

by the effect upon the preservation of the many unspecialized programs and by the relationship of these particular specialties to the core function of our Centers. The totality of our services—which is the sum of the traditional leisure-time services, the socialization and recreational services, the formal and informal teaching services, the Jewish experiential activities, the pursuit of the cultural arts service, the specialized preventative and rehabilitative services and whatever else may be included in the table of contents of any of our Centers—is governed by the physical and financial resources made available by members, consumers and community. Until these resources become unlimited we will be called upon to set priorities and make choices of what should be added, what should be substituted, what should be retained and what should be dropped from the Center manual. More and more it will be necessary to cull out what we consider to be our basic functions, and this may change from time to time. To make these decisions more difficult, as many other good institutions, we have developed over the years a reputation for quality workmanship in some of the “merchandise lines” we carry. If our profit incentiviveness is to continue to be the relevancy of our services, like all good enterprises we may have to discard something even at the height of its success, for there may be more pressing needs emerging on the horizon which we are uniquely designed to fulfill.

The same principle of choice will apply in determining the staff that will be needed, and the design of the staff structure. Today the staff of our Centers are different from what they were in years gone by and there is every reason to believe that staff with different training, different commitments and different

skills will be needed in the future. In addition to professional skills our staff of the future will be required to possess Jewish skills. If we are to deal more and more with Jewish behaviour, Jewish lifestyles, Jewish practices, Jewish issues, and Jewish communal events, our staff will be required to be more competent in these areas in order to give appropriate leadership, direction and “authoritative” teaching, for as we influence the evolutionary interpretation of Jewish halacha it should be done within the context of Jewish tradition and Jewish mission.

The changes which must and will take place will not be easy nor without conflict. Debate over the distribution of community funds will continue to rage and the “fair share” of the community dollar that will be requested by Centers may not be so ample in amount. Ongoing interpretation to community leaders of what the Center is all about will have to increase within the daily dialogues conducted at community planning forums.

The role of the Centers in the future Jewish community may very well take on increased importance. Centers are the place where more Jews come to relate to more of their fellow Jews more consistently. Center services are more influenced by members than are the services of most other Jewish institutions. Our system is one which provides a market place for diverse interests, points-of-view, likes and dislikes and for the fulfillment of diverse needs and aspirations. We provide a setting which is not bound by the holiness of tradition but rather is impelled to fulfill the commandment of relevancy to the evolving Jewish community. These dynamics present direction and conflict, but more important they present a sense of mission and a message that we may be needed more than ever before.

On Working With the Agency Board: A Sometimes Neglected Skill*

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There are also a variety of opportunities within agency program and services to provide opportunity for laymen to experience them directly. The laymen should get a chance to “touch” the youth and see activities in vivo.

One of the most vital roles of executives and sub-executives in Jewish communal agencies is serving as a secretariat, the professionals who staff the board of directors and its various committees. One of the unique aspects of American life is private social agencies and the boards of directors who, ideally, in a caring fashion, shape vital human services. How this special American creation works is largely dependent on the competence of the professional who staffs the board and the other lay bodies.

In the years of conducting institutes for executives and sub-executives on the subject of working with boards, I often will ask, “what is your first association when you hear the term, ‘board of directors?’” The response of participants invariably includes terms like, “Control,” “Hiring” and “Firing,” “Lack of Understanding,” “Policy Makers,” “Conservatives,” “Reactionaries,” “Cigar Smokers,” etc. These associations and perceptions suggest the presence of potential obstacles in effective use of professional self in working with those who are responsible for policy-setting.

It's been suggested that the professional's role with the agency's board of directors is analogous to that of a part-time group leader with the “Tigers Club.” There is one major difference, however. With the “Tigers Club,” the professional's concern is with the Tigers' meeting their individual and group needs. In working with the board or with one of its

committees, the main focus is on the lay body setting appropriate agency policy and is not on the people on the board or committee meeting personal needs. However, we must recognize that people do have needs for recognition, acceptance, being part of the group and exerting leadership. These needs must be met in the normal course of board and committee meetings. Without these psychic rewards or payoffs, people won't fully and freely give of themselves.

