

## Skills for the New Millennium

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Marla Eglash Abraham and Steven Windmueller have done a great service to the field by articulating their formulation of the principles of Jewish communal life. I hope their article will begin a series of dialogues on the underpinnings of our field.

In addition to the principles, a good Jewish communal service worker needs special skills. Herewith, again as a discussion starter, is my list of the skills, in no particular order, needed to meet the needs of the Jewish community in the new millennium.

1. *Marketing:* There was a time when we did not need to let our public know what we were and what we did, but that time is past. Now, no matter what our field of endeavor, we must make sure that people know about us, know what we do, and how well we do it. We do not need to be marketing experts, but we do need to know when the services of a skilled marketing professional are called for, and we need to be prepared to spend the money to market our programs and services appropriately.

2. *Communication:* Getting the message across clearly, forthrightly, and directly is vital to success in our field. An individual must be able to speak and write with proper English. Where budgets are part of the portfolio, the individual must be able to explain the numbers intelligibly to all audiences.

3. *Organization:* The ability to coordinate large enterprises, diverse groups of people, and complex skills is increasingly valuable for an individual to have.

4. *Finances:* No matter what the field of service, no matter what the level, a person must understand budgets and funding. To be successful, one must manage resources appropriately. We are the guardians of communal funds and the fiscal representative of untold numbers of donors. This responsibility is a heavy one and one that we *must* discharge. If

a person does not know or understand budgets and numbers, courses abound. These skills are a basic part of the tools of a competent professional. One needs to be able to read a budget, do financial planning for the program in which one works, develop appropriate fiscal projections, and understand how long-range financial planning will help the endeavor prosper.

5. *Technology:* It is not necessary to be able to take apart a computer and put it back together in order to work in Jewish communal service. It is not even necessary to understand the way a computer works. But it is necessary in today's world to be comfortable with technology and to be prepared to use it when appropriate. One must have an e-mail address and read the e-mail regularly. One must be computer literate to the point of being able to do basic word processing and financial data recording. The ability to prepare presentations on the computer is a vital skill, as is the ability to do research on-line. Our kids can do it; we need to be able to as well. Coming along rapidly is video and satellite conferencing.

6. *Commitment:* Working for the Jewish community should be more than a job. A commitment to the values discussed by Eglash and Windmueller is vital to one's ability to succeed in this field. At times the world can be frustrating and difficult. On occasion the demands are extreme and the working conditions not the best. The compensation needs to be increased for almost every position. There are downsides to what we do. Nevertheless, our work is vital to the survival of the Jewish people. Commitment to that ideal must be foremost in our thoughts.

7. *Sense of Humor:* How else do you cope?

8. *Sense of History:* While an understanding of the history of the Jewish people is central to our work, one also needs an under-

standing of the history of Jewish communal service and the agencies that make up our field. How did your agency come into being? What was its original mandate? How has that changed over time? Now that you know, you must be able to communicate this sense to the lay leaders, to the volunteers, to the staff, and to the community at large.

9. *Vision:* The vital companion to a sense of history is a sense of vision. Where is Jewish communal service headed? Where is your agency headed? What are its goals for the future? Here too it is vital for a leader to be able to communicate this vision to the lay leadership, to the volunteers, to the staff, and to the community at large.



## The Geometry of Jewish Life

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Marla Eglash Abraham and Steven Windmueller have done the field a service in drawing up this set of organizing principles for Jewish communal service and, by so doing, inviting us to a dialogue of self-examination.

Their principles include both time-tested and new elements. Who can quarrel with emphasizing the need for change, growth, and renewal; the importance of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*; remembering our place in the larger Jewish world of Israel and other diaspora communities; and decision making that reflects a search for consensus, democratic values, and viable lay-professional relationships? They also acknowledge the multiplicity of Jewish connections and the enormous variety of individual Jewish journeys in our day, and call for acute attention to current social, technological, and public trends.

