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choose to be so deeply involved in Jewish life, both professionally and personally. It appears counterintuitive and could be mistaken for self-loathing. And it is most definitely *not* sexy.

I tried to remain composed while we waited for the check to arrive. As we walked out of the restaurant, my date turned to me and asked, “Why are you so Jewish? Why choose to be so involved?”

I have been asking myself the same questions for years. I’ve always immersed myself fully in my work. I’m your textbook definition of a workaholic: I’m terrible at setting boundaries and I rarely carve out time for myself. If I’m working for “the Jews,” I’m completely enmeshed in that world. This is further exacerbated by the fact that my downtime is equally as “Jewish” as my profession: My friends are Jewish; I regularly attend synagogue; and I lead and participate in a number of different Jewish

groups and extracurricular activities.

What is most challenging about living such an integrated life is that Judaism is no longer reserved solely for my own spiritual fulfillment. It seeps into and occupies every sphere of my personal and professional life so that they are virtually indistinguishable from each other. This further complicates my already difficult struggle to balance work and life, and it begs the question that by always being “on,” could I endanger the very value Judaism provides for me in the first place?

It is something to be careful about. And, ironically, I feel pulled to be more involved. Wherever I have found myself, I have always been drawn to creating or strengthening community. It is in this interconnectedness and belonging that I find meaning, and why being “*so Jewish*” fulfills the various facets of who I am. 

On the Verge of Real Change

SHIFRA BRONZNICK AND JOANNA SAMUELS

What are the decisive indicators of progress? That’s an important question for people who care deeply about social change — especially about advancing gender equity and shared leadership.

For a long time, we felt confident that because of the large numbers of accomplished women staffing the communal sector, inevitably the glass ceiling would shatter and women would rise into the leadership structure in numbers comparable to their presence in the field.

Yet even today, the annual salary surveys of the large legacy organizations — tracked by the *Forward’s* editor in chief, Jane Eisner — display a gaping gender gap in positions and salaries. Only nine of 76 Jewish organizations in 2011 — less than 12 percent — were headed by women.

Signs of Progress: Re-map the Landscape

Although substantive progress of women into leadership is hard to see if we look in just one corner or another, when we survey the entire landscape, we can identify positive change for women *and* the Jewish community.

First, a few big cracks have occurred in the glass ceiling at veteran organizations: Women now lead two large-city federations and are heading some of the largest and most successful JCCs, cultural institutions, and social service agencies.

Among Jewish national publications, Jane

Eisner is the editor-in-chief of the *Forward*; Susan Berrin edits this publication; *Moment* is published, edited, and owned by Nadine Epstein; and *Tablet* is edited by Alana Newhouse. Some of the community’s most influential foundations are headed by women, including the Wexner Foundation and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. Ruth Messinger, president of the American Jewish World Service is no longer alone at the top of Jewish social justice groups; superb women leaders now run MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps, JOI: The Jewish Outreach Institute, (now Join for Justice), and Just Congregations. Slingshot: A Resource Guide to Jewish Innovation, the guide to the 50 most innovative initiatives in Jewish life, reveals that more than half of the initiatives are headed by women. Spiritual communities led by women are receiving national recognition, from IKAR, to the Kavannah Initiative, to The Kitchen. And Modern Orthodox women like Rabba Sara Hurwitz belong to a growing cohort of transformative leaders who are changing the face of traditional Judaism.

How did these changes happen? Despite the temptation to believe that the prominence of so many female leaders is the inevitable transfer of power from one generation and gender to another, we must conclude that the transfer of power is the result of advocacy, research,

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education, rabble-rousing, and courage.

Over the past eleven years, we identified what held women back, and we learned what works to dismantle gender bias and promote equitable workplaces that attract, retain, and advance women professionals.

Changing Work-Life Policies

For the first time, organizations — large and small, veteran and start-up — are acknowledging the undeniable influence of work-life policy on career paths. More organizations are adopting flexible work arrangements and paid parental leave, and they are seeing the benefits — from reduced turnover to increased effectiveness on everyone's part. Most important, professional ambition is not viewed as inevitably in conflict with a commitment to caregiving.

Several additional factors play a role in this workplace transformation:


Negotiation is becoming an essential component of the leadership toolkit. Ample research from Linda Babcock at Carnegie Mellon University and Hannah Riley Bowles at Harvard University indicates a gender divide in the use of workplace negotiation. Women have to navigate differently in the process, by explicitly linking their aspirations and requirements to organizational success. Gaining tools and tactics enables women professionals to negotiate successfully for promotions, salary increases, workplace flexibility, and resources on the job. Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community (AWP) has offered trainings and individual coaching for many years, and we see the impact of women utilizing this skill set across our community.

More women are entering the public square as thought leaders. Increasingly, communal events that feature all-male plenaries and panels are seen as out of step. Accomplished female academics, rabbis, activists, organizational leaders, and volunteers are now leveraging their expertise in many venues. And our ongoing partnership with the Op-Ed Project has helped to bring the voices of many more women into prestigious publications, which is changing the perception and experience of women as public intellectuals in our community.

Men and women are allies in this change. To create progress for women, we need the partnership, support, and advocacy of men. To date, 70 prominent male thought leaders in our community have accepted AWP's pledge to refrain from participating in or organizing all-male panels. Explaining to conference organizers that

a female colleague must appear alongside them, or in their place, makes a powerful statement about the importance of collegiality, equity, and their own values. A significant result of taking and acting on this pledge is that many men have deepened their own commitments and actions around gender equity in their workplaces and local communities.

These efforts move our vision of a more equitable Jewish workplace from the theoretical to the practical. As a result, we are building a community where women and men know how to fuel change. We hope that this progress will grow and deepen, and will build a cadre of leaders who are change-ready and capable of redefining their organizations for the 21st century.

We also believe that our work on gender equity is catalyzing a conversation that rethinks leadership itself. We envision a community that promotes greater opportunities for shared leadership and new models of collective decision making in organizations. These less hierarchical models, where professionals bring their talents and passions to address collectively the major challenges we face as a community, will certainly result in better solutions and more sustainable leadership experiences. 



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