

Facilitating Career Building in Jewish Communal Service*

Debra Laks

Supervisor, Jewish Employment and Referral Unit, Federation Employment and Guidance Service, New York

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Career Planning or Hitchhiking?

Most individuals know little about the career planning process and utilize instead a hitchhiking approach as they go from job to job. With diploma in hand, new graduates get out on the road and usually take the first job which comes along. Lacking proper maps or guides, these young professionals travel innocently in whatever direction their first job takes them until they decide they no longer like the scenery and it's time to get out. Unfortunately, these young workers often continue using the same tactics in their attempt to find new and better jobs as they proceed through their professional lives.

The problem with hitchhiking through a career is that little planning is done and much is left to chance. Professionals at all stages of their careers need help with learning how to plan carefully job changes which are in keeping with their individual skills, interests and values. Beyond a preliminary stage of self-assessment, most professionals are greatly in need of guidance in "self-marketing" techniques. New workers and seasoned professionals alike are often weak in their knowledge of how to identify preferred agency settings and then "market" themselves effectively to potential employers.

Responding to this need of Jewish communal service professionals in Greater New York is the newly formed Jewish Employment and Referral Unit (JERU) of

the Federation Employment and Guidance Service (FEGS), newly formed through a special grant from the local Federation and the Muehlstein Foundation.

The Jewish communal professional faces unique problems in attempting to build a career in New York City. The vast number of Jewish agencies creates a complex network through which the professional must find a path leading from one job to the next. With the formation of JERU, FEGS has created a centralized service where professionals can come for career guidance and job referral in all areas of Jewish communal service. JERU serves as a job clearinghouse where local Jewish agencies can list their job openings and receive appropriate referrals of qualified job applicants. JERU also provides special outplacement services for employees of Jewish agencies who have been "laid off" due to budget cuts, helping them find new employment within the Jewish communal field.

Demonstrating the need for such a service is the number of individuals who have applied to JERU for assistance. In the eight months since its formation (in October 1980) JERU has received over 530 resumes from professionals who wish to begin or advance their careers in Jewish communal service. Its professional staff has met individually with almost 400 of these applicants offering them career guidance and job referral services.

Communal Service Career Planning

JERU's supervisor meets individually

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with job seekers and provides them with insight into career planning and job seeking strategies. At the beginning, there is a self-assessment; the client is helped to identify skills and interests by reviewing past achievements in paid or volunteer experience. Through discussions and various exercises, the client is then helped to identify those values which are important priorities to them in the work environment. Skills, interests and values are then evaluated to help the client formulate a short-term job objective and long-term career goals.

The second phase of the process involves researching the field and gathering information about the network of Jewish communal agencies in New York City. To facilitate this process, JERU is developing a comprehensive resource file which contains specific information about services, programs and philosophies of the hundreds of Jewish agencies in the Greater New York area. Clients are also advised of other sources of information regarding Jewish agencies and are then helped to develop contacts and build a network of individuals who can provide useful information for a successful job search. Through these informational interviews, research and guidance, job seekers begin to learn where they might best fit in the Jewish communal field. JERU works closely with the Council of Jewish Federations and the Jewish Welfare Board which respectively handle job placement in Federations and Jewish community centers on a national basis.

"Self-Marketing" Advisement

New and advanced professionals alike, need guidance in learning to "market" themselves effectively to prospective employers. JERU provides clients with assistance in resume writing, cover letters and interviewing skills. Clients are helped to develop effective, creative resumes which support their short-term job objectives. In some cases, more than one resume is

needed. Job seekers are also helped to realize that in today's highly competitive job market, one's presentation on paper is a key factor in obtaining interviews. Once a job interview is secured, the applicant must then be able to demonstrate effectively to the employer how past achievements provide evidence of transferrable skills which will help the job candidate be successful in the position for which he/she is applying. Clients are advised that being skillful in one's profession does not guarantee equal skill in job searching. Most professionals in our experience have blind spots or even misinformation that lend very well to advice and assistance in organizing an effective job-hunting campaign.

Professionals sometimes have an unrealistic time-frame in mind for finding a new job. The current job market is such that a selective, professional job search can easily take several months. In addition to the concrete and specific help, JERU provides clients with the emotional support and encouragement which can help them to persist in their job hunt and to deal with the frustrations and disappointments which are usually encountered. As expressed by one of JERU's clients at the end of a long job search:

... There were many times during this search when I was kept from being discouraged. You always made me feel as though my concerns were important and to be respected. I felt a sense of understanding... and this is crucial when a person is placing his career on the line and taking real risks in the job market.