However, while I agree with much of what they have written, I also am uncomfortable with what seemed a too-limited conception of the enterprise. I offer the following comments in the spirit of the dialogue that the editor has put forth.

Let me focus on Principle 7, the one that asserts that a federated system is the key to effective Jewish communal organization. Even now, on the simplest level, this is not universally the case. Outside North America are Jewish communities that do not operate in this mode, for reasons of local

history and politics. While Daniel Elazar has made a compelling case for federation as a historically grounded organizing principle for Jewish communities, even he never argued that no other modes of operation could be functionally effective in particular circumstances.

But put that aside for the moment, and move to a more fundamental problem. A federation is a system in which a number of subsystems of roughly equal weight both operate independently and cede some powers to a central body. This is not the way the Jewish community really works, even in North America. Indeed, federations tend to see themselves as the central body in the Jewish communal game—witness the rhetoric of “federation as central address”—but that has never been actual fact. Federations are central and have power (in the limited ways that the federal governments have power over states or provinces) in the agency worlds of social service, local community relations, and central agencies of Jewish education, and in fundraising for the Jewish Agency and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. But this leaves out an enormous portion of the Jewish organizational world—the congregational sphere and the independents.

This rhetoric of federation centrality is dysfunctional in at least two ways. First, take the authors’ discussion of the reconfiguration of roles in the process of “linking our educa-

tional and religious infrastructures with the communal service enterprise." I read between the lines that it is the federation that is to take the lead role in all the new "community planning and programming." This is a picture of the community as a circle, with the federation at the hub, although the circle is now enlarged to include, in addition to the agencies and other long-time federation allocations recipients, congregations, schools, camps, and other educationally directed institutions.

If these principles are intended to be for our entire field, this point of view is insulting to congregational/educational sensibilities. I also submit that it cannot work. It is not enough just to enlarge the circle. When I worked at Combined Jewish Philanthropies, the Boston federation, on the creation of models for federation funding of congregational supplementary education (the initiatives that evolved into Boston's Continuity Commission), I learned the hard way that congregations and federations operate on very different calendars, and with fundamentally different cultural assumptions—about, for example, the nature of authority, the proper roles and relationships of professionals and volunteers, decision making, time frames, planning, and a host of other items.<sup>1</sup> When there is this kind of cultural divergence, there is great hazard in one of the parties seeing itself in the central communal role. The cultural differences must be acknowledged, affirmed, and negotiated. Not an easy task, but a crucial one. For federations to work productively with all the educational/religious organizations listed in Principle 7, there must be a whole new vocabulary and choreography of operation, and federations must stop seeing themselves at the center of it all.

In fact, the body of Principle 7 does speak of federations in partnership with synagogues and other institutions. This is a different approach—not federation but con-federation.

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<sup>1</sup>I wish to highlight that there is no longer disagreement that the Jewish religious core of our civilization is central to our Jewish communal enterprise, surely a new and to-be-celebrated turn of events.

It comes closer to what I am suggesting. It means that other organizations besides federations will take on the lead roles of conveners and bridge-builders. More than that, it means federation volunteers and professionals will be open to learning new languages and paradigms of operation and priority-setting. Not only will the federations nurture the "new constellations of cooperation" that are necessary. The call is for all the major players to work as colleagues. Not an easy transformation, but one that is radically necessary.

Second, and here is my major concern—what of all those other players, the myriad of organizations in neither the congregational/educational nor federation spheres? These organizations, both old and new, may be small individually, but they are collectively significant and are on the increase. They include Jewish women's organizations (and some of these are not so small), the "friends of" various Israeli universities and other groups, the Jewish museum and film and other cultural organizations, and the grassroots independent *havurot* and spirituality groups and their collective umbrella organizations, to list just some of them. Principle 7 simply does not go far enough. The challenge for the 21st century is not just to enlarge the circle to encompass cooperation with the mainstream Jewish educational/religious institutions, however important that task is. This set of principles as a whole does not sufficiently take account of the enormously more complex facts of Jewish life today.

