

What We Can Learn About Recruitment from an Evaluation of Two Programs by Roberta Louis Goodman

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The shortage of quality Jewish educational personnel is well documented both through research (CIJE, 1994, 1997; Mandel Foundation, 1998); experience such as the list of advertised positions, many of which go unfilled; or the stories of the difficulties search committees have in finding suitable and available personnel. In recent years, many recruitment efforts have been developed, stimulated by the overwhelming sense of need and the availability of increased funding to address this concern.

While the shortage of qualified Jewish educational personnel is well documented, less well understood is the recruitment process that could help inform the development of these recruitment efforts. This article attempts to answer five key questions pertaining to recruitment. Who are likely candidates for a career in the field? What helps prepare someone to be a solid candidate for entering the field? What can lay and professional leaders do to more effectively recruit people into the field? At what points in someone's life should the recruitment process occur? What makes a recruitment program effective?

The data, findings, and insights presented in this article are based on an evaluation of two programs aimed at recruiting college students into the field of Jewish education: the CAJE Schusterman College Program and JESNA's Lainer Interns for Jewish Education (Goodman, 2000).

An important step in structuring this study was consulting with a professional career counselor to better understand how recruitment is approached in general. While Jewish education has only recently become focused on issues of recruitment, the field of career or vocational counseling is an established one.

Dr. Janet Shlaes (1999), an executive staff member of Jewish Vocational Service in Chicago, advised that in recruiting someone into a field, two items are important: their knowledge of the field and the match between the field and the person's skills, abilities, and interests. These two issues guided the study from development of the survey instrument through data analysis and report writing.

Description of the Programs

First launched in 1990, The CAJE College Program was developed "to encourage young people during their college years to explore the options of a career in Jewish education (1994 Report on College Program to CAJE Board)." Between 20 and 30 individuals attend the program held during the annual CAJE Conference. Participants are recruited through college channels and through the CAJE membership, many of whom have contact with college students. The program provides a combination of sessions solely for the group, as well as the opportunity to choose from among the array of offerings in the main CAJE Conference. After the Conference, participants are encouraged to remain connected through the CAJE College Network and through interaction with mentors, established Jewish educators with whom they were to remain in contact throughout the year, a 1999 addition to the program. Those who run the CAJE College Program are all volunteers.

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Begun in 1992, JESNA's College Program is currently offered at Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University for either a semester or a full-academic year. Program participant size ranged from 24 to 40. Publicity is distributed to students while still in North America prior to their leaving for study in Israel and recruitment efforts are more concentrated when they arrive there. In Israel, all participants take a Jewish education class for college credit and go on numerous field trips to see Jewish education in action. The year-long students do an internship in an Israeli educational institution.

Once they return to college in North America, JESNA highly recommends that participants serve in a Jewish educational placement for the academic year, typically in a supplementary school or youth group setting. During winter break, the cohort convenes for a three-day seminar in the Los Angeles area. Several professionals from JESNA, the Israeli universities, and Hillel staff the program. Program graduates remain connected through a combination of mailings, e-mail, telephone, and meetings.

Methodology

The data were collected through use of a questionnaire mailed to all the past participants of the two programs. The questionnaire was constructed to develop a profile of candidates likely to enter the field of Jewish education and to evaluate each program's effectiveness. Of the total 332 participants (145 from CAJE Schusterman College Program and 187 from JESNA's Lainer Interns for Jewish Education), 102 completed questionnaires were returned (31 CAJE Schusterman College Program participants and 74 JESNA's Lainer Interns for Jewish Education), for a 31% response rate overall. Since the number of returned questionnaires from individuals who participated in both programs was so small, the three individuals are counted in the numbers for each program.

Answering the Five Questions: Essential Findings Relevant to Future Recruitment Efforts

In answering the five recruitment questions, the report produced findings that have important implications for future recruitment efforts. These findings have to do with knowing whom to target for recruitment, preparing for a career in Jewish education, coming in contact with influentials, identifying when someone actually enters the field, and developing a good program.

Knowing Whom to Target for Recruitment

How are likely candidates for a career in Jewish education identified? If we follow the advice of vocational counselor Janet Shlaes, a person's familiarity with a field is a major component of matching that person to a field as a career choice. The respondents to the survey from both programs had extensive experience in the adolescent years, ages twelve through high school, working in the field. They worked in a wide range of settings, including those to be anticipated, such as supplementary schools (approximately 70% for both age groups) and day or overnight camps (60% for both age groups), as well as pre-schools, day schools, Jewish youth groups, Israel programs, and retreats.

