

How Women's Leadership Can Transform Our Institutions

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My work has taken me into many sectors – from the Jewish communal world to the general not-for-profit field, to philanthropy and even business.

All of these experiences have given me tremendous perspective on the similarities between the issues that women face – no matter what the venue – in advancing within their own institution and within their own field.

The first major similarity is lack of women at the highest echelons of corporate and political institutions. Whether it is the old corporate world, where only 10% of senior managers of Fortune 500 companies are women or the new world of media and technology, where a study just released by the Annenberg Center found that only 13% of these companies' executives were women, or in our government where only 13% of the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives are women, there is a consistency in the gender gap at the top.

On the other hand, in the general not-for-profit world we are seeing major breakthroughs: 3 out of 7 universities in the Ivy League are headed by women; more than 50% of foundations are chaired by women CEOs – including some of the most prestigious, such as this one, Pew Star, and even the world's largest philanthropy, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. And despite the disturbing news – revealed in this week's *Chronicle of Philanthropy* – about the salary gap between male and female CEOs in the not-for-profit world, the fact is that women are heading up general not-for profit agencies in record numbers.

I have been working on the issue of women's leadership in the Jewish community, as well as in the general not-for-profit sector, where I serve as a consultant to the White House Project, an organization some of the people in this room helped to create.

In my work in the Jewish community, I have been struck by the stark contrast to the incremental gains in the corporate world and the strong foothold achieved by women in the not-for-profit sector. The Jewish community has an extensive network of powerful local and national agencies – raising and spending billions of dollars each year – and one might expect, that Jewish women who have demonstrated strong leadership in many fields – including the women's movement – would be well represented at the top of the field. On the contrary. Of the top 47 Federations across the country only one is headed by a woman and of the 19 large city Federations, none is headed by a woman. Among 40 major national Jewish organizations that were analyzed by Dr. Bethamie Horowitz, Dr. Charles Kadushin and Dr. Pearl Beck in a CUNY Graduate Center research study commissioned by Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project of the JCC, only two are

directed by a woman. When 30 national organizations were analyzed in this 1994 study, the researchers found that more than half – 53% – had no women in the top five highest salaried posts.

Over the years, I have served as a consultant to Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project of the JCC, and together we have worked to persuade the community's decision-makers to recognize and remedy the dramatic imbalance that exists in the leadership of our institutions.

As part of this endeavor, Eve Landau, Director of Ma'yan, and I met with dozens of male CEOs. More than 25 of these agencies had never had a female president in their entire history. Over time, my conversations with these executive directors became more intimate and candid, and it became clear that few of them had any woman candidates in the pipeline for the presidency.

Equally troubling was what happened when I asked each and every one of the male executive directors that I met with the following question: "When you sit together with your colleagues and the room is all men, do you ask yourselves if there is anything you need to do to compensate for the fact that there are no women involved in your discussions? Every one of them without exception, from very liberal to fairly conservative, from the spiritual leaders to political leaders to cultural gurus, all said quite honestly, "I never thought about it until you came into my office today for this meeting."

The fact that significant Jewish communal conversations are virtually always talks between men led me to explore in some depth what happens to women when they try to participate in leadership roles in this community. And it led me to try to base my case for bringing women into these high level male networks on more than merit, justice or equity; because I realized that an appeal to fairness was not enough to shatter the extraordinary complacency and comfort that sustained these male networks. Rather, I have tried to persuade Jewish communal leaders that bringing women into senior leadership posts will be critical to redesigning the structure of the Jewish community, its priorities and its agenda, in a way that will enable it to survive the changes of the 21st century.

The question that I posed echoed the question asked by so many people who knew of my efforts to work with Ma'yan to advocate for bringing women into volunteer and professional leadership posts. The question is: when you are trying to bring women into leadership positions, are they going to be just like the men? Do women lead differently? And what could be the impact of women's leadership on our community?

To answer that question, we need to understand what it means for a woman – who is in the minority position – to lead.

Because, while I won't assert that women are inherently different than men, women have certainly been in a minority as leaders, and I believe this minority status has affected their approach to leadership. Not their leadership style. But the process that they use to

advance their agenda – given the impact of their minority status. That process – that comes not from biological difference, nor from a more natural tendency towards altruism and cooperation – that results from their experience and that can, if properly recognized by themselves and others and if clearly credited back to women, result in different content, different priorities, different vision, and different focus.

