

MANAGING YOUR CAREER IN JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE: JCSA TELECONFERENCE— DECEMBER 2002

*The Jewish Communal Service Association presented JCSA Teleconference—2002, entitled **Managing Your Career in Jewish Communal Service**, on December 17, 2002. The program was the fifth in a series of telecasts on critical issues of concern to the profession, the field, and the Jewish community. Forty communities in the United States and Canada—the largest audience for a JCSA telecast—were online to receive the program.*

The following article is based on that broadcast. It has been edited for continuity and to conform to Journal style. Biographical information about the participants in the teleconference is found at the conclusion of the article.

BACKGROUND

JCSA is dedicated to the advancement of our field of service and to the enrichment and development of professionals in Jewish communal service. As such, our *Association* has taken the lead in exploring ways to enhance recruitment and retention of highly qualified professionals.

The *Association* is actively working to strengthen our field and encourages professionals to consider their employment as more than a job. Indeed, working in the Jewish community can be a lifetime career that is fulfilling and rewarding.

JCSA is indebted to Teleconference—2002 Program Committee Co-Chairs Esther-Ann Asch and Robin S. Levenston for the development of an outstanding program. They led the effort to assemble an extraordinary panel of professional leaders capable of presenting insights, strategies and tactics for managing your career in Jewish communal service.

Videotapes of *Managing Your Career in Jewish Communal Service* are available free of charge. Email your request to INFO@JCSANA.ORG

INTRODUCTION

Esther-Ann Asch

Vice President, Community and
Foundation Relations
F.E.G.S. Health and Human Services,
New York
and

Robin S. Levenston

Vice President, Women's Department
THE ASSOCIATED: Jewish Community
Federation of Baltimore, MD
**Co-Chairs, JCSA Teleconference—
2002 Program Committee**

Asch

The seminar panel comprises four impressive professionals, each with significant knowledge, expertise, and insights into managing a career in Jewish communal service. The panelists span a broad range of specializations and interests. They are diverse with respect to degree of experience, level of supervision, gender, geography, type of agency affiliation, and involvement in for-profit or not-for-profit organizations.

Each panelist shares two important attributes—a proven ability to bring new and innovative methods to improve their agency or business, and a strong and abiding commitment to the profession. The panelists are

Robin S. Axelrod, Cindy Chazan, David E. Edell, and Alfred P. Miller.

Levenston

Four major thematic areas of interest and concern emerged from our pre-telecast research, which included many interviews with colleagues in local communities: (1) professional development and supervision, (2) mentoring and career advocacy, (3) attributes that CEOs look for when recruiting staff, and (4) what factors encourage a lifetime career in Jewish communal service. Our program has been designed to respond to these interests and concerns.

To begin, our panelists will describe a critical career choice or "defining moment" that helped bring them to where they currently are in their careers.

A DEFINING MOMENT

David E. Edell

President and Co-Founder
DRG, Inc., New York

Following my junior year in Israel, I knew that I wanted to pursue a career of being an executive in the Jewish community. I grew up in a home where my father and brother were federation executives, and I was not naïve about the challenges of the field. My first job in Jewish communal service was as the Director of Leadership Development at UJA-Federation of New York. To this day, I remember it as one of the most satisfying and exciting positions possible. However in the organization's structure, it was placed within the campaign department, and my supervisors were all senior fundraising executives. I learned quickly that I was being "pigeon-holed" and perceived to be a "campaigner." Although my interests and programs covered the entire spectrum of federation activities, my career options seemed only to be in the fundraising arena. I needed to find a way to broaden my networks, relationships, visibility, and learning. I did so by consciously seeking opportunities to work with colleagues in all of the other areas of the fed-

eration's operation. I built relationships and wonderful friendships with those in the planning and allocations departments, as well as with the leaders of the network of agencies. I also pursued opportunities with AJCOP and the-then CJCS (now JCSA) where I met and worked with peers and leaders from other fields of service. It was a conscious decision and strategy to manage my career options.

