

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Carol Schechter outlines the ways in which national, communal and individual organizations in Jewish education can utilize social marketing principles and techniques to encourage recruitment and retention of Jewish educators. She draws lessons from the field of social marketing to prescribe a clear plan of action that can be adopted by any community.

The Application of Social Marketing Principles to Educator Recruitment and Retention

CAROL SCHECHTER

Introduction

Successfully recruiting and retaining talented educators is a challenge that crosses all areas of Jewish education. Those who have worked to improve Jewish education over the years recognize that this is not a simple problem to solve. A complex set of factors – including low salaries, lack of standard benefits policies, competition from other employment sectors, and the decentralized nature of recruitment and retention efforts – all contribute to the problem. Success will require sustained and systematic change at the individual, organizational, institutional, and community levels.

At the same time, it is true that we have never had the range and depth of experience with changing individual and organizational behavior as we do today, and the lessons learned from other social change arenas can be applied to recruitment and retention of Jewish educators.

Social marketing is one such social change approach that can be applied to educator recruitment and retention. Social marketing is a discipline introduced in the 1970s that applies commercial marketing principles and expertise to address social problems (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971).

Social marketing methods have been applied over the last three decades to a large array of issues, including controlling and preventing tobacco use, improving mammography and other cancer screening rates, and changing dietary patterns to include more fruits and vegetables. The accumulated experience provides a substantial body of evidence that supports the applicability of marketing approaches to advancing social causes (Andreasen, 1997). Several principles that emerge from

these experiences can support and advance the design of recruitment and retention initiatives.

1. Know exactly who your audience is and look at everything from that group's point of view (AED, 2001).

Social marketing is a consumer-oriented and audience-focused approach to program planning. Marketers recognize that they are probably very different from the population they are seeking to recruit, and they seek to understand the world from their audience's point of view. This principle can seem deceptively simple. Most social activists have trouble when it comes to actually looking at the world through the audience's point of view. For Jewish leaders, passionate about their mission, it is tempting to assume that others share or can be persuaded to share their values and beliefs. To some extent this may be true, as many people will agree to the basic value of Jewish education. However, beyond this basic agreement, values and priorities are likely to diverge; and recruitment planners must begin to pay careful attention to the points of view of the people they are seeking to reach. Designers of recruitment programs must understand what constitute incentives and obstacles from the perspective of those entering the field.

2. Be clear about the actions you want your audience to take (Smith, 1999).

Both commercial marketing and social marketing focus on behavior change. In commercial marketing, behavioral decisions center on a purchase – buying a particular soft drink, a new pair of sneakers, a car, or a house. Social marketers are concerned about influencing audience behaviors. Eating five fruits and vegetables a day, wearing a seat belt, or enrolling in a clinical trial are

examples of behaviors that have been the focus of social marketing efforts. Marketing plans are designed with the end goal – behavior change – in mind.

In applying social marketing principles to educator recruitment and retention, it is important to identify and articulate the BEHAVIOR that you want your audience to exhibit. Applying for a position, attending a job fair, teaching continuously for at least five years are examples of behaviors. Clearly articulating the behavioral goal helps to focus the marketing strategies on clear outcomes and allows evaluation of different strategies.

3. To succeed in getting people to do something you want them to do, you must offer them something they value in return (Smith, 1997).

Marketing recognizes that there must be an exchange of value between the parties involved. In a commercial transaction, the exchange is easy to identify – a consumer gives money in exchange for a product that offers benefits they value. Social marketing efforts in recruitment and retention also must offer clear benefits to the potential educator.

Marketers know that everyone always needs to answer the question “What’s in it for me?” In designing marketing efforts for educator recruitment, the answers will vary. Altruism, passion for Judaism, salary, job benefits or personal satisfaction may resonate as benefits to different audiences. Audience research is necessary to identify the critical benefits that matter to potential educators. To be successful, recruitment planners must know what benefits matter to their audience – and must deliver these benefits, not just promise them.

4. Be aware of and plan for the competition (Andreasen, 1995).

For almost every commercial product, a consumer can choose an alternative product or even no product at all. In educator recruitment the same is also true. College graduates or older adults looking for a career change, for example, may have other opportunities. The choice of becoming a Jewish educator must not only provide value to that individual, but must provide value that *exceeds* the value of their other available choices.

5. Marketing is much more than advertising.

Marketing is sometimes mistakenly assumed to be synonymous with advertising or promotion, but it is actually an integrated set of tactics, interventions, and approach-

es. This range of tactics and approaches – known as the “marketing mix” – addresses four sets of variables. All these variables must be considered in designing effective educator recruitment.

- **Product** – In this case, it is the educator position and all the benefits associated with the employment offering. Social marketers look at how they can design or redesign their product or service to offer benefits that the target audience values. In the field of Jewish education, it is critical to improve the job offering so that it is attractive to potential applicants. This may involve increased salaries, job benefits, mentoring opportunities, teacher recognition programs, or other benefits that are identified through research as important to potential applicants.
- **Price** – In commercial marketing this variable is the actual cost of the item; however in social marketing, it usually refers to the set of barriers that the consumer must overcome to obtain the item. Reducing barriers and increasing benefits will increase the value of the exchange to the consumer.
- **Place** – This means the location or outlets where the product or service is available to the consumer. In education, it is the actual location of the teaching position and all the elements associated with the place – the social and physical environment; the availability of accessible and friendly staff to answer questions and provide support; the accessibility of the location; and simple issues such as availability of parking or transportation.
- **Promotion** – This encompasses the communication and outreach activities used by recruiters to publicize opportunities and recruit and retain educators. Promotion activities might include community networking; radio and newspaper advertising; direct mail; public relations efforts, such as making community presentations and encouraging recommendations from influential friends or community leaders; interpersonal networks and more. The effectiveness of promotional activities depends on a number of factors, all of them based in a solid knowledge of the target audience: developing messages that convey benefits to match the needs of the specific audience, using messengers who are credible and trustworthy to the audience, and placing messages in communication channels where they will reach and be seen by the target audience.

Conclusion

Social marketing can provide a useful framework for designing, carrying out, and evaluating efforts to recruit and retain Jewish educators. Its principles – knowing the target audience, clearly articulating the desired behavioral goal, understanding the exchange of values involved, assessing the competition, and utilizing all the elements of the marketing mix – provide a systematic

approach that may improve the effectiveness of ongoing and future efforts in the field.

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Editor's Suggested Discussion Guide:

- Schechter makes a strong case for the value of social marketing for recruitment and retention of Jewish educators. To what extent is your community prepared to engage in this marketing process? Who, on the local level, would need to be involved in the process?

- How might these principles be applied on the local level? How might your community pool resources to implement a social marketing campaign?
- What resources and supports are needed on the national level to apply these principles?