While neither the quality of engagement nor the actual role is delineated, what emerges is a picture of a field that presents opportunities at a very early age for being on the "delivery," or "professional" side. The opportunities for learning about the field at a young age are particularly apparent when compared to other fields, including law and medicine.

What is different about the participants in their college years, as opposed to in their teen years, is that these programs have provided them with some significant professional development experiences at a time in their lives when they are very consciously making decisions about careers and job experiences. The CAJE and JESNA programs provide an opportunity to learn much more about a field and career paths.

Knowing whom to target should not be a recruitment problem for Jewish education. Without having the actual numbers, there are probably thousands of young people who serve as school assistants, teachers, camp counselors, youth group advisors, and the like in their teen and college years. The challenge, then, is not so much in identifying the potential pool of people, but rather in recruiting them effectively and in sharing with them the challenging positions and careers paths that they can pursue throughout their lifetimes.

Preparing for a Career in Jewish Education

The respondents in these two programs are better prepared in terms of their own Jewish education than many of the people already in the field. All the respondents had some formal Jewish schooling as children, with 80% of them continuing their studies beyond Bar or Bat Mitzvah. These numbers compare favorably to teachers in Jewish schools, where 45% of pre-school teachers and 71% of supplementary school teachers received any Jewish education in their teen years. Only day school teachers matched this level of education, with 85% receiving Jewish schooling post-Bar or Bat mitzvah (CIJE, Policy Brief, 1993, p. 2).

The respondents continued their formal Jewish educational training into their college years. Eighty-five percent of the respondents took Hebrew courses and 92% took Jewish or Middle Eastern study courses in college, with 60% on an intensive track, having majored or minored in one of these areas as undergraduates or graduates. This 60% figure is significantly higher than the 31% of the teachers in Jewish schools with a major in Jewish studies, according to the CIJE study (CIJE, The Teachers Report, 1998, p. 6). While the CIJE did not include a minor in Jewish studies in its figures, the indicator is still a powerful one.

Fifty-three percent of the JESNA respondents and 39% of the CAJE respondents either have received or are planning on receiving a degree in Jewish or general education or a certificate in teaching. At a young age, these respondents nearly match the 54% level of CIJE teachers with an educational credential (CIJE, The Teachers Report, 1998, p. 6).

Their extensive Hebrew and Jewish studies backgrounds and their training in education suggest that these candidates possess many of the skills and abilities necessary for being outstanding Jewish educational professionals. Combining their Jewish knowledge and experience in the field of Jewish education, these respondents are powerful and likely candidates for a career in the field. They bring to the field many of the qualifications that reports such as those by the CIJE, now Mandel Foundation, on Jewish educational personnel found lacking: preparation in Jewish studies, Hebrew, and education.

Given the proliferation of Jewish studies programs in North America and the extensive use of teens and college students in the Jewish educational system, one has to wonder how many more people such as these are not being attracted to these recruitment programs or to the field.

Coming in Contact with Influentials

People as well as experiences can be important factors determining one's values and career choices. In this study, those deemed as "influentials" were people known to the respondent and, in some way, encouraged them to explore Jewish education as a career, often through modeling as much as active suggestions. Nearly half of all respondents had a close relative (parent, sibling, aunt/uncle, grandparent, or cousin) who was a professional involved in Jewish education or Jewish communal life.

Even greater were the percentage of respondents, some 70%, who had close relatives involved in Jewish education or Jewish communal life in a volunteer role. In some way, most of the respondents were exposed to the value of participating in Jewish communal life as children.

Expanding beyond close relatives, nearly 70% of the respondents reported that someone was particularly helpful and/or interested in their pursuing a career in Jewish communal life. Among those listed as influentials were education directors, rabbis, youth group staff, teachers, cantors, camp directors, central agency staff, JESNA and CAJE staff, Hillel professionals, Jewish studies professors, college chaplain, lay leaders, peers, friends, and family.

Both professionals with whom they experienced Jewish life, (e.g. taught or counseled them) and those with whom they worked appeared on the list.