After a wonderful twelve years at UJA-Federation, I reached a second "defining moment" when the "fundraiser" label, coupled with my desire to stay in the New York area, limited my options. I wanted to serve the Jewish community and have an impact. I knew how acute the personnel crisis had become in the 1980s and chose to focus on that issue. I made the difficult decision to create an independent, entrepreneurial vehicle, DRG, Inc., that has become a national executive recruitment and consulting firm working exclusively with nonprofit and Jewish community organizations. I could not have built DRG without the many relationships that I had forged with federation and agency colleagues in New York and across the country. They provided me both the networks and credibility that I needed to succeed as a recruiter and consultant.

The "defining moments" were about choices that I made to try to manage my career options. A good strategy, hard work, the support from family and colleagues and luck all combined to help me achieve my goals thus far.

Cindy Chazan

Director, Alumni and Community
Development
The Wexner Foundation, New York

I grew up in Montreal in a family committed to Judaism and Zionism. I was a product of Jewish day schools, summer camps, and youth groups. From the time I was a teenager, I knew I would work in the Jewish community.

I left Montreal in 1972 to attend the then-fledgling Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service at Brandeis Univer-

sity. Upon graduation, I returned to Montreal and began my career: first in the Jewish Community Center field for twelve years; then in federations for thirteen years; and now in the world of foundations for the past four years.

Single until my mid-thirties, I moved from Canada to the United States, from Montreal to New York, and then to Hartford, CT—all part of the then-prescribed formula for professional advancement in our field. And I made these job and community changes with a sense of adventure and excitement.

I began my career at a time when there were few women role models, and those women who had succeeded never married or had children. It made me question if I could realize both of my dreams—to be a professional leader and to be a wife and mother.

I did have several exceptional male mentors and role models as colleagues, supervisors, and volunteer leaders. They made me feel that no professional goal was beyond my reach and were supportive when I moved on to my next job. I never felt the “old-boys network” was a barrier, and in fact, I always felt included, motivated, and encouraged by these men.

I married in my mid-thirties and began my new life living in New York and commuting to Hartford every weekend for a year. There were no challenging positions for me in Hartford, and I was unable to give up my job in New York with the Jewish Welfare Board (now Jewish Community Centers Association). I then came to my most self-defining moment. I needed time with my husband and to create a home. I could never have a child if I continued this lifestyle. I had to make a very difficult decision and tough choices.

I decided to leave my national agency job in New York, and assumed the number-two position at the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford—a safe position that I assumed could be the last of my career. Friends, mentors and colleagues told me

that the move would certainly derail me from the professional fast track I had been on, and would likely end any ambition I had to become an executive director and professional leader. I accepted these consequences, while knowing that male colleagues seldom had to make such a choice. Nonetheless, I knew I had made the right choice for me.

Three years later, my husband and I were blessed with a son. Two years later, I was offered and accepted the position of Executive Director of the Hartford Federation, following an extensive search by the Federation’s Search Committee. I now had the professional opportunity I thought could never be mine.

My career has been one of weighing trade-offs—speeding up at times, slowing down at other times. Sometimes the choices were mine to make, other times they were not. Some opportunities felt right, and others had “danger” written all over them. But I regret none, and for better or worse, I was fortunate to have been able to choose.

Alfred P. Miller

Chief Executive Officer

F.E.G.S. Health and Human Services
System, New York

My defining moment came when a mentor taught me to see the world in a macro vision, rather than in a micro view. He explained that by making systemic changes, one could positively affect many more people than through the more traditional “one person at a time” approach to problems. This new understanding encouraged me to move my career toward administration and executive leadership, rather than as a practitioner and counselor.

The turning point in my career was the desire to effect change on the larger canvas of life by influencing the fundamental systems and networks of communal service—in my agency, the local community, the nation, and internationally.

Robin S. Axelrod

Director, Sol Drachler Program in
Jewish Communal Leadership
University of Michigan School
of Social Work
Ann Arbor, MI

The Jewish community was very small and not well organized where I grew up in East Lansing, Michigan, so I had no early knowledge of federations or Jewish centers. However, my parents instilled in me a strong sense of Jewish pride and identity, and I was very involved in Young Judaea, a Zionist Jewish youth group.

Several years ago, the Wexner Foundation reviewed the background of applicants who had applied for a Wexner Graduate Fellowship. They found that there were two tracks that led applicants to the field of Jewish communal service. There were those who were "groomed" for the field, and those who "bloomed" into the field.