The circle—the entire geometry, to take the metaphor further—must be fundamentally reconfigured. While I am focusing here on Principle 7, I confess to feeling, as I read the document overall, that it is built on a too-constrained notion of the realities of Jewish life today. Our principles must not refer only to our existing institutions. One of the major issues for our community in contemporary America is the increasing gap between the current systems of organized Jewish life and the lives of most 21st-century Jews. New organizations are being invented to close the gaps. Some will survive, some will not. But our principles must reflect these new truths, must be able to

make room for new Jewish organizations. The authors allude to these new realities in Principles 3 and 4, but do not follow through organizationally; they do not sufficiently challenge our current *modus operandi*.

The changing facts of American Jewish demography and of Jewish identity in our day strike at the heart of our current organizational system and its response capacities, and call for a greatly expanded view of the field of Jewish communal service. Take three of these demographic realities: mobility, the postponement of marriage, and new conceptions of identity.

Jews are among the most mobile of Americans, and so Jewish life is less local, and more continental, than it once was (Goldstein & Goldstein, 1995). However, the organized Jewish community has been slow to recognize the trans-local nature of contemporary Jewish life. Few localities are positioned to identify systematically and then reach out consistently to newcomers. Even scarcer are possibilities for inter-community tracking and engaging Jews who move. Our structures just are not up to this challenge.

In addition, the median age of Jewish marriage is not the mid-twenties, as was the case at mid-century, but closer to the mid-thirties. Yet, few mainstream Jewish organizations have changed in ways that recognize this fact. Programs and fee structures continue to be built around the interests, values, schedules, and financial situations of settled, coupled adults. There are precious few mainstream institutional venues for single young adult Jewish participation. The results are all around us. I would, in fact, identify this lack of appropriate structures and venues for mobile post-college under-40 singles as the most glaring organizational lack in American Jewish life today.

There are some local attempts by mainstream organizations to provide new avenues of Jewish participation suitable for young and not-so-young but still single Jews and/or for newcomers. A Web search turns up listings of "young adult" or "young leadership" activities, sponsored by almost every major federation, the local affiliates of some national organizations in the larger urban areas, and some synagogues and other local groups. Most of

these attempts, however, involve only sporadic programs. Even more distressingly, competition and attempts at exclusivity, not city- or area-wide coordination, are the major pattern.<sup>2</sup>

We seem to expect Jews to find their own way to our organizational doorsteps. This ignores another set of major changes in American—and thus also Jewish—life: the rise of a concept of personal identity that is non-exclusive, sporadic in expression, and "symbolic," meaning that it does not require ongoing public expression and affirmation. And meaning also that most younger Jews—even those who feel strongly Jewish—feel little or no need to seek out specifically Jewish organizations to join. If some activity or other is well marketed and meets their needs, they may try it out, but they will certainly not join because this is "what one is supposed to do." And given our dismal record at tracking mobile Jews, they may never even hear about it in the first place.

Yet, I see a glimmer of hope on this scene. Jews outside the current mainstream frameworks are creating their own roads to participation—new modes of "doing Jewish," new ways to express all that "religious, ethnic, generation, cultural and sexual diversities of our community" to which the authors correctly refer. In fact, that is a lot of what all the diversity of new Jewish organizations that have emerged in this decade represents. Think of the Jewish film festivals, Jewish healing centers, eco-Jewish groups, Jewish hiking and travel clubs, Jewish book clubs, non-synagogue study and worship circles, women's Rosh Hodesh groups—no doubt each reader can add more.

My point is that Jews have plunged into the 21st century ahead of our mainstream organizations. Our job, as Jewish communal professionals, is to catch up with them. Our principles must tell us not only how to make the current structures work better (which I think our colleagues have tried to do here), but how

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<sup>2</sup>The Reform Movement's "Privilege Card" is the only well-organized national program that I am aware of. It would be helpful to know how widely it is being used.

to look beyond the present, to expand our playing field, and in the process invent a new and more effective game.