M.G., Social Worker

Referrals and Placement

In addition to general self-marketing advisement, JERU refers clients to actual job openings in Jewish communal agencies. Of the over 130 job referrals made each month by JERU, almost 50 percent result in interviews. Since job development for professionals often takes several months, JERU's success in seeing 30 percent of its

applicants employed in its first 6 months of operation is heartening.

JERU receives a broad range of professional job orders, from entry-level to advanced positions. To date, over 65 Jewish communal agencies have listed jobs with JERU and the unit has made referrals in almost every instance. JERU handles approximately 25-30 professional job orders each month and as the unit's visibility increases, it is expected that more agencies will utilize the service. Through site visits, telephone contacts and mailing, JERU is informing agency executives and personnel directors of its services.

Special Programs

To further assist clients in their career planning efforts, JERU has developed a two-part (six-hour) seminar. Through lectures, group discussion, guided exercises, reading lists and resource material, participants engage in a process which promotes self-assessment and facilitates long- and short-term career planning.

The seminar covers the following topics:

Part I

- Identifying and assessing skills
- Setting interest—skill priorities
- Examining values
- Clarifying goals
- Exploring internal and external barriers to goal realization

Part II

- Researching the job market
- Targeting preferred agency settings
- Effective "self-marketing"
- Interviewing skills

This seminar format has proven to be highly effective—even inspiring—to most participants. Thus, far, it has been held for two groups of JERU's clients and two groups of graduate students at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Responses indicated that the group dynamics provide a sense of motivation and support to job seekers. Many participants gain a new perspective on how to present themselves to employers

and how to better organize their job search. The group participation helps take the professionals out of a relatively passive role and to a realization that they can have a sense of control over the direction of their careers' development.

Summary and Conclusion

With a minimum of publicity JERU has brought hundreds of clients to its services. Following their initial interview, a significant proportion of clients have been responsive and eager to utilize the JERU services. Prior to contacting the agency, many applicants had been trying to find jobs within the New York Jewish community, but hadn't really known where to begin looking. Even in those cases where no job referrals were made by JERU, the clients found useful the access to information about the network of Jewish agencies in New York City, the kinds of positions available and the salary ranges being offered.

Agencies as well have responded positively to the services of JERU. Even in those cases where agencies did not hire a JERU client, they considered themselves enhanced by having a larger pool of qualified candidates from which to choose a new staff member. JERU has also been used as a resource by certain agencies to determine competitive salary ranges for particular positions.

One of the problems highlighted by JERU applicants is the fact that once a professional moves above the \$20,000 salary level, the available middle-management-level jobs are far fewer and salaries are not competitive with similar positions in private industry. Many highly qualified younger professionals have expressed deep concern over this issue and have wondered if they can continue to "afford to be in Jewish communal service." This is an area where valuable management talent may be lost by our agencies.

The model presented by JERU might be utilized by other Jewish vocational services in other large cities. The data generated by such a centralized clearinghouse can be extremely valuable in documenting employment information and trends in the national field. Our experience confirms that professionals who wish to build careers in Jewish communal service need access to career planning guidance and job information. Our communities are enriched by the

talents, dedication, and sensitivity of its professionals who are committed to providing services which improve the quality of our lives and which help to assure the betterment of the Jewish community. Providing a coordinated system for their professional growth and advancement helps assure the continuation of the strength and vitality of our agencies and the people we serve.

Social Work Summer in Israel

Dr. Paul G. Shane, a member of the CJCS New Jersey chapter and Chairman of the Social Welfare-Social Work Department at Rutgers University in Newark, has worked with Jewish Federations and with Hebrew University of Jerusalem to bring elements of Jewish communal service into the Rutgers undergraduate social work curriculum. He is responsible also for a unique summer program co-sponsored by Hebrew University and Rutgers. The program, "Social Work Summer in Jerusalem," is intended for both students and practitioners interested in exploring the Judaic roots of social welfare and present day social problems in Israel as well as welfare programs there. It is a six-week program, followed by an optional two-week field experience for those who speak Hebrew. Participants can receive eight transferable college or graduate credits for the program, which consists of two three-week courses at the School for Overseas Students on Mt. Scopus and a number of field trips to social agencies and programs including Project Renewal (joined diaspora and local community projects in low income communities), Interns for Peace (cooperative Jewish-Arab programs) and the whole range of more traditional agencies. Dr. Shane welcomes inquiries from interested persons.