Those who were groomed had significant, early exposure and involvement in the Jewish community. Those who bloomed had little involvement, but experienced some form of transformation or realization that led them to our field. I came to understand that I had been groomed for work in the Jewish community. It was, and is, who I am. However, that realization came to me a bit later in life.

I earned a BA with a major in Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan in the mid-1980s. I had no real sense at that time of what a career in the Jewish community might be, other than as a rabbi or director of a religious school. I did not know any female rabbis, and heading a religious school was not of interest to me. So I did what many of my friends and colleagues were doing—I went to law school.

Although I received a law degree, I knew early on that a career in law was not for me. I wanted to do that for which I was groomed...work in the Jewish community. With the support and encouragement of my incredible spouse, and despite raising two young children, I returned to school to prepare for a career in Jewish communal service.

This was my best decision and highest risk-taking...and I have absolutely no regrets.

Levenston

We certainly have a dynamic panel with varied backgrounds and entry points into our field...colleagues who have been presented with critical challenges and difficult decisions along their individual career paths. We will now ask the panelists to comment on how to secure the tools needed for good professional supervision.

PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION

Axelrod

A supervisee must be assertive in order to get the professional supervision she or he needs and deserves. When negotiating for a position, you should include regularized supervisory time as part of your agreement, and continue to negotiate for such quality time after employment begins.

You need to have "sacred time" with your supervisor...time set aside on a regular basis when you and your supervisor are alone, and without interruptions or distractions. The time should involve a discussion of what is professionally pertinent and important, with clear boundaries between what is appropriate professionally and personally.

You have a critical role to play as a supervisee. You should know not only what your goals and objectives are with regard to what you want from supervision but also what the supervisor's goals and objectives are for the session. You should recognize that time is a precious commodity, and you should be fully prepared for each session. It is helpful to bring an agenda to the session and to email your supervisor in advance about any particularly difficult issues you want to discuss. In that way, the supervisor can give some thought to the matter before the session.

Make certain that you are on the supervisor's "radar screen." Make your supervisor aware of what is working well for you and

what challenges you face that require working together.

The following is a list of the **Top Ten 'Yes's and 'No's' of Supervision***

10—A supervisor should not respond to interruptions during the session, except in a dire emergency.

9—Clear and professional boundaries should be established between supervisor and supervisee.

8—Do not gossip about other employees.

7—Bifurcate supervisory issues into what is on your immediate work agenda and those issues or matters that are more long-range and philosophical. Both are important to the growth and development of the supervisor and the supervisee.

6—Both supervisor and supervisee should bring issues for discussion. The supervisory process should be viewed as a co-dependent enterprise.

5—A supervisee should occasionally ask, "What tasks should I undertake, and which skills should I hone that will enhance my future professional development?"

4—Regular supervisory sessions should be agreed to mutually. A weekly or bi-monthly schedule seems to work well for most people.

3—A supervisee should be humble, but also "manage up." A supervisor can learn from a supervisee's assertiveness and risk-taking.

2—A supervisee should request future portfolio assignments and be able to make the case for being able to staff the assignment.

1—The most important rule for a supervisee is that it is helpful to find outside mentors, regardless of how nourishing your in-house supervision may be.

*Adapted from teaching materials from David Contorer, Director of Major Gifts of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit.

Levenston

What can you do if you do not have a good supervisor? How do you tactfully "manage up" so as to receive better supervision, without jeopardizing your position in the agency?

Miller

All supervision does not have to come from one's own supervisor. Networking and belonging to professional associations such as JSCA are extremely important. You can meet, interact with and learn from colleagues who are at various points in their professional careers—entry-level practitioners, supervisors, managers, and even CEOs.

Attending professional association conferences is particularly helpful. In that setting, 'rank' tends to disappear, and people talk to each other as individuals. You can easily ask questions and learn not only what is right for your agency but also how the process works elsewhere. The insights gained can then be shared with others in your agency. In fact, sharing these new ideas with your own supervisor can help put you on his or her 'radar screen.'

I believe that some executives are uncomfortable with the supervisory role, and that most do a very inadequate job. In order for you to get as much as possible from supervision, you need to help make your supervisor aware of what you need from him or her. You may even have to find the sources and resources and prepare the materials for your supervision.