Jewish professionals have access to potential candidates at many different junctures in their lives. The respondents reported on specific ways in which these Jewish professionals encouraged a Jewish educational career choice (see Table 1).

The good news is that most of the respondents connected with some Jewish communal professional. The finding that speaks to the influence that a Jewish communal professional can have is that 52% of the respondents from both programs indicated that some professional had maintained contact with them over the years, developing a long-term or mentor relationship.

The unfortunate news is that Jewish communal professionals are not doing as much as they could be. The percentage of professionals who suggested to a candidate that they enter the field or pursue a degree in Jewish education is disappointingly low. This is especially the case, given that the respondents had contact with so many Jewish professionals over their lifetimes, including during the years when young people think about what they want to do with their lives. These professionals were not very helpful in identifying sources of funding to help pay for a Jewish education.

The system needs to address how Jewish communal professionals, as well as lay leaders, can become better recruiters, better advocates, and better career counselors on subjects including where and how to find scholarship money to encourage young people to enter the field of Jewish education.

Identifying when Someone Actually Enters the Field

At what point in someone's life should the recruitment process occur? How do you know when someone has actually prepared for and entered the field as a career? Is it when they pursue a degree in Jewish education? Is it when they have their first full-time job in Jewish education? In looking at the respondent's college degrees, employment histories, and career aspirations post-college, it was extremely difficult to identify exactly who was

preparing for and entering the field of Jewish education and who was not. The data suggest that, for the respondents, there were multiple ways to prepare for a career in Jewish education and a variety of paths to take, some that are present themselves immediately after graduating with a degree and some that evolve over time.

All the respondents were asked to describe their career plans in the next five years. Sixty-four percent of the respondents indicated an interest in working in Jewish education or Jewish communal life over the next five years. In response to a question as to whether they, ultimately, intended to pursue a career in Jewish education, 59% of all the respondents indicated that they were very likely or likely to do so. In actuality, 75% of the respondents were working in Jewish communal professions either full- (33 individuals) or part-time (43 individuals), and only 10% were working outside of Jewish communal life. The part-time employees in Jewish education include both undergraduate and graduate college students and individuals working full-time in other fields.

Yet, when it came to obtaining a degree specifically in Jewish education only, 19% of the total respondents are either currently enrolled in a program specifically in Jewish education or have received a masters' degree in Jewish education. While the question was not directly asked about their intent to enroll in a Jewish education degree program, clearly there is a discrepancy between those interested in a career in the field and those who are obtaining a degree in Jewish education. Many of the respondents are choosing alternative study paths to a career in Jewish education.

The boundary lines of who is in the field and who is not are fuzzy and fluid. Recruitment is a lifetime, not a "one-time," process, it is not just about getting college students into the "right" graduate program or position in the Jewish education. They move in and out of the field and select different degrees and work experience to enter or re-enter the field. Given the multiple entry points into the field, and the varied career paths, a career in Jewish education remains accessible to them all. Recruitment is about staying connected to these individuals throughout their careers.

Developing a Good Program

Given that this evaluation examines only two programs, it is difficult to generalize as to what are the key elements in an outstanding program. Yet, one factor stands out as significant, namely, the importance of bringing the participants into contact with peers like themselves in terms of their Jewish knowledge, commitment and willingness to explore or pursue a career in Jewish education, or communal life. Nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated that friends or peers positively influenced their choice to think about a career in Jewish education. Comments about what made the program successful, such as "the other participants who were on my own career path" and "other college participants," pointed to the importance of building a sense of community and connection. Friendships and networks of relationships were formed.

The organization of both the JESNA and CAJE programs reinforced the establishment of peer relationships and networks during the program time and beyond. The importance of creating peer support needs to be in the forefront of any recruitment program, and so especially for this age group.

Conclusion

In addition to giving us information about two outstanding programs, this evaluative research has provided insights into some of the challenges involved in recruiting and possible ways of addressing them. Recruitment efforts must focus both on the potential recruits and the recruiters. Clearly, both professional and lay leaders are influential in leading people to careers in Jewish education, yet they need to know and do more.

More research is needed about recruitment issues and potential populations, including who does not enter the field, second career entrants, recruitment programs for more mature individuals, the role of university Jewish studies professors in promoting entry into the field, and so forth. May we all raise up many disciples and find teachers for ourselves and others.

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