an institution demands much of its professional, but it has a mission that is attractive to individuals who wish to work creatively with people, and, more particularly, who wish to do so within the Jewish community. What then are the conditions under which the professionals work?

C. Working Conditions

Two factors come immediately to mind: hours of work and remuneration:

To be effective, a Center must operate at times when it will be most accessible to the Jewish community. This requires both evening and weekend work, which in turn, places additional strain on the families of the JCC professional.

It also brings professionals into conflict with prevailing notions about "time to do one's own thing." The situation is severely exacerbated by current JCC salaries most particularly, but not exclusively, at the entry level. Jewish community center entering salaries for individuals with an MSW or a Masters in Jewish Communal Service in 1981 was \$14,000.⁴ As such, this is not competitive for many of the quality individuals who might wish to devote themselves to careers in the Jewish community center. Federation beginning salaries, for example, averaged some \$2000 to \$4000 higher. The low entering salaries are, in some ways, understandable. Center lay and professional leadership are under constant pressure to balance budgets and the temptation to spend fewer dollars for professional staff is great. Some communities have opted for hometown individuals (who are often untrained) as a means of budget balancing. Since these individuals are often willing to accept lower paying positions, there may in fact be short-term fiscal advantages to this approach. The long-term effect is the reduction in the number of qualified and experienced persons prepared to assume middle-management and executive positions, to say nothing of the resulting lack of cross-fertilization of ideas and the quality and vitality of the service being delivered.

III. Worker

There are some 2000 professionals employed full time in the Jewish community center field. Who these people are, their attitudes, aptitudes and aspirations, play an important part in determining future employment patterns.

⁴ "Current Statistical Reports—Professional Salaries and Employment in Jewish Community Centers and YM-YWHAs, 1982." JWB, New York.

A. Background

Today's JCC professional comes from a different socio-economic background than his/her predecessors. A generation ago, for many, if not most, individuals entering the field, social work represented a means of moving into the professions, a step up in society. Today, most candidates for the Center field come from middle and upper middle-class backgrounds. They bring with them different expectations as to what constitutes adequate remuneration for work done. They also have access to family and friends who represent an alternative source of employment opportunities at salaries greater than those being offered at the Center. The number of competent middle management professionals who have opted for higher paid business opportunities has increased significantly in the last two years.

B. Education

Though, as one might expect, JCC professionals come from a variety of disciplines, by far the most widely held advanced degree is the MSW (and Masters in Jewish Communal Service). Current employment patterns would indicate that though the field is more open to individuals with degrees other than MSWs, the MSW will continue to be the most prevalent degree in the next decade. The individuals entering our field with this degree, however, are and will be, different than they were a generation ago.

The welcome introduction of graduate level management courses into social work and Jewish communal service curricula will enhance the ability of these professionals to fulfill their roles as administrators. But, perhaps the most significant change is one involving Jewish commitment. Today's professional is

more committed Jewishly and somewhat better Jewishly educated than his predecessor of 20 years ago. In fact, I believe that a generation ago many people came to the Jewish community center field out of a commitment to social work principles. In contrast, today's men and women are entering schools of social work because of their desire to work with, and for, the Jewish people.

C. Attitudes

In a recent study of attitudes of Jewish Center workers, author Don Scher found that 40 percent of those responding to the questionnaire indicated that they intended to leave the Center field in the next few years.⁵ While Mr. Scher cautions against overgeneralizing from his sample, and while not everyone who indicated they intend to leave will actually do so, the figures are still significant. In part, they may reflect the dissatisfaction noted above in the survey of worker attitudes in the country at large. Indeed, two of the reasons for wanting to leave the Center field were lack of professional satisfaction and lack of advancement. What is particularly significant, however, is that the most often cited reason for wanting to leave the field is poor remuneration.

D. Sex Distribution

Some six years ago, 50 percent of the professionals employed in Jewish community centers were women. Today, that figure has risen to 60 percent. In small part, this shift reflects the larger number of professionally trained women available to the field. Of greater significance is the fact that fewer qual-

⁵ Don Scher, "A Study of Selected Characteristics of A Group of Professional Jewish Community Center Personnel," Association of Jewish Center Workers, May 1981.

ified men are applying for what they consider low paying positions.

This sex distribution has already worked to reduce the number of qualified middle-management and sub-executive individuals available to move to other communities. Don Scher found that 74 percent of the males in his sample indicated a willingness to move. Only 34 percent of the women indicated they would move to pursue their Center careers. On the other hand, one important benefit to those communities which have employed professionally trained women is that they are more apt to have the services of these workers for a longer period of time.