Edell

There are some additional things that you can do to get as much as possible even from poor supervision. Find one or two things you can get from your supervisor. There are unique pieces of agency history, wisdom, and 'street experience' that you can acquire—even from a poor supervisor—that may be valuable to you. Be open-minded and willing to learn. And when something does

go well in the supervisory process, acknowledge it and thank your supervisor.

Fortunately, our field is filled with many interesting and informative people—rabbis, agency executives, practitioners, and others. You can learn and be significantly enriched by being part of that larger professional network.

Finally, I would like to comment on the possible role of volunteer leaders in the supervisory process. Professionals seldom think of laypersons in the context of mentoring or supervision. However, under certain circumstances, volunteers may be valuable resources when you are faced with poor supervision.

You can seek out and discuss the problems you are experiencing with your supervision with a volunteer with whom you have a trusting relationship, provided that the layperson is not involved with your own organization. Discussing or complaining about your supervision with a volunteer involved in your agency is extremely risky and should not be done. The world of Jewish communal service is very small, so caution must be the byword in reaching out to volunteer leadership.

Chazan

In an era where the 'urgent' often drives out the 'important,' where we always seem to be putting out fires, the agency supervision to which we are entitled is frequently sorely lacking. I often meet with young people who are too shy to ask for supervision that is due them. Of course, I also see some people who go to the other extreme, plaguing their supervisors, and demanding attention at times when it is inappropriate.

Levenston

Part of the role of supervision is to encourage those we mentor to grow and to pursue greater challenges...including advancing their careers. Such growth and advancement often involve seeking a new position in another agency. In some of the

fields of service, you are expected to tell your supervisor in advance that you are "opening your portfolio." How do you do so without it being seen as a threat to your supervisor? Better still, how can you gain your supervisor's endorsement and support for such a quest?

Edell

There are indeed rules of etiquette about seeking a new position, which you should know and respect. In addition to "playing by the rules," how and on what basis you approach your supervisor on a possible job change can be critical to your success.

It is important to think carefully before embarking on a job or career change. You should be knowledgeable and secure in your reasons for change and be able to defend the change of direction with confidence before you discuss the matter with your supervisor.

If you are embarking on a job search because you are unhappy at your current position or because you have heard about a possible job opening but know little about the new position, approaching your supervisor under these conditions entails significant risk.

I am a firm believer in openness and honesty. Such candor is important to the supervisor-supervisee relationship. However, it is not dishonest to explore, inquire, and gather information about job opportunities before you discuss the possibility of change with your supervisor.

Once you are confident that your reasons for leaving are sound and the direction in which you want to move is correct, you can seek guidance and advice from your supervisor. Your approach however still needs to be thoughtful, respectful, and strategically planned.

Miller

We must learn early in our careers not to allow fear to be a dominant factor. Not everyone has confidence in him- or herself at the outset, but once you gain that self-assurance, never let fear dominate your career.

It is in the best interest of supervisors and managers to nurture the people who report to them. It is important to offer advice, guidance, and even assistance in finding another job in order to advance their careers.

If as a supervisor you are helpful and supportive, you build a personal network that lasts a lifetime and offers significant professional and personal rewards. I know many people in organizations and governmental positions with whom I worked, guided, counseled—and the good will engendered has been returned many fold. So, supportive supervision and mentoring are good practice and management...and ultimately are good for your own career.

Axelrod

Regular supervisory sessions are critical to the development of open and honest dialogue. Such regularity enables the supervisee to gain confidence and to better judge how and when to discuss job or career changes without being threatening to the supervisor.

Supervision is a difficult process. A helpful tool for improving supervisory skills is an article entitled *Everything I Know About Business I Learned From Monopoly* (Harvard Business Review, March 1, 2002). It discusses how supervisors can create structures for supervision that encourage people to grow, gain confidence, and be happy on the job.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Levenston

Professional development is necessary for increasing knowledge, honing skills, and future career advancement. Are there resources within and outside the Jewish community that can help prepare us for the next step? Are these resources available at little expense, particularly in view of limited agency budgets for professional development?

Axelrod

There are many resources that individuals can access on their own initiative: courses,

lectures, and knowledgeable persons to seek out for advice. When you reach out, you not only learn but you also impress your supervisors with your display of interest in professional growth. Managers are looking for people who are not only doing well at their jobs but also who go beyond, and are interested in things broader than their specific role in an organization.

