Responses to the Survey

Lisa Colton

Founder & President, Darim Online

Let me respond to *Profiling the Professionals* wearing three different hats: as a representative of the "younger generation" (although I find myself these days on the older end of that spectrum), as a woman, and finally as an entrepreneur.

I want to frame my comments with the observation that the nature of the Jewish community, its organizations, and its professionals are changing rapidly. Although this survey gives us a valuable snapshot of today's field, our real call to action, as leaders and professionals, is to start preparing for the future. If we combine the report's findings that current professionals come from strongerthan-average Jewishly committed homes, with the data (see point #4 in the abstract on p. 7) about younger generations' lower commitment to the Jewish collective and the positive impact of the Israel programs, we see that we need to plan for an entirely different workforce in the coming generation or two. Who the younger workers are, why they come to work in the Jewish community, what is attractive to them, how can we retain them, how our workplace cultures (and policies) in our organizations will evolve—all these issues are changing as well. For example, when I began working as a Jewish communal professional 10 years ago, the social entrepreneurship sector was basically nonexistent, and now it is a very important and growing segment of our community—maybe not yet in numbers but definitely in impact. And we will continue to see that sector grow

To inspire the best and brightest to work in the Jewish community and to retain them, we need to be competitive—in salaries, benefits, flexibility, professional development, and work culture. What is competitive today may be different from what it has been, and as senior employers and leaders we need to understand what being competitive means for the younger generation.

I want to share four factors that will affect our culture and how leaders will lead in the future.

First, two-thirds of Jewish communal professionals are women, but there is a \$20,000 pay gap between male and female professionals. So, in addition to giving me a raise (please!), we must think about how we can eliminate this gap. Other fields are increasingly paying attention to this pay gap, and we have an ethical imperative to do better. Although many organizations have had addressing this gap somewhere on their agenda, it is time now not only to be talking about it but to be constructive and make change. Shifra Bronznick and Advancing Women Professionals have done amazing work and have some valuable resources, examples, and policies to support those conversations. In a recent board meeting of my organization, we had a very serious conversation about this study, the data that came out of it, and its impact for our planning. I can tell you personally that being supported in the Jewish community to be the best mother and the best individual AND the best Jewish communal professional I can be has been critical to devoting my life to this field, to staying in the field, and to being successful at it. Therefore, we need to educate ourselves and think proactively about policies that help women work smarter.

Barry Rosenberg

Executive Vice President, Jewish Federation of St. Louis

I was pleasantly surprised by the extent of the response to *Profiling the Professionals* and the picture of the field that emerges from it: the depth of Jewish experience that our field possesses, the personal commitment and engagement to Jewish life that were evident, the self-perception of the respondents that they are part of a professional movement, and their readiness to deepen knowledge and skills. It is something that I have observed and experienced in St. Louis, and I was glad to see it represented throughout the sample.

Yet, I wonder how representative that sample is of the broader universe of workers and whether it reflects what I have sensed is a real crisis in Jewish communal service. Do we have adequate numbers of qualified workers who possess the requisite skills and levels of sophistication to meet increasingly challenging needs in an increasingly challenging environment? Among the trends I have observed are difficulty recruiting trained, experienced people, especially outside large population centers, as well as high turnover and short tenures among entry-level staff, in particular young women. In many communities these trends have led to a reliance on local hiring of professionals, many of whom have minimal Jewish backgrounds or experience and start their careers viewing their work as a job, rather than a career or calling. This orientation may signficantly influence the manner in which they approach their work.

It is those trends and the recognition that human resources are at the center of everything we do that led St. Louis to create the Professional Excellence initiative eight years ago. With generous funding from the Lubin-Green Foundation (\$1 million over seven years), we created the first truly community-wide effort to address recruitment, retention, professional development, and organizational culture to advance and support professional practice. The Federation- sponsored and managed initiative has raised awareness and sensitivity to professional issues.

Our greatest achievement has been JProStl, one of a growing network of grassroots professional organizations. It boasts an active board and volunteer base, and it speaks to the report's point about nurturing a sense of profession, which I have seen diminish from the time I first entered the field. Our JPro organizes dozens of training, networking, recognition, and relationship-building programs, which attract several hundred participants from every corner of our community and at all professional levels and roles. It is tackling senior management development, new worker orientation, collaboration, and how to productively address controversial and difficult issues. This March it will host a

conference attracting workers from across the Midwest and the country. We have seen the enthusiasm and receptivity to training and profession-building that are possible when we invest ourselves deeply with Jewish communal service professionals. In St. Louis we are now expanding our program to add a parallel volunteer development component through the Millstone Institute for Jewish Leadership.

Let me share several reactions and comments to Profiling the Professionals.

It begins by asking the question, "How do you define Jewish communal service?" We in St. Louis answer this question very broadly, including administrative-level employees and also focusing on those who work for our organizations who are not Jewish. For example, we run introductory sessions on Judaism for our non-Jewish employees. We found that reducing barriers has built morale and a sense of colleagueship and that our administrative staff really resent not being considered "professional."

The findings on Birthright and Masa highlight an insufficiently leveraged opportunity to use a wide variety of programs, events, and interactions for active recruitment to the field. Many of us entered the field because someone tapped us on the shoulder and suggested we might find meaning and success in Jewish service. I believe we need to cultivate a culture that sees all of us in the field as talent scouts and has some organized mechanisms for incubating that talent—via Hillel, young adult programs, internships, and other efforts.

