

WCJCS: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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Professionals must be recognized as true partners with lay people in leading the community. To achieve this recognition, the WCJCS must go beyond its historic role as a quadrennial gathering to advocate for a more developed role for professionals, and its name should be changed to reflect this new mission.

At our last WCJCS conference in Jerusalem, our teacher and colleague, Alice Shalvi, gave a moving plenary address. She described how her commitments and motivations have inspired her throughout her career, even at times when her work was not recognized or compensated at the level it should have been. She spoke of the impact on individuals and communities, of the work of Jewish communal service, of the work of those who have labored selflessly and tirelessly to make an important difference. Our careers have meaning because we as communal servants must make personal sacrifices to achieve these lofty and worthy goals.

As always, Alice Shalvi was inspiring. Yet, I found myself quite bothered by the message. For in essence, her message was that those who work for the Jewish community are its servants and destined for a life of noble suffering. The words were powerful, but the message wrong.

It is my conclusion that the time has passed for Alice Shalvi's approach. Those who work for the Jewish community must no longer define themselves as servants. Rather, we are professionals. We bring indispensable training, specialized skill sets, leadership commitment, and vision.

In today's world at large, the need for professionals is unquestioned. Who would accept education, medical care, government, judicial systems, and businesses from servants? Yet in much of the Jewish world, one who chooses to work for the Jewish community is still treated as a servant of the community, rather than a professional partner.

A different understanding of the role and

image of the Jewish professional is not simply a thinly veiled attempt at self-aggrandizement or a bid to gain recognition. Rather, it acknowledges a changed Jewish world.

Jews are sophisticated and educated. Jewish identity is complex, and Jewish life is demanding. Jewish people and Jewish communities need institutions that reflect their sophistication and can respond to their needs with agility. They need and deserve professionals with appropriate training who understand what makes Jewish life distinctive.

The challenges facing Jewish communities today require new modes of thinking. Jewish life is challenged from within and without. Formal affiliation is diminishing as Jews choose to identify in ways as varied as at any time in Jewish history. There are more formal and informal options for participation in Jewish life—made available by the existence of Israel, the Internet, and international connections—and simultaneously there are more forces allowing passive assimilation. There are real threats to our very being and even more to our well-being.

These changes are no longer "news." Yet too many communities have not adapted to them. For example, all too often, if one inquires about how many Jews live in a given community, one is provided only formal "affiliation" numbers, rather than the total population. Leaders bemoan their difficulty in generating involvement from younger generations, but do not comprehend that the younger generation perceives their Jewishness in very different terms. They may be very Jewish and care deeply, but reject the stultifying structures that control access to

resources and decision making. The strategies of many communities are built around historic memories and political realities; they are "ancient history" to those who have relocated to or have more recently come of age in those same communities. These are universal problems—marginally different from place to place but affecting all—in the United States, Israel, Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific Rim.

There are still too many communities on all continents that retain a vision of Jewish life that reflects the concept of a single and monolithic community. This may have been necessary in post-Napoleonic Europe or made sense in the 19th century and in the first generation after World War II, but no longer works today. I recently visited a European city and was told by the "official" representative that there were x,000 in the community. Later I learned that there were two other synagogue organizations, and the total affiliation of all three added up to less than one-third of the number of self-identified Jews actually living in the area. While the official told the truth, his count reflected blinders that can prevent that metropolitan Jewish population, which is in fact growing, from reaching its real potential.

A new and growing challenge is to determine how to respond to two unanticipated problems: the horrific resurgence of anti-Semitism and economic dislocation. What public policies should apply to individuals or individual communities? Should international Jewish funding be made available only to those who wish to go to Israel? Should institutions in communities at risk be supported, or should public policy dictate a strong encouragement of relocation? What role should international Jewish leaders have in advocating with individual governments or regional polities?

Institutions that function under the assumptions of a bygone era respond to yesterday's challenges and are not agile enough to respond to tomorrow's. Volunteer leaders who achieved their role with the assumptions

of past communal structures often do not understand the challenges of the new issues.

Adapting to a quickly changing world requires trained leaders and not simply reactive ones. There have been very heartening and successful attempts to provide for such, including the Goldman Fellowships, L'Atid, Wexner Heritage Program, and others. In communities where there are graduates of these programs, both lay and professional, we see new visions, new structures, and new understandings. We see a growing respect for the professionals and a new and viable compact between lay people and professionals. These communities, which have adapted progressive ideas for community development, education, social structures, and leadership development, can be found on every continent.

Lay leaders need professional partners. This concept, that Jewish communities need Jewish professionals, has not been accepted by all. There are still those who argue that strong professionals will disempower the volunteers. They believe that only volunteer lay leaders can empower lay involvement and commitment.

This position reflects a misunderstanding of the essential nature of the relationship between professionals and volunteers. This relationship must be built on partnership. Partners recognize that there must be a division of responsibility based on who does what best. Where there is a partnership, volunteers participate with the professionals in setting policy, advocating internally and externally, and involving others in the life of the community. Volunteers and professionals develop a shared vision and use their skills and influence to strengthen the community. In my experience, this partnership produces a healthy mixture of social services and educational opportunities; it ensures that the community has the ability to respond to crises and to build a future built on positive values.

