

LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR A GLOBAL JEWISH CIVIL SERVICE

GERALD B. BUBIS

Vice President, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs; Founding Director of the HUC-JIR School of Jewish Communal Services, Los Angeles

If Jewish communal service training programs are to be beacons for change, they must define more precisely the source of sanctions for professionals' exercise of leadership. They should focus on principles underlying vibrant Jewish communities, the use of new communication technologies, and the implementation of new governance modalities.

Jewish communal service training programs need to be the beacons for change as the focus of the global Jewish agenda moves from Jews' problems—rescue and resettlement—to Jewish problems as Ahad HaAm called them—Jewish education, pluralism, freedom, responsibility, indifference, and the search for God and good.

We are not a profession as are doctors or accountants. Therefore the training we undertake on a global basis must be focused upon that which is most transferable: (1) values, history, and structure; (2) new modalities of work; and (3) human and organizational behaviors.

VALUES, HISTORY, AND STRUCTURE

A value is an idea so cherished that we work toward its being used in life. There must be a continuing search for the values that transcend denominationalism, and a serious curriculum must provide the opportunity for this search.

Recently the nine programs of Jewish communal service in America completed a joint project through the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs funded by the Wexner Foundation. It resulted in a volume on the Jewish polity through the ages that identified principles determining the differences between viable Jewish communities and those that could not succeed. They are to be seen as constitutional principles—the guidelines for a viable and vibrant Jewish community.

These principles are based upon the premise that the modern Jewish community

represents the continuation of the original covenant struck with the Jewish people (Geffen as derived from Elazar, 1997):

- *Voluntary Citizenship:* That citizenship in the polity is a matter of choice for Jews and that the decision to become a citizen must be expressed by some positive act of affiliation.
- *Associationalism:* That the basic unit of the polity is the voluntary association, a group of Jews who agree to join together to pursue one or more self-selected goals.
- *Federalism:* That relations between and among these associations are (largely) based on federal and confederal (rather than centralizing or hierarchical) principles.
- *Aristocratic Republicanism:* That the polity is ultimately responsible to (and sovereignty ultimately resides in) the Jewish public as a whole, but that leadership is vested in an aristocracy of trustees normally defined by their readiness to contribute substantial funds and energy to the polity.
- *Consensual Decision Making:* That decisions are reached by seeking a consensus among active leaders and that open conflict is avoided wherever possible.
- *Shared and Divided Authority:* That authority in the polity is exercised by a variety of leadership groups, representing different bases and primary spheres of authority; with no group monopolizing authority in any sphere of activity.

- *Brit Areivut* (The Covenant of Mutual Responsibility): That a primary purpose of the polity is to ensure the well-being of every Jew as an expression of the Jewish principle of *Areivut*.
- *Jewish Survivalism*: That the second primary purpose of the polity is to ensure the physical, cultural, and spiritual continuity of the Jewish people and Jewish religion.
- *Love of the Land of Israel*
- *Respect for Jewish Tradition*: Torah as Constitution.
- *Hesed* (Covenantal Love): Above and beyond the call of duty.

These concepts can bind all of us together and form a coherent part of all curricular material taught worldwide.

NEW MODALITIES OF WORK

In the last ten years there have come into being radical new communication tools. And yet after nearly fifty years of practice, teaching, and consulting I see few examples of organizations changing the ways they communicate and govern. The training programs must challenge themselves. Must there always be committees to make changes? Must staff always be present when decisions are made? How can organizations make the most of the new technologies in governance and delivery of services?

Consider this example: Outside of Israel few agencies make accommodations to Jewish family life for their own staffs. Would home-based services be one answer? Are staff really needed in places called offices? What are the limits of teleconferencing, fax and e-mail communications even within one organization? How can these tools be used for global teaching?

Do leadership training programs challenge the present by asking what Ian Mitroff of the University of Southern California calls "what if" questions? What if there were a world-wide recession and staff were reduced as drastically as the Jewish Agency has reduced its staff? What if a theocratic state in Israel came into being? What should the role

of staff be? Could scenarios with world Jewish consequences be developed and distributed world-wide?