Chazan

I am shocked at the number of colleagues who tell me they had no time to read a book in the past year. We get so involved in our daily work routine that we find little or no time for outside enrichment...and it shows. We risk becoming stale, and our lives one-dimensional. I encourage us all to take a step back and think about other ways to nourish ourselves.

Some professionals feel that their work is their contribution to the Jewish community, and feel no obligation to participate as citizens...and it shows. Active involvement in the community enhances our professional status and helps us be seen as legitimate, authentic participants in the enterprise.

There is a difference and a separation between “getting better” and “getting ahead.” Getting better refers to personal growth as an individual. It requires answers to such questions as: “What books should I read?”—“What movies do I see?”—“What courses do I take strictly for personal enjoyment and development?”

Getting ahead means advancing your career. My sense is that not enough of us think strategically about our careers. We need to answer questions such as, “What directions am I taking in my career?”—“To what kind of position do I aspire?”—“Where do I want to be in a number of years?”

Once we have done so, we need to decide on what should be started now: courses to be taken, adequate supervision and mentors to be found, the building of useful knowledge and experience. We must plan to grow both as people and as professionals.

TELEPHONE CALLS

An important aspect of the program was the questions and comments phoned in to panelists by teleconference participants in communities throughout North America. Jennifer Rosenberg, JCSA Executive Board Member, monitored the phone calls.

**Caller # 1—Matt Freedman,
Baltimore, MD**

How can professionals change fields within the Jewish community? How do you transfer skills or gain new skills to make those transitions work?

Chazan

So there I was—living in Hartford with my new husband, the Jewish Community Center Director—and commuting to work each week in New York for the JCC Association. I decided to seek a position in Hartford to have a family and be part of a community, so when offered the job of Assistant Director of the Jewish Federation, I accepted.

Now I had to shift my focus from working for a national agency in the Jewish center field (a field I had been working in for 12 years) to a local federation (with which I had no previous work experience). I expected to encounter many differences between the two systems and many problems to overcome. In fact, the fundamentals of both systems were remarkably similar. I did have to learn several new things such as planning and fundraising, but basically I was able to hit the ground running.

Earlier in my career and now in my current position with a foundation, I find it fascinating to recognize talent and to find ways to mesh that talent in new and unusual settings. Professionals can draw upon their experience and resources to fit any situation. Let me illustrate with a personal experience.

I was asked in a job interview in Hartford if I had ever solicited a one million dollar gift. I responded, "No, I hadn't. But I had helped solicit a \$100,000,000 contribution"

(the result of a long process with an individual who eventually became committed to Jewish education, and whose generosity affected and influenced many people). So, I was able to draw on my resources and past experience.

Miller

It is important not to limit yourself or see yourself in a narrow focus of professionalism. Rather, you need to experiment, try new things, volunteer for different assignments. I have held almost every position in my organization because I would volunteer for new assignments and learn much from each experience.

If you are a rehabilitation counselor that should not mean that you are uninterested in employment, education, youth and family services. The broader your experience, the more important you become to your organization, and the more marketable you become in the field. As a CEO, I can tell you that it is the person with broad experience whom I recruit for my agency.

MENTORS AND CAREER ADVOCATES

Levenston

Mentors and career advocates are important in the development of a career. How does one seek an appropriate mentor and develop a safe environment in which to confide in that mentor?

Chazan

A mentor is an extremely valuable asset to your career. To select the appropriate mentor, you must first do your homework. You need to consider who your partners are in your agency (supervisors, volunteer leaders), and beyond your organization (colleagues and peers from as wide a circle as possible). Ask yourself: "Who has the history, credibility, smarts, authority...and the willingness to take the time needed to develop that mentor/mentee relationship?"

My goal has always been to develop a relationship with a mentor based on trust, honesty, and a willingness to reflect on my work and identity—as mentoring is an intentionally reflective learning opportunity.

The right mentors have helped me function more effectively, grow both in and outside the job, improved my speaking and writing skills, and taught me where to go for remedial help and how to read the warning signs of potential danger so as best to determine if I should “suck it up” or move on. Some of my mentors lived in my community; others lived far away, requiring me to travel hours every month to meet personally with the mentor.