I challenge us to picture not a circle with one center (the federation model), or even an oval, with two central foci (the federations sharing governance with the congregational/educational world), but some much more complex figure, a greatly enlarged figure with changing borders that weave themselves around a set of moving and changing focal points. Not as neat as that circle or oval, but Jewish life, personal or organizational, is not neat these days. I would wish the principles to be expanded to reflect this point of view more consistently.

Perhaps a quote for the set of expanded principles could be "*eilu v' eilu divrei Elohim ha-im*"—"both these and these are the words of the living God." We must learn to value and work with all these different perspectives, including or perhaps especially the ones that challenge and stretch our images of our institutions and ways of operating in them. Our principles must help us envision and respond to a new geometry of Jewish life.

#### REFERENCE

- Goldstein, Sidney, & Goldstein, Alice. (1995). *Jews on the move*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.



## Paradigm Shifts

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The set of principles prepared by Marla Eglash Abraham and Steven Windmueller make a real contribution by identifying key issues affecting North American Jewish life at the beginning of the new millennium. They do so less as a set of static observations and more as a dynamic educational manifesto.

The institutional challenges forcing change require that our professionals use transformational skills to effectively continue the strength of our communal institutions. Sadly, too many of our professional leaders are far better trained and socialized to transactional dynamics and therefore have been unable to lead the organizational transformations required.

A number of paradigm shifts are affecting

Jewish communal service.\* The first is the structural change in the economy as we leave the industrial era and enter the information era. Massive change is taking place as a result of the power of information and the strength of market economies and spreading democracy, yet we have seen little change within the Jewish communal field. This is in contrast to the massive upheaval in the business sector and in government. Second, the shift in needs has been substantial. The Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and building an Israel at risk are no longer the resonant cries, yet little alignment in the definition of contemporary needs and their solutions has emerged. Third, there has been enormous universal change in donor interest as many question the need for umbrella organizations to distribute personal acts of charity. Fourth, there has been a transition of lay leadership from an entrepreneurial class with enormous synergy in a lay leadership role to a fee-for-service professional class with far less

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\*For an elaboration, see Solomon, Jeffrey, "Reinventing North American Jewish Communal Structures: The Crisis of Normality," Pins Memorial Lecture, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel, March 5, 2000.

synergy. Fifth, the professional focus on process, in part resulting from the change in lay leadership, has been a barrier to building the alignment necessary to move the agenda. Sixth, "reshtetlization" has occurred in reaction to the massive changes in communal needs, the donor marketplace and the leadership scene. The consequent natural desire for homeostasis and an inward perspective—the drawing of borders around the local community—does not bode well for the concept of collective responsibility, which has always been a precious asset of the North American Jewish scene. Seventh, the leadership of communal structures do not look like amcha—the people. The diversity necessary to avoid underrepresentation of women and young people, as well as to accommodate a range of alternate background and lifestyles, has resulted in a disconnect between the "dais" and the audience. One would not define most community organizations as inclusive nor has quality become a true paradigm in Jewish community organizations. Yet, other attributes of North American society have built both inclusiveness and quality as core components. Finally, few of our institutions and organizations create the kind of welcoming community that is desirable.

As one looks at these conditions of contemporary Jewish organizational life, one can appreciate the eleven principles outlined by Abraham and Windmueller, but question whether they reach far enough in terms of change leadership and management.

Here are my specific comments on each of the "Principles."

### 1. TRANSFORMATION AND RENEWAL

Clearly, were this to become a key principle in educating the next generation of professional leadership, the community would be well served. The need for transformation and renewal is clear, yet we do not see great evidence of "new models of institutional partnerships as well as collaborative planning and programming." The teaching of conflict resolution, community organization, and techniques of collaborative planning would well serve

existing needs.

### 2. TZEDAKAH/TIKKUN OLAM

It is heartening to see this as a core principle, as the inward look dominant in the past number of years has diminished the community as a core part of a compassionate America. It has also probably done little to attract young individuals at the margin. Our deeds must better fulfill the words of our sages.