HUMAN AND ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIORS

One phenomenon that is insufficiently addressed is the ambivalence that many board volunteers and funders have about staff. People who give money and monitor the use of that money are often disturbed to learn that services are rarely concrete (with the exception of organizations such as the Joint). The dollars available for direct service for every hundred dollars raised are often not understood. The paradox is that governors want and need organizational instruments to plan, supervise, monitor services, and serve the governance and funders' systems themselves.

Further, in North America executives in medium and larger cities are now earning respectable salaries. A significant number are now earning more than some of the board members. Ironically at the same time entry-level salaries have lagged. This may explain the finding that after three years one-half of entry-level workers have left the field.

On the governance side there has been a change in the nature and kind of volunteer. There used to be a strong common past to bond board and staff members. Many board and staff people had weathered the Depression and the Holocaust, and begun their careers as poor people after being the first in their families to go to university. The empathic possibilities between the two groups born of their common past were palpable.

Indeed many service agencies had board members whose success in the business world preceded their own higher education. Some were illiterate. Staff were often better educated than many board members.

That is not the norm today. The economic gap between junior staff and most board members is often enormous. Many board members are now highly educated and in many instances possess more specific education relatable to agency management than do staff. (Think of computer experts, legal and

accounting specialists, and communication specialists as some examples.)

The end result is often a different attitude and treatment of staff. This must be on the agenda for the globalists among us who realize that service to the Jewish people has to be elevated as a cause, that staff are entitled to dignity, comfortable living levels, and aspirations for the betterment of their own families.

The field should take a hard look at new governance modalities currently in use in the corporate world. Drucker (1990) suggests how board members could meet without staff, do certain evaluative functions for staff, and in general perform functions on behalf of staff (not as a substitute) in order to enhance the governance function. He is not advising micro-management but rather the use of highly intelligent and talented people for the furtherance of the agency in a disciplined and thoughtful way. In all instances consultation with appropriate staff must take place before, during, and after this process.

Avoiding the overuse of committees and early burnout of volunteers and achieving the correct balance in involvement of both board and staff in the governance process needs careful exploration, experimentation, and research.

My plea is for a visionary boldness in exploring the parameters of training and education. Unless a serious education program can be implemented on a global basis, the difficult and sometimes confounding issues facing Jews will find few staff available as serious players in evolving the strategies to deal with them. This says nothing of staff helping to shape the often bold visions and initiatives that will be needed to engage Jews worldwide in the next decade.

The new technologies beg for creative use in education. I envision opportunities to take some of the more vexing issues facing us as a people, evolving scenarios drawn from the various countries where Jews live, and challenging students to team up through e-mail, Internet, teleconferencing, etc. for discussions, simulations and the like. This can

involve some of the great minds of our generation—theologians, philosophers, sociologists, and practitioners—to critique and discuss the presentations. Where translations are needed they can be provided.

There needs to be a more coordinated approach to research. Surely a consensus can be achieved on the set of issues to be researched with commonly developed instruments or questions. We have not examined our communities and their institutions in sufficiently trans-border ways.

CONCLUSION

None of these goals will be achieved unless we confront the reality that most staff are not perceived as leaders and relatively few play leadership roles. I have been involved in training and/or educating at least 1,000 staff all over the world. Few of them aspire to leadership roles. Most seem to fear the consequences when their leadership might call for helping a community or organization go in other directions.

Today the greatest impact most frequently comes from unconventional sources and untraditional organizations.

The challenge then is to define more precisely the source of sanctions for exercising leadership. We must begin that process by confronting ourselves, our access to power, and our own abilities to articulate the needs for staff who are capable of transformational leadership. We must help change the systems in which they labor. The issues are world wide; so are the challenges and opportunities.

REFERENCES

- Drucker, Peter. (1990, Fall). Lessons for successful nonprofit governance. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 1(1).
- Geffen, Rela. (1997). Fundamentals of the Jewish political tradition: Constitutional principles of the Edah. In Gerald B. Bubis, Daniel J. Elazar, & Melvin L. Silberman (Eds.), *Serving the Jewish polity*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.