Mentors need to feel that the relationship is not all one-sided, and they should see that it is a collaboration of mutual benefit. When I ask people to act as mentors for alumni of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship program, even the busiest of professionals feel flattered. No one has ever said “no” to such a request.

Mentors have to be courted and sought out. It is up to you to initiate meetings and manage your mentoring. It can be one of the most worthwhile things you can do to help yourself personally and professionally. Now it is a great privilege for me to be able to make the mentor-mentee relationship happen for others.

Miller

There are other kinds of mentoring that do not follow the more traditional form.

All of us have found role models at one time or another. We look at someone and think, “That’s someone I admire...look at what he or she has accomplished, and how that person did it.” We can learn from these role models and develop informal mentoring relationships by talking or writing to them, requesting to meet them, and asking for information or advice. The role model will be flattered by your interest and request for guidance.

Levenston

I did not have a mentor within the organizations for which I worked during the first ten years of my career. By getting involved in JCSA, I found mentors (some of whom are on this panel) and was able to seek their counsel in deciding on my recent job change. Participation in a national association and in a broad network opened doors for me. I strongly encourage everyone to become involved in such networking.

Caller # 2—Dr. Steven Huberman, New York

How does the Jewish or Judaic aspect of your professional practice enter into this (the mentor-mentee) kind of interaction?

Axelrod

The Judaism is part of your *neshuma*, your soul, and your value system. The Judaic impulse is what makes you care for one another and what makes you go beyond your job. It is caring for the community...not only for today, but also for its continuity and survival into the future. It is being as concerned for Israel or the Jewish community in Argentina or Hungary, as you are about your own local community. Being Jewish is being part of something very valuable, with thousands of years of tradition. It provides a great source of belief and inner strength.

Jewish texts tell us (*Pirkei Avot* 4:1) that those who are wise are those who learn from everyone. “From my teachers have I gained understanding.” In this context, I think “teacher” can be broadly defined as supervisors, mentors, and colleagues. That too is part of how we bring Judaism into our professional lives. Drawing on Judaism’s rich sources, we can enhance our learning...and our teaching.

WHAT ARE EMPLOYERS LOOKING FOR?

Levenston

As we look toward the next steps in advancing our careers, it is important to know

what attributes CEOs, executives, and search committees look for in recruiting professionals. What are the skill sets we need to acquire in preparation for advancement?

Edell

In my experience as a recruiter, the most important attribute that employers and search committees look for in a candidate is style. They would define style as the ability to engage a diverse sector of volunteers and encourage them toward an opinion or action. Style is about how we use what we know and ourselves. It is sometimes learned, but much of it is simply about who you are.

Professionals who are moving ahead in their careers have expertise, breadth of knowledge and interests, and the ability to engage volunteers on a variety of subjects of interest to the volunteer. Style is not charisma, good looks and nice presentation. However, how we dress, speak and write all have an affect on our ability to impact others.

Who we are, how we engage people, and how we can influence people's thinking and action largely determine success in the field. It is not about being liked, but about the impact we make in our relationships.

Second, employers are looking for candidates with a proven record of achievement. My advice is to gain experience in your current position, develop a record of accomplishment, and show that you can take a project from conceptualization to completion.

As an aside, I think that in today's tight employment market, some people are moving too quickly and without the requisite experience. This is resulting in a pool of professionals, managers, and supervisors without a real record of achievement. In the long run, this could seriously weaken our profession.

Third, employers are looking for candidates with expertise in specific areas. Let the potential employer know of your expertise and that you can apply it to a project from start to finish, with a minimum of supervision and handholding.

Overall, employers want people with style, presentation, the ability to engage volunteers, a record of achievement, and professional competence.

Axelrod

It is helpful to make a distinction between "doing well" and "doing good," especially when coaching students preparing for a career in Jewish communal service. Both aspects are important, yet different.

Doing well encompasses the competencies, attributes, and abilities one brings to a job. Doing good means being a conscientious steward for your organization and a good citizen of the Jewish community. It means having a passion for what you do and going beyond just trying to get ahead. It means, "being a *mensch*."

