

LET OUR LEADERS LEAD

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For much of the past century, the Jewish community required facilitative leadership using the skills of building consensus and rallying the people. Although those skills are still necessary, Jewish institutions today demand visionary leadership, in which professionals articulate and advocate a vision of where they want the institution to go. Informed debate among broad segments of the community is key to the effectiveness of visionary leadership.

In "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet," an episode of the popular television show *The West Wing*, President Bartlet is confronted by his chief-of-staff, Leo McGarry, who accuses the President of failing to live up to his promise. "These people showed up to be led," insists McGarry. He challenges the President to stand up and articulate his vision instead of worrying about defending his popular image and ensuring his re-election. The President, realizing that McGarry is right, resolves to speak his mind about the issues that concern him most deeply. Thus, McGarry launches a new campaign to bring the President into his own and "Let Bartlet be Bartlet."

McGarry's injunction can be extended to all Jewish leaders today, as we stand at a critical juncture in Jewish history. As the challenges facing our federations and communities continue to multiply, inspired leadership from both volunteers and professionals becomes increasingly critical. Although we seem to have reached a broad consensus about the prototype of volunteer leaders whom we must continue to attract and develop, the field is decidedly less certain about whom it must recruit into its own professional ranks.

FACILITATIVE LEADERSHIP

For most of the 20th century, we expected our professionals to facilitate the enactment of a grand narrative of Jewish history. The task of the Jewish leader was to raise the Jewish people from the ashes of Nazi-devastated Europe and to help give birth to a

Jewish State. Some decades later, we looked to our leaders to bring Jews from behind the Iron Curtain; then through Operation Magic Carpet, our leaders were expected to galvanize efforts to airlift the Jews of Yemen.

The facilitative leader was the modern Moses, shepherding the people to a land of promise and carrying us along in the tide of our history. Like Moses in the desert, we wanted our leaders to hear the needs of the people. They had to know how to listen to our concerns, rally us behind the cause, and lead as we shouted out, "Let my people go," or contributed money on behalf of our displaced and dispossessed brothers and sisters around the globe.

The two most important leadership skills were building consensus and rallying the people. As listener, galvanizer, and shepherd, the facilitative leader was instrumental in realizing a vision for the Jewish people.

Management and facilitative skills remain important and necessary today. Indeed, throughout his career, Stephen D. Solender excelled in three areas in which our professionals must continue to function at the highest levels: community organization, financial administration, and Jewish knowledge.

We still need leaders to help us feel part of our historical imperative. There are still Jews today in need of our support in Argentina, the Former Soviet Union, Israel, and other parts of the world. Leaders continue to require the facilitative skills of building support around a common agenda, developing a plan of implementation, and articulating the importance of the agenda in the community-at-large. The recent Israel Emergency Cam-

paign is a clear example of North American Jewry working together as part of an overarching effort that achieved much more than what any individual federation could have done alone.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Today, we need leaders who bring a wealth of skills and experiences to the table above and beyond what we might term the "traditional" skills of Jewish communal professionals. A multiplicity of agendas demand our attention, and we expect professionals to articulate their vision amidst a cacophony of competing causes. Our volunteer leaders ask us what we think and why, and we, as professional leaders, need to be clear about our answers.

Because there is no longer a single shared vision of the grand narrative of Jewish history, Jewish professionals need to be "articulate, Jewishly literate visionaries" (Cindy Chazan, via telephone, 2002). As communal consensus declines, "the role of the professional leader as conciliator becomes even more demanding" (Dr. Jeffrey R. Solomon, via letter, 2002).

"Jewish communal leadership requires a mix of Jewish content and commitment, managerial skills, vision, and strong interpersonal and communication skills. At different times, one or more of these may be more important" (Dr. John S. Ruskay, via email, 2002).

In the past we characterized facilitative leadership and visionary leadership as mutually exclusive. At our own expense we pitted "enablers" against "big picture" leaders. We valued either the consensus builder or the visionary, either the person who is expert in process or the person who knows content. We now need to expect more from our professionals—that the individuals creating the narrative of the Jewish people are experts in both process and content.

Today, we seek not just to save Jewish lives but to save Jewish life. In these efforts, we are confronted by a multiplicity of competing ideas, narratives, and models. Will we focus on re-energizing synagogue life

through innovative family education? Will we recognize the power of informal Jewish education and strengthen support for Jewish camping? Is Jewish day school education the key to Jewish literacy and commitment? How do we build on the success of birthright Israel? Should we be devoting more resources to the critical college years to increase the chances that our Jewish college students will find powerful Jewish role models on college campuses? How do we capitalize on the window of opportunity that presents itself today in the Former Soviet Union to support the renewal of Jewish life there while also recognizing that in the same regions there is vast poverty and hunger among survivors of the Holocaust? How are we to best ensure the survival and welfare of our people in the twenty-first century?

Today, more than ever before, we need leaders who are not afraid to stand up and articulate their vision for the Jewish people. We need leaders who have, as "a willingness to take risks" (Misha Galperin, via letter, 2002). Jewish communal professionals must play a more active, formative role than they have in the past. Jewish professionals cannot just reflect the crowd; they need to tell us where we should direct our support and how best to do so. Where should our people go? Why should we encourage them to go there? Moreover, our professionals must be educators who can create meaningful models for their communities and teach their constituents about the value of sustaining Jewish life today. Today's leader must be both visionary and facilitator, with the foresight to know where we should be heading and the insight to teach us how to get there.

If visionary leadership becomes an additional mode of professional participation, we are, of course, paving the way for more disagreement among our leaders as their visions conflict and compete with one another. Every visionary leader has his or her own fundamental postulates upon which a vision is built. But only when leaders put forth their own ideas can we engage in serious debate. If we wish to effect change, we need leaders

who are not afraid to challenge our minds and our hearts.

While it is important for each Jewish leader to articulate a personal vision, it is also important that the communal vision not be solely the brainchild of an individual. "The vision must not be a consensus vision, but it should be a collective vision" (Richard Joel, via email, 2002). Federations do not exist to fulfill the dreams of a single person, nor should they serve as proprietors of the lowest common denominator. Rather, the vision ought to emerge as a composite and refinement of multiple views. It should be the product of deep engagement and consensus building by the professional working together with the community. A good professional will use the long-standing tradition of consensus building to unite vision and community. However articulate the vision espoused by a professional leader, it will only be strengthened through community debate that will sharpen its focus, clarify its objectives, and develop clear strategies for achieving its goals. In the end, the vision must be articulated by the professional leader as a

compelling, inspiring example of what can be achieved through communal involvement and support. The best ideas are those that have been refined through debate and discussion, facilitation, and consensus building.

Leo McGarry's message to the President is a message to all of us. The time has come to let our leaders be our leaders! We must encourage our Jewish professionals to stand up for what they believe, to articulate their own visions, and to educate their communities about their dreams for our Jewish future. Only then will we realize the promise of our People.

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