In essence, the board is a task-oriented group. Effective boards and their committees require people to volunteer their time and expertise in a responsible and mature fashion. They come to countless night meetings and give generously of their time. If the staff who work with these different policy units are not aware of lay people needing personal gratification from community work or if they are not aware of their own feelings towards lay people, professional effectiveness will be greatly hampered.

We strive to have a professional working relationship with boards and committees. If the professional self-image implies an *inferior* role in relation to lay people, rather than a *different* role, then professional effectiveness will be hampered and may view the coming of a committee meeting with the feeling, “dammit, I have a meeting coming up next week and I don't know what the agenda is going to be, what will we discuss?” We may develop anxiety about the meeting and unconsciously send out the notices late. Our follow-up or involvement of the people may be peripheral and we may rationalize the meeting as being educational since we have not allowed

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the board to get into substantive issues.

The prime function of the laymen serving on agency boards and committees is that of setting policy. Our function as executives is carrying out the policy. It is our role and responsibility to bring the real issues of agency services and their direction to laymen. Boards and committees get educated by dealing with real issues. One of the responsibilities of the executive is to provide background data that allows them to make intelligent decisions. The education of the board and committees comes right out of actually doing the business and work of the agency. If the executive is secure in his work, then he can encourage real decision-making to take place and will have confidence in people making sound decisions, given adequate facts, background and possible alternative courses of action. If, however, he is ill at ease with laymen, feels that they are infringing on his turf and is ambivalent about their decision-making responsibility, then agendas will be uncreative and the professional will give lengthy time-consuming reports at meetings.

There is a fall-off in attendance when boards and committees are not dealing with real issues. There is a direct correlation between lay attendance and the amount of decision-making. When people have been asked to evaluate a board or committee meeting, the highest rating goes to meetings where there has been creative decision-making and discussion. The meetings that get the lowest rating and where attendance falls off are "educational" meetings.

We professionals help the chairperson to learn and develop the skills for conducting effective meetings. In the week following a board or committee meeting, over lunch, on the phone, or in a private meeting, the executive should evaluate the meeting with the chairperson: the decisions and the process. There may have been a dialogue between the chairperson and a member of the committee or perhaps the chairperson responded to every point that was made during the meeting. We would be defaulting in our responsibility and

showing a lack of respect for the chairperson if we didn't help him better understand how he functions. This aspect of our role is unusual because the board is also our employer.

Prior to a board or committee meeting, the executive meets with the chairperson to establish and analyze the agenda, exploring the different facets of the issues. The chairperson is largely dependent on the executive for agenda possibilities. This is understandable because the executive is the logical transmittal belt for the issues and policy needs of agency operation. The executive must have a totally open and honest relationship with the chairperson. A chairperson should never go into a meeting without a thorough review of the agenda. The professional develops agenda with the chairperson, reviews what makes for an intelligent meeting and plans with the chairperson what he hopes will be a meaningful meeting.

When a chairperson says "I don't have the time to meet with you on agenda," we must insist that the time be found. It is my hypothesis that board and committee members have greater regard for their board and committee work and greater regard for us professionals when we have certain expectations of them and help them carry their responsibilities in a mature fashion. Before the first board or committee meeting, we should review with the chairperson a committee job description that spells out the committee responsibility, committee membership, committee structure and duties of the chairperson. A committee job description gives a dignity to the importance of the committee, a sense of what it is all about. We do not want people on committees who are names but who do not attend meetings. Committee members are insulted where there is a "big wheel" on a committee who never attends. His lack of attendance is saying to committee people that they and the task of the committee are not important. Let us consider a hypothetical agenda: the agency's development of a drug program is being considered by a lay body. The professional's role is to help the chairperson and later the committee under-

stand fully what is involved for the agency in providing this service. The professional will encourage the chairperson and committee to recognize that some people in the community will question the agency providing a drug service. He will encourage the chairperson and the committee to consider the community relations and public relations aspect of the total situation. He will point out that sixteen hours of a staff worker's time will be required and that the staff worker will therefore not be able to continue with x, or y, or z service. The agenda is already shaping up as the lay body meets to consider a drug program, e.g., the need for the service, community implications, cost factors, staff resources, etc.