IV. Implications

The Center field has been successful in attracting a number of professionally trained leadership individuals who are turned on by the challenge of service to the Jewish community. Our challenge is how to increase the number of these people and retain those in the field who can continue to make an important contribution. As noted, there is a variety of factors that make this easy to discuss but difficult to achieve. To do so will require an ability to think new thoughts and build on the strengths we have. The following are some of my notions.

A. Each individual Center must see itself as an important part of a wider field

Though the temptation to opt for short term goals is great, Center leadership must recognize that long term, self-interest dictates that each Center see itself as part of a larger field. To do so will help Center lay and professional leadership give greater priority to more competitive salaries, to recruitment programs designed to attract committed new professionals, and to a greater

focus on those activities designed to retain staff. This is not "pie in the sky" thinking.

Sixteen communities are currently participating in JWB's Executive Development Training Program, which is designed to prepare qualified sub-executives to become competent executives. The selected JCCs whose staff is participating in this program are helping, in part, to fund it despite the almost certain knowledge that in all but a handful of cases, the individuals will become executives in other communities. This recognition of responsibility to the *total* field will serve to increase the supply of available qualified executive candidates. A similar mind set is needed in all of our Centers.

B. Recruitment

Each Jewish community center must see itself as a recruitment outpost for the Center field. Almost every community has, as part of its day camp, resident camp or part-time staff, individuals who are looking for the kind of exciting challenge the Center field represents. Staff and lay leadership time devoted to reaching these individuals and encouraging them to consider the Center field, when augmented by a graduate school scholarship program, will not only help each Center grow its own crop of professionals, but will also produce candidates for the total field.

JWB has a national scholarship program designed to attract candidates with leadership ability and to stimulate the development of locally sponsored scholarship programs. This summer, six communities will join JWB in an experiment to encourage young people to choose the JCC field as a career. The targets of this endeavor are the camp counselor staffs in these communities. Eventually, it will be helpful to establish such an approach in each Center.

C. Making It Possible For Professionals To Move

New efforts will have to be made to attract professionals to communities. Some of these can include:

1. Finding jobs for spouses—If, in fact, there is a continuation of the trend to recruit professionals who are part of a two-spouse working family, more attention will need to be paid to making use of the many community contacts available to JCC leadership to seek a position for the spouse of the center professional.

2. Some arrangements will have to be made to provide mortgage assistance to the professional below the executive level who wishes to move. Here, too, communities may opt to use communal dollars for this purpose or involve lay leaders skilled in real estate and financial management to seek solutions that may not require the use of community money.

D. Women

Though they have entered the field in increased numbers in recent years, women still represent a comparatively untapped human resource. The use of such programs as the Wurzweiler School of Social Work's Block Program, which provides for field work in the local community and classwork on weekends or during the summertime, enables individuals who are less mobile to obtain a professional degree. But, equally important will be the Center's commitment to equal pay for equal work and its ability to provide job sharing opportunities and day care support that will permit women to work, if they wish, during child-rearing years.

E. Supervision-Evaluation

Efforts designed to help a professional succeed not only provide an at-

mosphere conducive to staff retention, but also serve as a quality control. It may be easy to get agreement that a consistent pattern of supervision and evaluation are important ingredients to maintain a successful operation. Yet, all too often, the pressures placed on supervisors to assume more and more complex tasks mean that supervision tends to slide. Again, an atmosphere that recognizes the value of regular supervision, and of systematic evaluation for everyone (including executives) creates a sense of purpose and pride.

F. Continuing Education

An investment in the continuing education of professional staff nets dividends not only in the maintenance of a quality professional staff, but in staff morale as well. Important as morale maintenance is for all professionals, special attention needs be given to the long-term employee lest he or she become stale and work in routine fashion.

Nor does continuing education necessarily require an expenditure of significant amounts of dollars. The use of lay leader skills in Jewish education, in accounting, management, etc., can be a creative and effective solution.

G. Recognition and Socialization

Recognition accorded professionals by both professional and lay leaders serves as a valuable retention tool. Sometimes the recognition should be in the form of tangible rewards, but just as often, the understanding support by those individuals with whom the professional works is important. There is an implication in this for the greater understanding by lay leadership of their roles and responsibilities in their JCC volunteer capacities.

Another aspect that deserves special attention by lay leadership is the op-

portunity to help introduce new professionals into the social life of the community. The reputation of a community gains for being warm and hospitable, and it assists efforts to attract and retain professionals.

The Center has always been, and continues to be, an exciting and demanding place in which to work. The

vitality of the Center's mission as a place where the Jewish community provides for itself a range of social, cultural, Jewish educational and recreational services, continues to grow. Whether we can continue to meet the challenges depends on the investment we make in developing the professionals who will help lead our communities tomorrow.

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