

Cholent on the Glass Ceiling: Slip-Sliding Away

Jeffrey R. Solomon

Cindy Chazen and Shifra Bronznick each write about the lost opportunities and disappointments in the relationship between women and leadership positions in Jewish communal service. While I identify with the valid and important points they make, I believe that the problems of gender equity in the field are symptomatic of more severe human resource problems. These, along with related organizational dysfunction, suggest serious, potentially fatal flaws affecting Jewish communal structures. The personal and institutional sexism that embarrassingly permeates contemporary Jewish communal life is but a symptom of a series of leadership and management failures that rest at the door of contemporary lay and professional leadership. None of us should sleep well at night knowing that 43 of the 44 largest federations are stewarded by men and all but one major national Jewish organization are led by male professionals. What are some of these management/leadership failures?

1. Performance Standards. Virtually nowhere in Jewish life do standard setting and accreditation processes exist (other than Hillel and the Jewish Community Centers Association, who are undertaking such an effort). Jewish communal institutions do not report to a "higher authority" who ensures that internal policies and procedures reflect the larger societal norms including equality and equity in the workforce. The internal focus of boards and management, without checks and balances, reflects an attitude that bespeaks insularity.

2. Human Resource Mismanagement. Within the range of Jewish communal institutions, poor personnel practices have become the norm. Few institutions publish job descriptions, postings of promotional opportunities and vacancies, or policies regarding professional searches. Too often, the "good old boy" network becomes the shortcut in both executive hiring and promotion. Conse-

quently, qualified, competent women are not traditionally given the opportunity to know of or apply for critical positions. The degree to which organizational human resource management is not serious is the bellwether for gender equity failure. Further, when one considers that the human resources of these organizations are their most precious assets, one can only wonder why 50 percent of this asset is squandered.

3. Command and Control Dysfunction. Many North American Jewish community structures were created at a time of pressing need as mobilizations. Contemporary issues have radically changed this scenario. Most of these structures, now attracting fewer donors and organizational members, deny rather than confront the need to address organizational transformation. Whether looking at membership organizations such as Bnai Brith or community-based organizations such as the federa-

tions, the inability to accept the changed landscape results in command and control as the prevalent behavior; a behavior not uncommon in organizations where memories exceed dreams. As pointed out in Bronznick's essay, in such an environment, the potential for change in the professional leadership profile becomes far more challenging.

4. Lay-Professional Behaviors. Like Bronznick, I have often observed men making suggestions (that are adopted) that were earlier made by women but ignored. While I have no doubt that sexism is part of this dynamic, my observations also suggest that professional suggestions in general — female or male — are often devalued. That same suggestion, made later by a male or female volunteer leader, may then be adopted. Both lay and professional leaders are increasingly antagonistic, using "blame-frame" mindsets toward each other. For the most part, neither the volunteer nor the professional corps have effectively learned the principles of nonprofit gov-

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ernance, stewardship, or management with an effective delegation of authority and responsibility.

Possible Directions. During the past forty years, North America has come to appreciate the power of diversity in optimizing quality in any setting. Jewish communal structures, however, have missed powerful lessons regarding diversity, and they exhibit behaviors that are sexist and ageist to their own detriment. If one were to use the term “young professional” instead of “woman” in most of these articles, one would find a similar sense of frustration. The field desperately needs to confront its sexism and ageism, for it cannot afford to lose the power, knowledge, and effectiveness of a large leadership pool.

One of the concepts being discussed within the context of the previously noted Advancing Jewish Women project is the adaptation of “Sullivan-like” principles. The Sullivan Principles, which helped transform apartheid South Africa to a more equitable state, were simple declarations to which (investing) institutions could subscribe. We must encourage every Jewish organization to sign on to principles of equity and equality in the workplace, including collecting and making public data regarding hiring, retention, and promotion. If the chief pro-

fessional and volunteer officers were to sign on to equity principles, we could begin to better sensitize and encourage a healthy norm while isolating the violators.

Similarly, we must learn from the positives of affirmative action in the larger society. Imagine that every search committee required a qualified female finalist for any job search. Done seriously, we would locate scores of talented women who could help facilitate the debates we need to better serve our constituencies. I concur with my colleagues as to the importance of mentoring and other components of creating positive change. Chazan’s use of “self” aptly illustrates the value and impact of these components in leadership development. However, I also implore that we become more assertive, more just, more effective in demanding what our community deserves — the best that we can deliver in smart, effective organizations, using *all* of those precious human resources available to us.

Jeffrey R. Solomon is President of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies. He previously served as Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of UJA-Federation of New York.

Balancing Work and Family: A Leadership Dilemma for Women

Judith Glass

How do we understand the problem of women moving into leadership positions? Whose problem is it? And who is responsible for solving it?

The problem can be analyzed on three levels: 1) deficiencies in individual women; 2) role responsibilities; 3) institutional structures. The first level addresses women’s leadership styles and temperament. The problem is hers; the solution is remedial programs and mentoring.

The second level looks at gender roles and the totality of responsibilities that women carry in the society — how women split their allegiance between work and home. The problem is still hers; the solution lies in managing the family differently.

The third level looks structurally at what underlines the relationship between the organization of the family and the organization of work. The way we work is based on an outdated model of the family. The problem is institutional; the solution lies in changes in the work site if women are to assume leadership roles.

Compounding this analysis is the increased working hours of all professionals because of downsizing and competitive pressures. Women’s working hours have increased more than those of men due to the combination of labor market work and responsibilities for housework, child care, and elder care. If we want more women in positions of leadership, then we must acknowledge and accom-