When we advocate for recognition of the key role of professionals, we must also insist that the volunteer continues to play a vital

role. In fact, one of the hallmarks of a good professional is the ability to be a good partner and to maximize the effective participation and leadership of volunteers.

I have experienced the power of this partnership in my own career. As the head of Hillel's international operations, I consulted extensively with governments, communities, and international organizations. During a visit to one city, I learned that a new facility had recently been made available to the students, but that there was no infrastructure or commitment to maintain it. The students had lots of energy, but they had no board, no ongoing financial support, no professional, and no perspective on what was needed. My assessment of what would work called upon my professional experience in many other communities. Because of this work, I was able to partner with a lay leader in another country who did a great deal of business there. His family had just committed \$1,000,000 to a student center in his home city. I was able to help leverage this connection so that the business leader persuaded the community where he did business to find funds to support the student center. If we had not worked together, building on my experience and his influence, this simply could not have happened.

On another occasion in a very different locale, several student groups were quite committed to working together, affirming the diverse reality of their daily existence. Yet they were convinced that the local leadership would never endorse or support this "pluralistic" model. All of their experience had taught them that there was simply no way that groups representing different kinds of religious connection or ideological conviction would be allowed to set up shop together under one roof. When I was asked to consult to solve the problem, I learned that the students' perceptions were wrong. The community leadership was open to the idea, but had no knowledge of working models that might be applicable in their setting. In the absence of a professional to whom to turn, their own stereotypes and biases were reinforced.

When a larger vision was presented to both sides, reflecting an understanding of demographics, marketing, and examples from elsewhere in the world, the students and community organizations shifted gears and began developing a venture never seen in this country before.

Yet, professionals themselves are not exempt from shortsightedness regarding professionalism. At a recent workshop on mission setting I conducted for agency executives in a very large American city, it became evident that very few had considered the centrality of their own staff in articulating and implementing their agencies' missions.

Affirming professionals means valuing professionalism. This implies standards of behavior, a code of ethics, respect for the field of service disciplines, and an understanding and acceptance that work exists in larger contexts.

A mark of professionalism is ongoing study to keep abreast of new developments. Medical doctors need continuing training throughout their careers; attorneys must earn a certain number of continuing education credits to maintain active status in the local bar. Psychologists, accountants, and academics all actively participate in professional growth opportunities. That is what it means to be a professional.

Professionals and their host communities all benefit from regular, systematic educational growth. Educational systems, social service agencies, and other communal agencies are more effective when they are led by up-to-date professionals.

Information exchange and networking are a corollary to this professional development. Therefore, conferences and in-service opportunities continue to be crucial and indispensable. While it is true that cyberspace allows much more sharing than ever before, some research shows that people only use this information and resource *after* they have had in-person connections. There are still too many places that consider conference attendance to be a luxury. It is imperative that

organizations budget for training and conference attendance as part of their core operations.

Similarly, professionalism means accountability and evaluations, standards, and benchmarking. These tools are increasingly used in the private sector and in much of the not-for-profit world. These too reflect a respect for shared knowledge and improvability of organizations. These practices cannot be implemented without solid and respected professionals.

Thus, we envision a new and broader role of a newly renamed World Council of Jewish Communal Professionals (WCJCP). The traditional role of providing international *networking and information sharing* should assuredly continue. In addition, WCJCP should do the following:

- become a constructive *advocate* for the values and benefits of trained, respected, and appropriately compensated professionals in communities throughout the world
- make lay and professional *leadership* throughout the world aware of consultative services where experienced professionals can be made available to help address local needs
- disseminate current *best practices and standards* developed by various disciplines and fields of services to lay and professional leadership
- become involved in the various associations and fields of service so that professionals in those associations understand the *international context* of what they do
- disseminate information about and perhaps help find funding to increase participation in *training opportunities* and conference attendance

While based in North America, I have had professional experience in Israel, Europe, and Latin America and have worked closely with professionals in much of the rest of the Jewish world. Over the years, I have seen noticeable and welcome changes in the attitudes and circumstances of many lay leaders and professionals.

In some circles, the ideas in this article are considered *muvan me'elav* (well established and obvious). Yet in too many places they are still considered controversial or disruptive to local ways of doing things. There is still much to do to achieve full recognition of the key role of professional leadership. It is for this reason that the World Council must go beyond its historic role as a quadrennial gathering to advocate for a different vision of communities and a more developed role for professionals. The name change, therefore, is not merely symbolic, but one that suggests a greater, more proactive role in enhancing Jewish life throughout the world.

RESOLUTION

Whereas the nature of Jewish communal life has been evolving to respond to profound changes and challenges; and whereas the need for and role of those who work for the Jewish community has grown and developed from those who serve to those who provide professional direction and whereas the role of the association which represents all fields of Jewish communal service has grown and will continue to evolve to provide support and direction to those who work for the Jewish community and whereas the name of the organization should reflect these changes. We propose that the World Council of Jewish Communal Service henceforth be the World Council of Jewish Communal Professionals.