

## Recruitment and Retention of Professional Staff for Jewish Communal Service\*

GERALD B. BUBIS

*Alfred Gottschalk Professor of Jewish Communal Studies and Director, School of Jewish Communal Service, Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles*

*As many as fifty percent of the people who begin in Jewish communal service are out within two years. This must give us pause . . .*

A number of long range issues are emerging that will affect recruitment and retention for the profession. They are: 1) the increase in the number of working couples, 2) the ramifications of setting physical mobility as the price for upward mobility, 3) the "feminization" of the field, 4) the financial consequences of enforced physical mobility, 5) the inadequate efforts at recruitment for the field.

The fact that, more and more, both partners of marital couples are working has increasing significance for the field of communal service. Unless and until the needs of each individual can be met professionally, there will be exacerbated consequences for the couple. They will grow out of physical moves that are exacted as a price for upward mobility for one of the two partners. It will be incumbent upon the field to provide thoughtful counseling and working opportunities for *both* the husband and wife if it is to provide the necessary opportunities for advancement. The need of the field for competent professionals must result in greater thought and care in the action it takes than has been evident up to now.

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This in turn must lead to using the best of the practices available in the field of business, such as 1) low-cost mortgages for housing, 2) tuition credits or subsidies for young professionals (who increasingly want more intensive Jewish education for their own family and themselves), 3) time for quality experience in the home as a result of the heightened place of family among the professionals as opposed to earlier generations, 4) shared jobs for those couples ready and qualified to take them.

While it has been historically considered a truism that couples should not work in the same agency, this premise will have to be examined in the years ahead if "the best and the brightest" are to have their needs met and if they are to be utilized efficiently and fully by the Jewish community.

The ramifications of feminization are enormous, most of which will be good. Historically, however, any profession which began as male dominated and moved to being primarily female, has suffered a downward step in status.

While not inevitable in the future it is a challenge that awaits this field. Social work in general always was primarily a field of women, but somehow in the Federation system as in Jewish communal service, there was a much higher

proportion of men than there was in social work in general. The certainty of having so many women in the field in the years ahead must be addressed in the context of the other issues raised above.

Joint recruitment by the profession, agencies and the schools will have to receive higher priority. If this is not done, the quality of those applying for the field will decrease perceptibly as a result of the availability of other professions to "the best and the brightest" of the men and women who formerly might have thought of communal service as a career.

There are some general tests of the worth of the profession in a given society, a kind of professional litmus paper test. Status in general is measured by the power given by the society to that particular profession and by the desirability of the profession in the eyes of the society, and it is ratified by salary levels in the given society.

When these criteria are applied to the field of Jewish communal service, a number of realities are evident. They are 1) power is limited in the field except at the highest level of executive jobs, which in turn represent only some ten percent of all the jobs in the field of Jewish communal service; 2) the status of Jewish communal workers would probably be in the lowest decile of professions in the United States. There are relatively few Jewish communal workers and Jewish community lay leaders who would want their children to be Jewish communal workers; 3) Jewish communal salaries are being outstripped radically by other professions at the beginning levels. It is safe to say that "the best and the brightest" graduating from MBA programs, law schools, accounting programs and the like, are being paid anywhere from two to three times the beginning communal workers salaries. An outcome of all of this is the exacer-

bated problem created by static fund-raising, which has resulted in the field itself substituting BA level people to fill jobs that were formerly held by Masters level candidates.

In addition there is a growing gap between the beginning salary of the communal worker and executive recompense, which has now, in some instances, reached astronomical proportions. There should be some formula based on fairness and reality that would close the gap between the salary of the executive and the beginning salary of workers. This is not to suggest that it should be accomplished by lowering the salaries of executives, but rather raising the floor that is now so low as to be close to what is considered poverty level for some families.

What is needed, in short, is a program of image building wherein and whereby the desire to be a communal worker is made a matter of high priority in Jewish community life in general. The reality is that at present some three billion dollars are handled by communal workers annually. The Jewish community in America should take a serious look at what kinds of people are and should be put into such positions of high trust. Great probity and skill, high values, vision and depth of understanding should be expected of those who are to be the guardians of/and helpers in the shaping of the priorities governing how this money will be spent.

It is a test of a cultured society that it find and elevate those who will serve it as a career, with dignity and honor.

In Judaism the notion of *klei kodesh*—holy vessels—is one of great importance. The professionals in Jewish communal service are in a way the holy vessels, for they are working in a partnership and helping to evolve for and with their lay partners a sense of values, priorities and directions in the shaping of a healthy and vibrant Jewish life here and abroad.

Specifically, there are a number of steps which should be taken to help upgrade the desires and the realities that must come together in order to make a career in Jewish communal service attractive to "the best and the brightest" of our young people.

Some of the suggestions which follow are long term in their nature, while others could be implemented in a reasonable period of time providing a consensus emerges. First, the long range.

Special curriculum units should be developed for use in religious schools and camps which honor and elevate the notion of careers in Jewish communal service. It is only through the development of models and opportunities which are seen as valuable by the Jewish community that there is a possibility of encouraging the young to consider careers such as those for Jewish communal service. The rabbinate offers a good model in this regard with early and constant identification of those who are seen as potentially the best for the rabbinate, and this model should be transferred into Jewish communal service.

There should be lecturers in pre-confirmation and confirmation classes by agency directors and Federation staff, models who come to life to be seen as people to be emulated.