### 3. OUR PERSONAL JOURNEYS

The potential synergy that the authors propose in "join (ing) the insights of Jewish texts and traditions to the functional tasks of governance, leadership, planning and fundraising" is a useful and essential part of teaching for future leadership. However, it is important that core principles of governance, leadership, planning and fundraising be taught effectively so we do not have a professional corps with less-than-superior substantive skills.

### 4. CREATING COMMUNITIES OF JEWISH MEANING

As this principle supports several of the earlier identified paradigm shifts, it is both relevant and wise. However, to create communities of Jewish meaning one needs to look at the behaviors of institutions. Are synagogues truly relevant (beyond life-cycle events) to their members and to the larger community? Do service agencies place their clients at the top of the pyramid of importance? Are we prepared to look at our organizational behaviors to see whether they reflect our traditional values?

### 5. ISRAEL DIASPORA CONNECTION

As Israel is firmly entrenched in the first-world economy and progresses toward peace, the nature of the relationship must be explored. I find it interesting that the authors use kol Israel arevim zeh bazeh as the introductory value statement, but do not emphasize the potential role for the Jews of the world and the Jews of Israel to work together in behalf of their shared values.

## **6. OUR WORLDWIDE RESPONSIBILITIES**

This generation of professional life has been blessed by the results of the breakdown of Communism and the impact of Jewish influence and affluence. Whether in the republics of the Former Soviet Union, Syria, Ethiopia or Yemen, world Jewry in partnership with Israel has made an enormous difference. Yet, are we adequately training our future professionals to fully understand the nature of global community development and the simple reality of collaborating with Jewish communal colleagues at all reaches of the world with the speed of a mouse click?

## **7. THE FEDERATED CONCEPT AS KEY INGREDIENT**

The federated concept has served both the Jewish community and the larger American human service scene with unprecedented success. As it reinvents itself for an era of different challenges, the notion of federated must become more inclusive, involving more components of Jewish life, and therefore, training leaders to that end is essential for the next era of our community.

## **8. REAFFIRMING THE CONSENSUS PROCESS**

The authors argue that consensus and its principles remain essential to the practice of community building. I suggest that in many of our communal settings, this is a false assumption. For most of the 20th century, the crisis of Europe, Israel and its early years, anti-Semitism and Jews at physical risk made the obtaining of consensus an achievable ideal. As these crises have waned and the definition of today's needs is far more diverse, I question whether consensus continues to be the best means of governance. Democracy is built on majority rule with respect for minority consideration. Is it really necessary for our institutions to seek a 90 or 100 percent consensus before taking action? Redefining corporate culture in this

arena will be one of the challenges for the coming period.

## **9. STRENGTHENING THE LAY-PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIP**

As we strengthen the lay-professional partnership, in addition to building a culture of mutual civility and respect, we should also be building a culture of mutual standard-setting. Too often expectations go unfulfilled because there is little sense of standards and measures. The lay-professional partnership begs for a maturing process.

## **10. REAFFIRMING OUR CORE DEMOCRATIC VALUES**

Clearly, the affirmation of our democratic values is essential and must be seen within the increasing diversity both in our community and in the larger society. Students would be well served to understand these principles and to be sensitive to them as core elements of practice.

## **11. ON THE CUTTING EDGE**

The Jewish community gave birth to and nurtured many health and social service institutions that are known for their cutting-edge leadership within their fields. Yet, best practices are not necessarily the norm of how we transmit information and knowledge. Students who focus on best practices as part of their understanding of growth and development will benefit.

Marla Eglash Abraham and Steven Windmueller have made a very substantial contribution to the field and the debate that they foster can help position 21st-century Jewish communal life. However, at moments requiring transformative leadership, risk and boldness become tools in the professional's armamentarium. We should be encouraged to think boldly as we deal with these massive changes.

