

Working with the New Breed of Volunteer*

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There seems to be a shared opinion on the Jewish communal scene that there is an inherent difference between our veteran leaders and the ones who have more recently obtained positions of responsibility in our communities. There is a sense that our more mature volunteers, shaped by the most stunning events of any generation—a depression surrounded by two world wars, the Holocaust, and the rebirth of our people, bring to community work a unique emotional commitment. They were a group born of poverty but weaned on *tzedakah*. For them the prevailing question was “Is it good for the Jews?”

Members of the newer generation more likely came out of affluence and were shaped by another series of events: the civil rights and anti-war movements which led to harder questioning of authority and institutions. This skepticism, against the backdrop of an increasingly technically oriented society, has led to an analytical approach which some have characterized as a computer mentality.

This attitude was summed up by Stanley Horowitz, executive director of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, in his address at its 1980 annual meeting:

The orientation of the senior generation began with the heart and was affected by the mind; the new generation begins with the mind and is affected by the heart . . . There is the desire to give—but with a requirement that money is well spent; the desire to solve human

problems—but not just by “throwing money” at them; the desire to support traditional and new agencies and causes—but with the assurance that they are necessary and efficient; the desire to build an outstanding Federation—but with the expectation that it will be active and not passive.

I support these observations, but I also think we get off track if we (a) assume these differences are a generational matter; (b) use them as an excuse for our own failure to respond to changing professional requirements; or (c) don't try fully to understand what is causing an increasing number of lay leaders to be highly result-oriented, looking first to the bottom line, and appearing less emotionally connected to our work. If we understand these developments, we may begin to influence them.

I start with the working principle that the differences between the older and newer styles of leadership are not as great as we have made them out to be. I realize that there are veteran leaders with some of the traits associated with new leaders and vice versa, and consider that there may be a number of features of our society of today to which all of us are responding, regardless of age and regardless of the workplace.

1. There is a greater questioning and demand for accountability in government, the professions, and elsewhere.

2. We live in a time when family patterns are changing dramatically and when members of an extended family no longer have the opportunity to share experiences, to grow and mature together.

3. Our demographic picture is changing. People no longer grow up together in a

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neighborhood, see each other become successful and together become involved in community activity. There isn't therefore a reservoir of mutual trust which helps develop what we think of as a "community."

4. Our leadership may believe that our communities have achieved a level of sophistication which enables us to deal with more difficult questions.

5. This is not a time of lush economic growth but rather of diminishing opportunities.

Whether these or other factors are responsible for the change, we are left with the undeniable fact that as professionals we have to respond to a changing style of leader: one who is more demanding; who wants proof and statistics; who demands objectivity; and who uses modern business techniques.

A Look at the Business World

Before examining how we might respond to these changing characteristics, it might be instructive to take a look outside our usual sphere and into the business world, where much of this thought seems to have originated. It appears that in recent years a new business approach has emerged, which has a tendency to look more closely at the bottom line. Short-term profit at the expense of long-term growth has fostered a sense that one cannot afford, strategically or financially, to think of what might be best five or ten years down the road. Many in the corporate world believe that the short-term, bottom-line reports have become the tool of a distant management to detect daily ups and downs, but which don't have the ability to create a better corporate life any more than such a focus in communal life can substitute for individual, close-up, hands-on guidance. We cannot allow our communities to be measured by the equivalent of these short-term yardsticks. We are in it for the long term. Our communities are forever.

Douglas Bauer wrote¹ that there is an unprecedentedly fouled atmosphere haunting the executive suites of corporate America. Top managers are being dismissed more frequently, with more publicity, and after much shorter tenures than ever before. Dr. Eugene E. Jennings, of the Graduate School of Business at Michigan State University, notes a more than doubling of the firing rate of presidents and CEO's in the period 1976 through 1980 over the prior four-year period.²

Undoubtedly some of the firings in the corporate world, just as in our field, are due to the individual's inability to measure up to the requirements of the job, but Bauer observes that there are newer forces at work: ". . . company leadership has grown increasingly quick to change its mind and direction, to lose patience with problems and confidence in those charged with solving them."³

But even in the business world, some are beginning to notice changes, perhaps changes which signal a balance that we might all seek. Michael Maccoby is director of the Harvard Project on Technology, Public Policy and Human Development. In his study of leaders, he notes a change from the gamesman style of the last 20 years. According to Maccoby's formulation, the gamesman has been considered the ideal leader. "He or she controls subordinates by persuasion, enthusiasm or seduction."⁴ The gamesman focuses on the individual and welcomes opportunities for the "best" to reach the top. In a time of economic growth, the gamesman was a successful leader. In the current period of

¹ Douglas Bauer, "Why Big Business Is Firing The Boss," *The New York Times Magazine* (March 8, 1981), p. 21.

² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Merry Falconer, "Power Versus Participation: The New Leadership Style," *Leadership*, Vol. 1. No. 4 (1981), p. 18.

diminishing resources, the gamesman's style has serious limitations. He can no longer control with promises of more, and his lack of compassion for those who aren't the "best" becomes apparent.

Maccoby goes on to describe the new "ideal leader." This is the person who brings out the best in a *group*. "He inspires cooperation, making a team of winners rather than a group of workers, of whom only a few will rise to the top."⁵ The ideal leader is concerned with the individual's self-development, he is more tolerant and flexible, and is willing to share power. While these descriptions were developed in the business world, they fit politics equally well, and have a good deal of meaning for us.

A Few Observations

Having described the issues and problems, now let us make a few observations and suggestions.