But first, let's look at what happens to women when they try to use their voice and break through the leadership ranks. Over the years, I have learned a tremendous amount about women's experience based on hundreds of interviews with women, many of them communal leaders. Every single woman reported the experience of having their remarks overlooked and their ideas credited to others, almost always a man.

Even in the brave new world of technology, Esther Dyson, one of the major intellects of the field, who convenes leading CEOs of the industry, wrote of her experience in the Sunday, *New York Times*, "Twenty years ago we thought the high tech world by now would be different, that women would succeed in large numbers, because this was a world where performance counted. It hasn't turned out that way. Women still have a tough time making it into management." Dyson writes, "Power is not based on performance alone but on presence and personality – and perception of personality. In business, women still face a different world than men. I recall the first meeting of the Electronic Frontier Foundation that I ever attended. I knew the other board members who all respected me. But I couldn't get a word in edgewise. Why? I can't imagine any other reason other than that I spoke with a female voice. The high tech industry is really no better than most. I've been to meetings where a woman ventures a comment and is ignored. Minutes later a man makes the same point and is noticed."

Not being heard creates a sense of powerlessness for women. This feeling is more than subjective and anecdotal.

The fact is that all of the research consistently demonstrates that there is a bias shared by both men and women that skews a fair evaluation of women. Let me offer a few examples, based on research compiled in an extraordinary book by Professor Virginia Valian entitled, *Why So Slow: The Advancement of Women*. In one study discussed by Valian, fictitious resumes of 10 psychologists with PhDs were sent to 147 chairs of psychology departments. The names on the resumes were rotated between men and women. When the psychology department heads received the resumes, they wanted to hire the candidates: they were good candidates. But there was one key difference: a resume with a female name received the entry-level rank of assistant professor. The same resume with a male name was consistently assigned the higher rank of associate professor.

Another example shows how bias affects the way we perceive leadership. In one experiment, college students looked at slides of 5 people sitting around a table. Sometimes, they were an all male group; sometimes all female; other times the group was composed of men and women. When asked to identify the leader in the same sex groups, the students always identified the man or woman sitting at the head of the table. But

when the group was composed of men and women, and a woman was at the head of the table, in almost half the cases, the students labeled a man sitting elsewhere as the group's leader.

The data consistently demonstrates that we are biased, yet instinctively we all deny it. We want to believe that our judgments are fair and our selections are merit based. But we can often be biased in our judgments, particularly when a person is a minority of the group. Let's look at another experiment where the exact same resume of a woman received a negative rating when it was part of a group of resumes that was 10% female, and 90% male; it received a better rating when it was part of a group of resumes that was 25% female and 75% male. And it received a good rating when it was part of a group that was 37% female and only 63% male. In other words, being in a minority detracts from one's perceived value.

I don't have to persuade you that bias exists, but I think, even women activists often underestimate its impact. I view this bias as the central barrier to women's advancement. And, I also think the impact of bias leads women into certain patterns of behavior designed to allow them to overcome bias and advance – such as working hard to exceed expectations. This strategy for advancement, noted by Catalyst in many of its reports, has some unintended consequences that may simultaneously limit women's progress. One example, I've seen is the tendency women have to work exceptionally hard in their own institution to the detriment of their advancement in their field. Men are confident that taking a leadership role in the community – or among their colleagues – is an essential part of their job. They don't hesitate to take time away from their duties in their own institutions to network with others, to sit on committees, to give speeches, or to join boards. Women tend to see these opportunities as either civic duties or self promotion and believe that should they accept these positions, they should be vigilant to make sure they are still giving as much time as they always did to their individual jobs. As a result, women often turn down opportunities that would give them increased visibility in their field or run themselves ragged trying to fulfill every responsibility to the fullest.