When executives of Jewish communal agencies meet together, they may look at computer systems, they may talk about better maintenance control systems, they may analyze what is going on with United Ways around the country, but a rare item on their agenda is the business of working with boards and committees. Yet a substantial part of the executive's and sub-executive's job is taken with working with lay policymakers. Individual executives have different perceptions in this very delicate area. Some have personal goals or aspirations in their relationships with lay leaders. Maybe they aspire to join their country club or to become social friends. There is a very clear and definable professional role in working with boards and committees but executives must learn to avoid the "minefield."

It is often said that the agency is a partnership of the lay and the professional. To be very candid, I am not sure that it is a partnership. It is at best a dubious partnership if one of the partners can hire and fire the other. This doesn't mean that something is wrong with the relationship. We want to try to understand the very unique relationship of the professional and the lay leader. The proprietorship of the agency is the board of directors and they hire the professional and delegate to him and to the staff the authority and responsibility to carry out the policy decisions they make. He will

interact with them and he will have much input and will attempt to influence their decision-making process. There are very few things that arise in lay decision-making that the executive doesn't have some thought on or preference for what he thinks would be most effective for the agency. But to suggest that it is a partnership distorts the nature of the relationship. At best, let's say that the professional is a junior partner.

The working relationship has separate and distinct roles for each. The professional must examine his feelings toward persons who are in authority. If he does not have self awareness as he enters into this process, he is going to be in trouble. He should have some sense of "am I comfortable with this person; am I at ease with them, am I respected as a social worker, etc." Effective board and committee members are not born or created and one of his jobs is to help them function more effectively.

It is the chairperson's responsibility to contact people regarding serving on committees. The professional does not do it; he will meet the lay chairperson and review with him who he thinks can serve effectively. The people on the committee are accountable to the chairperson and not to the professional. Reminder calls are made for a committee or board meeting (some of us have given up on post-cards because some people check that they are coming and then forget) at least twenty-four to thirty-six hours before the committee meeting. When the people are reminded about the meeting, they are not held accountable to the professional. If the professional's secretary is making the call, she indicates that she is calling for the committee chairperson. The reader may react to this as of little or no consequence. Yet, the follow-up call is actually a part of climate creation. It is a matter of building in a responsibility and accountability to the agency and to the person who appointed them, the chairperson. When lay people take on an assignment, we should expect a mature relating to the responsibility.

The notices of committee and board meetings go out over the chairperson's

signature at least two weeks in advance. The people have time to plan on their calendars and know what is expected of them. Ideally the schedule of committee or board meetings for the year is established at the first meeting. This conveys to people that the committee's work is important and that they are needed.

At committee meetings, I sit next to the chairperson and play a supportive role. During a meeting I may point out to the chairperson that X is trying to get his attention. Sometimes I slip the chairperson a note on something he is oblivious to. Everyone at the committee meeting should have an agenda. The agenda helps people discipline themselves in the meeting. It gives them a chance to say,—“Mr. Chairperson, I notice the agenda does not include such and such which I think should be included.”

We will have people on boards or committees who in their business enterprises are decision-makers and possess substantial power. We find such people relish opportunities for assuming major responsibility. The Jewish community center I direct has a board of elected directors and standing committees. Board members chair these committees. There are several board members sitting on each of the different committees plus people from the community-at-large. We have about four hundred people on our different boards and committees and this provides for substantial community involvement.