Chazan

I accepted a position early in my career that I quickly discovered was a serious mistake. The easy answer would have been to walk away from the job and community as quickly as possible. Instead I remained long enough to achieve legitimacy in the job.

What is the measuring stick for how long to remain in an unsatisfactory position? How can you make your life more livable under these circumstances? What can you learn from such a negative situation?

The following will help in making the decision to leave. Have you learned all you can in your current job? What do you need to sustain your interest? Do you have a pattern of quick job changes? Can you select a milestone to reach prior to leaving? What should your next career move be?

My advice to young professionals is to have patience, and to think the situation through carefully before bolting.

Caller # 3—Ann Hartman Luban, Chicago

A number of colleagues in our community recently gave birth to children. They are looking for strategies for staying connected

to the field while on family leave or working part-time. How can these professionals stay on a career path?

Miller

Esther-Ann and I have a colleague at F.E.G.S. who was away from the agency for ten years while she raised her son. She kept in touch via telephone, emails, and occasionally attending meetings throughout her absence. By doing so, our colleague convinced us of her interest, creativity, motivation, and continuing concern for the organization.

After a ten-year hiatus, we rehired her as a top administrator. By keeping up to date with the agency while away, it took just a short time to bring her fully up to speed. Although a person raising a child has much to do, staying in touch with your former agency is easier than ever with the new communications technology available today.

Chazan

It is also very important for the agency/foundation/profession to keep in touch with people on maternity leave, particularly if they have expressed an interest in returning to the field in the future.

The Jewish community has invested a great deal of time and energy in the education, supervision, and mentoring of these terrific young women who are taking family leave time, so we cannot just say “goodbye” to them. It is a matter of responsibility for supervisors and mentors to stay in that person’s life because of the investment made.

When I learn of a part-time job or a writing assignment, or a volunteer role that may be of interest, I call and offer the assignment to the person on family leave. If we keep these fine professionals involved, the Jewish community may be able to recapture their talents when it is the right time for them to come back into the field.

Edell

As the marketplace of talent remains limited, maintaining active working relation-

ships with persons who need to move in and out of the field for periods of time is becoming an organizational imperative. Agencies need to develop job sharing, flexible work time, part-time arrangements, and a host of other options that will keep their best staff members within the organization.

**Caller # 4—Debbie Roshfeld,
New York**

It is one thing for arrangements for various work options to be made with individuals, but how can we create a cultural change so that these options are available to all professionals?

[**Editor’s Note:** A session at the 2002 UJC General Assembly in Philadelphia dealt with organizational models for offering a menu of options for people returning to the field, working part-time, and/or resuming work after a life-changing event. The models can be applied to both for-profit and not-for-profit agencies. The caller’s question refers to that GA session.]

Miller

The use of modern technology such as “telecommuting” is highly efficient, saves money, and allows for much work to be done in the home. Therefore, the person can remain at home and still be a viable part of the organization.

Chazan

On the other hand, telecommuting can be disruptive to a normal home life. In fact, the attendees at that GA session noted that it was incumbent on us to create boundaries between our professional and personal lives.

Young people today are much clearer and more honest about what they demand from supervisors and volunteers than my colleagues or I were when we were new to the field. Perhaps this willingness to articulate such concerns comes from the realization that it is legitimate to talk about priorities in life other than work. My personal “wake up”

call came when my son asked if only Jewish people had meetings!

One thing to emerge from the session at the GA was the fact that the corporate world has moved much farther and faster in presenting work/life options than have Jewish agencies. We need to catch up in order to keep some of our best professionals in the field.

Axelrod

For many women in the 30-something age cohort—and for women in general—there is a serious concern about maintaining boundaries between the personal and the professional, in part because we are driven to be both good professionals and good parents. You have to learn to ask for help in making sure that these boundaries do not become blurred and that family time is as sacred as the work you do for the Jewish community.

Levenston

I would like our panelists to offer their suggestions for how we can stay invigorated, passionate, and focused on our field of service. In other words, what helps keeps us working in the field, and what makes Jewish communal service a lifetime career?

Miller

I have spent almost my entire career with one agency, although this was not my intention when I began working at F.E.G.S. many years ago. However, I learned through role models and mentors that with creativity, integrity, and a sense of curiosity, one can make things happen that will maintain energy, excitement, and continuous involvement in the organization and the work it does.