First, we, as Jewish communal professionals, and particularly Federation professionals, must become knowledgeable—if necessary, as expert as our laymen—in the management techniques of the day. We must have enough understanding to know which management techniques are right for us and be strong enough to employ them; but also to know when they do a disservice to community development. We must be able to discuss them from a knowledgeable and credible standpoint.

We're being told that we ought to run our agencies more like businesses. Most of us bristle at that thought. We know that our agencies must be fundamentally human service-oriented, and that we are human service providers, not business-people. I think this has created, in some of us, a rejection of management techniques in any form. My own sense is that we ought to welcome innovations in as many areas of our work as possible. We ought to seek

⁵ *Ibid.*

methods from other disciplines to employ in all appropriate areas of our work as long as we ensure that the basic human service mission stays at the heart of our work.

That's what we can learn from the so-called "new breed." Now, let's deal with a few things we can teach.

Foundation of Community

Leaders have to be aided to understand that the voluntary community is a delicate balance of individual and institutional interests. For example, in every one of our communities, there is a balance (sometimes a tenuous one) between the autonomy of our agencies and the Federation's central responsibilities. I sense that the leadership in Federations believe it is time to change that balancing point and have Federations be more assertive in the planning and budgeting process. In times of limited resources, some are saying that the autonomy of agencies must be put into a "new context."

We don't know yet how this will come out, but regardless of outcome, we have to show, by example, that process and consensus are the tools we use to achieve success. They're not measurable; they don't happen quickly; but unless it's understood that they are essential—and the employment of sophisticated management merely our tools—we'll have all the right budgetary analyses but with a faltering community.

In passing, I stress, in the strongest way, how important it is that our lay leaders understand what it takes to build a strong community. But it is not just our responsibility. There is also a role for national leadership, especially through the Council of Jewish Federations.

Balance of Head and Heart

We have to achieve a balance of head and heart. Both are extremely important, but passion and commitment are supremely important. We must have passion liberally mixed with discipline and objective analysis.

There may have been a time when many felt that structure and bureaucracy were inconsistent with serving people. Now, we must be sure that structure and bureaucracy don't, in themselves, become our goal.

Everything about our work proves and supports the notion that commitment must be nourished and must continue to be the centerpiece of our work. Business techniques are a helping hand.

My earlier statements about the business world should not be taken to mean that I think our leadership is imbued with that kind of thinking, at least not when their communal hats are on. The satisfaction people find in Jewish communal life simply isn't the same as in business. Trustees of social service agencies are the people who are willing to be among the few who care enough to lead others. Such people exist in every community and have existed in every age. They are willing to devote time, money, energy, and brain power. Such devotion requires depth, sophistication, a great deal of selflessness but, most of all, a passion and commitment to their work.

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Those are the basic ingredients as I see it. The requirement that we develop a knowledge of management, that we teach the foundations of community development, and that we achieve a balance of head and heart.

Some Suggestions for Action

In an effort to stimulate thinking I'll end by outlining a few mechanisms or thoughts we ought to keep in mind to achieve our objectives.

1. As I've indicated, we have to take the initiative to learn modern management techniques and determine how they can be used in our agencies. In addition to con-

ferences where presentations can be shaped to fit our needs, we should seek opportunities in our communities for consultants to speak to our staffs, and for us to take courses at local universities with people from the business and corporate worlds. Also, we ought to ensure places on our staffs for people with diverse professional and employment backgrounds.

2. We must be confident that our Jewish schools offer up-to-date Jewish civics courses which confront contemporary issues. I'm intrigued by all the new methods we are using to teach our kids: computers in Jewish education, video discs, cable TV. I hope that in our rush to bring modern techniques into teaching, we remember that we must teach young people to think and to feel, not just to respond to electronic stimuli.

3. Our leadership development programs must have an appropriate balance of the emotive and didactic. They must not be either too emotional as to be quick fixes or too concrete as to overlook our basic purposes. We need to seek the kind of study that develops a long-term commitment.

4. We have to recognize that no matter how it appears that our leaders may be cool and results-oriented, Jews are an emotional people, and we should have avenues for our leaders to express feeling. We have to find ways outside of the normal decision-making process to bring leadership together in a way that they can grow and learn from each other, and our communities can benefit from what each person brings.

5. The Council of Jewish Federations and United Jewish Appeal are both concerned and are putting great effort into community development, particularly in newer communities that have less of a historical foundation, which can assist in adapting to current change. In addition to all that it is now doing, CJF might consider a mini-department devoted to growth communities. From what we see, most of

our national agencies use campaigns as a tool for community building. There is a lot to commend that approach, but let's not lose sight of all the other ingredients that make up a community. The campaign, because it's readily measurable, must not be used to the exclusion of more long-range guideposts.

6. We ought to consider how to use laymen, not only as committee members and policy setters, but as volunteers in areas of direct responsibility in agencies and the Federation. In our Federations and in the world around us things have become highly specialized. Federation staff can no longer count on their knowledge but must call upon experts in finance, educational philosophy, law, construction, and hundreds of other areas. If we involve people in

an effective way, our efficiency will increase, we'll show our openness to new ideas, and laymen will develop a more realistic understanding of their community.

7. We must show stability in our professional lives. We can't allow ourselves to be seen as constantly on the move. We have to be viewed as part of a process of building community—as something more than a corporate executive who'll be transferred out next year.

This last point refers to stability in a professional sense. I'll end with another kind of stability. It is the maturity that allows us to take the best of our traditions, our history as Jews and our discipline as professionals, and infuse them with some fresh new concepts. We and our communities will both benefit.