As Lisa Colton discussed in her comments, we should think of a job in a Jewish organization as a portal to Jewish engagement for those with weak or nonexistent backgrounds. We know and it has been demonstrated that Jewish identity is propelled forward by immersion experiences: day school, summer camp, Israel trips. If we think about it, working in a Jewish organization is also an immersion experience. As someone who entered the field with a relatively weak Jewish background, my job was an immersion experience for me personally. Most of us know individuals who became engaged in Jewish life and some who even converted to Judaism after beginning their work in the community. This has enormous implications for how we bring people in and, as Lisa mentioned, how we nurture those who come with minimal backgrounds. The headline finding of a weaker attachment to Jewish peoplehood and Israel among younger workers reflects my own perceptions and experiences. However, I would caution that there seems to be some question whether we have adequate baseline data, or whether, as the report suggested, this kind of commitment grows over time. Nonetheless, I think this finding of a weaker attachment to peoplehood and Israel has several important implications.

The dissonance between Jewish communal workers in general and the *amcha*—the people we serve—about peoplehood and Israel may be contributing to the difficulties our organizations are having understanding and engaging younger Jews. Additionally, because generally younger or newer workers are assigned to work with our young adult and youth population, we may be facing a situation where some of them are modeling and reinforcing attitudes that many of us find threatening to Jewish life. Therefore I believe we need to actively assert and insert the ideas of peoplehood formally, as curricula, and informally within our Jewish education and professional development activities.

Finally, I want to note that this discussion was originally scheduled to be held at the General Assembly of Jewish Federations; it was actually the only formal program on the GA agenda dealing with the issue of personal and professional development. I have found it difficult to get this item on the GA's agenda in the past. While I commend JCSA for taking the lead in commissioning this report and I believe that professional self-empowerment is very important, we need to be very clear that, in great measure, the conditions, policies, and attitudes under which we work are in the control of lay leadership. There are serious issues of lay-professional relations on the policy, operational, and interpersonal levels. I mentioned earlier that one goal of St. Louis's Professional Excellence project was cultural change within our institutions. I regret that this goal has been the hardest to achieve. Yet, until our boards seriously engage issues of professional practice and personnel, we will not adequately address the weaknesses we see nor reach the full potential of our collective profession. In our Federation's new strategic plan, one of our six major strategic priorities is "exceptional human resources." I am proud that our Federation has finally recognized that building capacity and infrastructure is just as important, if not perhaps more important, than the provision of retail services at the client level. Those services can only be as good as the people we employ.

Second, my generation strives for a work–life blend, not a work–life balance. That is a really significant change from previous generations. A work–life blend means lots of things, such as flex time and working part-time from home and part-time from the office after having a baby. It means that you can find me doing work on my laptop while sitting on the couch or in bed at 11:30 at night, but I may choose to take an afternoon off to see my kid's school performances. Does that mean I am doing less work? No, it means more flexible work, and that flexibility actually makes me a better, more productive employee.

It is important for us to cultivate working environments that work *with* this generation and their priorities and the way they blend their personal and professional lives together. That means a change in culture, policies, and work relationships, and it also means training managers so that they know how to manage these younger staff in new ways.

The blend also speaks to the power of the Israel experience that was noted in this report. After spending a year and a half in Israel studying at the Pardes Institute, I returned seeking a blend in my career. I wanted wherever I worked to acknowledge my Jewish life and observance so that if I wanted to leave in the mid-afternoon on Friday when it got dark at 4 o'clock, I could do that. And I wanted a job where I could take off for Jewish holidays without needing to use a sick or personal day. Being able to do just that led me to work in the Jewish community initially.

Third, we need to understand the decision-making patterns of these younger workers and then design the work environment around them. Because of their stage in life, Millennials are transient and may not stay in their early jobs more than a year or two (perhaps when when they have children and mortgages, they may move a bit less frequently). Years ago at a Charles and Lyn Schusterman Family Foundation gathering of grantees called TzimTzum, we reflected on how younger employees are hopping from one place to another, and several participants expressed a lot of frustration with that. But we realized that we needed to work together to retain these people within the Jewish community, so that when we invested in them with professional development and mentoring, they would take those skills to another Jewish organization and not outside of the Jewish community when they inevitably changed jobs.

We really wish that the Millennials would abide by our rules and stay at a job for 5 to 10 years. Darn those Millennials! But that is not how they work, and so we need to understand their decision making and work with them, not against them, if we are going to achieve our individual goals in each organization and our communal goals as well. When we look at mobility in the field, I suggest we differentiate between losing someone from our own organization and thinking about where that individual is going and how he or she might benefit the field as a whole in the future. Reframing our thinking on this issue will be very important.

Finally, we should see this field as a way to engage those who come with excellence in their professional capacities, but may not have have strong Jewish backgrounds. Although the data suggest that many Jewish communal professionals do come from stronger Jewish backgrounds, we can offer many learning opportunities for others to develop their Jewish journeys while we are supporting and making use of their fundraising and marketing and community-building skills. The ongoing learning and enrichment and sense of being part of something

bigger that we can offer in Jewish communal organizations are very important perks that are quite hard to find elsewhere.

In conclusion, I want to thank JCSA, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, Steven Cohen, and the Berman Jewish Policy Archive for this important study. The information is sparking important conversations—and action—that are having an impact on our field already and, if we seize the opportunity, will strengthen our field, and thus the Jewish community, for years to come