There are a number of tasks that come up on committees that cannot always be completed on the spot. A committee chairperson can subcontract out some of the tasks. The chairperson may appoint a subcommittee of several people to work on something or have one member of the committee work with the executive and come up with some direction for the next meeting. When there can be some division of tasks within the committee, people seem to enjoy the opportunity of reporting to the overall committee on findings and recommendations of the subcommittee. This leadership role can be one of the very gratifying and meaningful experiences people can have while

serving on committees.

We can enable our chairpeople to become more effective by teaching them to provide support and recognition to people who don't find it easy to contribute. Our chairperson can learn to sensitively and skillfully call on people who don't make inputs in meetings. Board and committee work is not group therapy but we have learned that the degree of engagement and involvement of a lay person on a board or committee will have a direct bearing on a layman's identification with the agency.

A committee meeting I recently staffed was rather dull but the chairperson was beautiful. At the meeting there was a man who was quiet and rather withdrawn but the chairperson called on him and asked him, “Please give us your thinking on this issue because I know that this is something that you have been interested in.” The person made some brief points and after the meeting this man commented, “It was a wonderful meeting tonight.” He had an opportunity to have some input!

I am suggesting that we be aware of the human needs board and committee members bring with them, having volunteered their services and talents. While committees are task-oriented, there are opportunities to give recognition, to help people experience the joy of being part of a group, to experience peer acceptance, etc. Most communities have an Anglo-Jewish press. One can have pictures taken of committees during the year and thus be interpreting the work of the committee to the community. Some professionals have effectively utilized the daily press to recognize laymen and special committee and board activity. These bring psychic rewards or payoffs that our lay people are entitled to experience.

We should provide opportunities for chairpeople of board committees to report at board meetings. Many reports are mailed out in advance. During the course of the year every chairperson at least once should report on some facet of the agency work for which his committee is responsible. As tempted as I am to make the report in my comments as

executive, I find it is much better if there is opportunity for different people to share with the board some of the things their committee is doing.

There are also a variety of opportunities within agency program and services to provide opportunity for laymen to experience them directly. The laymen should get a chance to “touch” the youth and see activities *in vivo*. Maybe it is to judge an essay contest. There may be some other occasion or “happening” that goes on where we can relate our committee people directly to agency programs in a satisfying fashion: for example with reference to immigrants, committee people can perhaps greet them upon arrival, pour tea at a reception, help them find housing, or attend one of their programs. One agency recently had a day camp reunion and a number of committee members assisted in some fairly menial kinds of jobs. They enjoyed enormously seeing the children and thus were helped to relate all their committee discussions on camp fees to live and vibrant human beings.

There is a strong reciprocal relationship between a board member's identification with the board and the frequency of occasions of interaction. The more strongly a board member is identified with the board, the more frequently will he participate and interact with others on the board. Conversely, the greater the interaction, the greater will be the identification.

The board and committee which meet once every quarter will not provide the same degree of interaction as one which meets monthly.

Boards are made up of individuals, each

with their own personalities, ideas, prejudices and habits. Each member of a board has his own reason for being on the board. To think of a board only as a homogenized group of people is to fail to understand it.

People who serve successfully on one board are often asked to take on new and larger responsibilities with other boards. It is this process of citizens moving in and out of positions of responsibilities which helps to give meaning and tone to Jewish life and trains the leaders who are needed for the qualitative improvement of life.

The boards of directors should have weekend retreats once a year. This allows for depth of participation and of engagement, and a sense of esprit de corps which are excellent for board morale.

New board members should experience a brief training experience. The board member should expect to be informed. Perhaps nothing else so hampers effective decisions as the failure by board members to understand the issues involved. Often the board member who does not really understand an issue hesitates to let the other members know this lack in him for fear they will think him ignorant. Actually, one of the chief rights and responsibilities of a board member is to be informed.

Every board member should assume a specific responsibility, preferably one which reflects his interests and capacities and which, with its execution, contributes to the board's conduct of its business and to the fulfillment of the agency's purposes. To sum up, a good board or committee is not a gift but is the product of some exceptionally hard work.