Opportunities should always be given for the young to meet with the lay and professional leaders at public meetings. Every effort should be made to utilize the experiences of other organizations such as the legislative days so successfully executed by the YMCA. Opportunities for teen-agers to be executive directors for a day, to act as board members and committee members for a day, to sit and attend meetings with staff and lay people to get some sense of governance and distribution of resources, delivery of service and the like, could help young people see the excitement

and energy that are invested in providing services to the Jewish people worldwide.

Computer games could be developed which use communal concern, community dilemmas and contemporary issues as a frame for problem solving and conflict solution.

Heavy attention should be given to the restoration of the summer internships which were so successful in several communities as a source for recruiting people to the field by providing undergraduates an opportunity for service in a Jewish agency as paraprofessionals.

Young professionals should be honored at public meetings and annual events in communities and at the General Assembly of the CJF and other national meetings so that all could see that not only are young leadership needed for the continuity of our Jewish community but that they, in turn, must have young professional partners to work with hand-in-hand in the years ahead.

In the shorter term, there must be decent housing and low-cost housing loans available to couples who are interested in Jewish communal careers so that they might live a life of dignity. Tuition credits for day schools and the like, free membership in the Jewish community centers and synagogues could definitely come to be part of the pattern of service that is given by communities as a way of encouraging the professionals to make use of the services and to have them available at low cost. As indicated above, it is urgent to think of job sharing and part time work possibilities with maternity and paternity leave, child care for the professionals and all of the possibilities the women's movement has been discussing and fighting for, throughout the country.

Under the premise that to have a life of knowledge makes sense in Jewish communal service as much as it does

anywhere, it is imperative that study leaves be developed. Israel's approach could be one to emulate in America. A money bank could be created, which staff is allowed to draw upon periodically for study and sabbatical purposes. It might be possible to develop such a fund on the national level, to be matched one-third by community and one-third by workers in order to grant three month sabbaticals every seven years for study purposes.

It is important to do recruitment in the places that have the greatest potentiality for identifying those most interested in Jewish life and its continuity. Intense recruitment efforts at places such as Brandeis-Bardin Institute, among American students in Israel, Jewish camps and the like should produce students for Jewish communal service. While these remarks are pointed chiefly at Federation work they should be understood as being important for all aspects of communal service, for it is from the broadest base of recruitment that Federations will also be able to satisfy their own personnel needs.

It is urgent to raise starting salaries. This will be best accomplished when national agencies refuse to help in the placement process until and unless a given community or agency is willing to meet the minimum standards set by the field. There must be salaries that allow for a decent standard of living. Salaries below the \$20,000 level cannot be treated seriously as affording a possibility for dignified living with the cost of housing, education, and maintenance what it is today. Lastly, there must be new approaches in scholarship pro-

grams for those who are coming into the field. Communities should begin to pay back the loans of graduates of communal service programs providing that evaluation had ascertained the desirability of keeping them on the job.

Those who begin in communal service are too often disillusioned and discouraged. There is a heavy turnover of workers on the beginning level. As many as fifty percent of the people who begin in Jewish communal service are out within two years. This must give us pause about the recruitment process and the students' educational preparation. Products of Jewish communal service training programs and schools have shown greater staying power. It is incumbent upon the Federations of America and the field of communal service in general to be much more serious in funding such programs of Jewish communal service and amplifying their scholarship funds, so necessary to young graduates avoiding the high indebtedness that is now the norm for those emerging from education for communal service.

If indeed recruitment and retention are to be a high priority, they can only come to be so by the field's moving past the rhetoric into an action program that will deal seriously with the crisis soon to be felt in a field which begs for "the best and the brightest".

The table in the appendix indicates the realities that face the field and the context for the action that has been outlined in this short article. Jobs exist. The need is great. Will action follow soon?

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Personnel Survey of Leading Employers of Jewish Communal Workers\*

Agency	Total Professionals Employed	Annual Job Turnover			Anticipated Future Growth/Shrinkage
		Entry Level	Middle Mgmt.	Upper Mgmt.	
American Jewish Committee	137	6-7	5	1	no change
American Jewish Congress	65	3	3	2	no change
American Zionist Youth Foundation-Zionist System	175	10	3	3	slight growth
Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith	130	... 6-7 combined			expansion***
Jewish Family & Children's Agencies (re. local agencies)	2,000	** ... 17-26 combined			
B'nai B'rith Hillel	160	20-25	NA	10	slight growth
B'nai B'rith Internat'l	60	3-4	3-4	1-2	slight growth
BBYO	65	7	1	1	slight growth
CJF—incl. local Federations	1,000	40	70	40	no change
JESNA	200 central staff	—	21	8	no change
Jewish Homes for the Aged	800	30	150	10	increasing growth
Jewish Welfare Board†	2,200	156	163††	69‡‡	slight growth
National Association of Synagogue Administrators (other than rabbis)	275	15 Total ...			increasing growth
National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council‡	350	15-20	15	2-4	small but steady growth
United Jewish Appeal	75-80	7-8	5-6	1	marginal growth
Rough Totals	7,690	300	440	150	

† Includes local camps as well as Community Centers.

‡ Includes American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, ADL, and non-Federation CRCs.

\*\* Entry levels usually filled from within.  
 †† 110 Exec. Dir.—11% turnover; 272 other upper Mgmt.—21%.  
 ‡‡ 850 mid-mgmt.—18% turnover; 200 support staff—5%.

\*\*\* 19 field staff hired in 1982-83. 6 new positions scheduled.

\* This survey was conducted in 1983 by the Professional Education Committee of the Conference of Jewish Communal Service. No data was at hand for personnel of Jewish vocational agencies.