When I came to F.E.G.S. in 1976, it had a staff of thirty persons, and an annual budget of \$300,000. Today the staff is 3,500 strong, and the annual budget is \$170,000,000. Success like that requires teamwork from people who create and share a vision that goes beyond their own agency, into the community,

the nation, the world. And because F.E.G.S. is innovative and constantly re-inventing itself and its mission, I do not feel like I've worked for just one organization all these years.

Robert Kennedy articulated a basic principle that is at work at F.E.G.S. He said, "Some people see things as they are, and ask 'why.' I see things as they could be, and ask 'why not?'" We seek young talent, people who are prepared to ask questions, who are not afraid to put forward a new idea, and who want to learn.

When something extraordinary happens we say, "Although we have not addressed this issue in the past, is there something we can do now—with our own resources, in partnership with other organizations, or by finding people interested in tackling the problem?" If the new program works, fine. If not, at least you know you gave it your best shot.

Satisfaction from doing something meaningful for others also helps keep you fresh, passionate, and involved. You cannot put a price on hearing an Israeli Minister say that your ideas led to an important new program or on the rewarding feelings you experience when you create a new program to counter eating disorders or find new ways to address breast cancer counseling.

When you believe in yourself and are prepared to take risks, you become much more valuable to your agency and to the community. When you create teams working cooperatively, you can make it happen.

And, if eventually you must change your job, you can do that too!

Axelrod

There is a phenomenon known as "boiled frogism." If you put a frog in a pot of warm water, the frog will feel comfortable. As you slowly raise the heat, the frog continues to feel comfortable and will not try to jump out of the pot. Finally, when the heat is really turned up, it will be too late for the frog to jump, as the creature will be boiled.

Unfortunately, that is what can happen to

us on the job, especially if we do not notice that the heat is being turned up. I was in a situation where the water was scalding; I took a risk and jumped before it was too late. And, if you do not change and "reinvent" yourself every five years within your organization, you too may become a boiled frog.

Therefore, try very hard to stay one step ahead of the heat being turned up.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Levenston

This panel discussion has been an exceptional sharing experience. We all need to find opportunities for such professional sharing, no matter what stage we may be in our careers.

Excellent places for sharing and professional networking are the Local Professional Associations. Seven of these local groups have already been established.¹ JCSA has been of assistance to these groups, and will continue to encourage the formation of other local entities.

I have co-authored an article along with colleagues from the Darrell D. Friedman Institute, detailing how to create and nurture a local association. It appears in this *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* edition. I hope you find it instructive and helpful.

I think it is critical for those in our field to be proactive in seeking professional fulfillment, in following the guidelines that were

presented today for seeking supervision and mentorship, and in keeping ourselves inspired as we move forward in our careers.

I strongly endorse the creation of local professional associations that can advocate on our behalf, lend credibility to our field, and develop a local support network for us to draw upon when we are looking to advance our careers and expand our horizons. JCSA and its Affiliated Profession Associations (APAs) play a similar role on the national scene, and likewise deserve our support and active involvement.²

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The *Association* is pleased to record the outstanding efforts of three fine professionals who played key roles behind the scenes: **Brenda Gevertz**, JCSA Executive Director; **Minna Nelson**, JCSA Executive Assistant; and **Frank Strauss**, UJC Communications Consultant, who expertly produced this and all previous JCSA Teleconferences.

¹Local Professional Associations

Kehillah: Jewish Communal Professional Association of Greater Baltimore
Jewish Communal Professionals of Chicago
Jewish Communal Professionals of the Delaware Valley (Philadelphia, PA)
Jewish Communal Professionals of Southern California (Los Angeles, CA)
New Jersey Association of Jewish Communal Service
Reshet Atlanta: The Jewish Communal Professionals' Network
Young Jewish Professionals Network (New York, NY)

²JCSA Affiliated Professional Associations (APAs)
Association of Jewish Aging Services (AJAS)
Association of Jewish Community Organization Personnel (AJCOP)
Association of Jewish Center Professionals (AJCP)
Association of Jewish Vocational Service Professionals (AJVSP)
Jewish Social Service Professionals' Association (JSSPA)
North American Association of Synagogue Executives (NAASE)

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