One more example that might hit home was illuminated through a series of insights that women who coach Executive CEOs shared with the White House Project. One coach noted that the essential difference she has seen between women and men is that when women are asked to take on an impossible leadership role, they often say "yes" even if accomplishing the task with the available resources is unrealistic and unreasonable. Men will agree to take the challenge on and then proceed to negotiate. "I'll do it, and here is what I need in terms of staff, support system and resources." So it might be important for women to start saying "yes" to many more opportunities and to also couple this with active negotiation for more resources to use when taking on particularly demanding jobs. Ironically, when I have told this story to some women, they asked, "wouldn't it make me look weak if I say I need help?"

That question demonstrates the bind women find themselves in when they try to lead as a minority. That by working hard to succeed in their own particular institution, they limit

their influence and visibility in their field; and that their concern about demonstrating weakness leads them to take on hard jobs with insufficient resources.

Certainly we all know numbers of women who lead in the traditional "control and command" way. But we underestimate the influence that women have had in reshaping the workplace when they have tried to manage serious responsibilities with fewer resources, less authority, and a keen memory of persistent experiences in which their voices aren't heard and their ideas are not credited.

Both Marie Wilson, President of the White House Project and the Ms. Foundation, and I are convinced that it is no coincidence that when women went into corporations in record numbers as middle managers that after awhile we began hearing the corporations were becoming more team oriented, less hierarchal, more collaborative. I think that is a direct result of the influence of women middle managers who, like the CEOs, studied by Judy Rosener in the article *Ways Women Lead*, found that to succeed without having authority and position you needed to bring people together and create positive and productive collaborative entities in which everyone benefits from their involvement. Yes, I know, this new approach to work was credited to the Japanese, but I think this typifies the way the changes that women initiate are absorbed into the general culture rather than highlighted to build recognition for the impact of women's leadership.

When researcher Lyn Kathlene studied the difference between the ways in which men and women legislators chaired committees she found that the male chairs frequently took the floor away from speakers, and interrupted to make substantive points. The women chairing committees spoke less, took fewer turns, and used their power to facilitate discussion.

Perhaps, many women have adapted this facilitative style because what works for their male counterparts does not work for them. That's why women may respond by functioning differently. For example, women cannot simply rely on speaking in a meeting as a means of achieving recognition and stature. This might result in a woman struggling to perfect her speaking ability and to fine-tune her sense of timing. But it also might result in a woman leader learning to listen very well, athletic listening, as it was called by Nikki Tanner who used women's listening ability - rather than speaking ability - to create a mega million-dollar capital campaign fundraising success for Wellesley College.

The differences in women's fundraising approaches which was written about by Susan Schneider, editor of *Lillith* magazine, is particularly significant in the Jewish community where the tradition of card calling in public for major pledges, transactional fundraising and quid pro quo fundraising was once the hallmark of Jewish philanthropy. But what it really defined was male philanthropy – where at United Jewish Appeal events – real estate moguls and business leaders would take turns making public pledges and even humiliating one another when they decided their peer had not contributed a sufficiently sacrificial gift.

This style of fundraising has been challenged by the women's campaigns in the Jewish community, women who led the way in trying to link involvement to giving, linking education about issues to increasing support, and learning to listen when they asked for funds, not just to hold forth.

Now "women's way of fundraising" including their frequently discussed preference for supporting specific causes and for becoming involved so they can have an impact on those causes has become the "new way of fundraising." And women's collaboratives and donor circles pioneered by institutions like the Ms. Foundation for Women are being reshaped as venture philanthropy by male leaders from the Robin Hood Foundation, the Philanthropic Initiative and Social Venture Philanthropists.

In the Jewish community, ironically as Federations grapple with the realities of people's preference for designated giving, particularly in the next generation of American Jews who are immune to appeals based on guilt and victimhood, Federation heads still privately tell me that women can't become Federation directors or directors of big agencies because they are not comfortable with face to face solicitation of large annual gifts.

In seeking to persuade the Jewish community that Jewish women leaders will have a positive impact on the well being of our institutions, I have emphasized the likelihood that women will democratize and expand the circle of people who affiliate with our institutions. Because even the oldtimers are troubled by the fact that 80% of their donations come from 20% of their donors, and that the numbers of donors are steadily diminishing.

For evidence, we can look again at the difference researchers found when they examined the ways women state legislators and men legislators formulated policy. They found that women reached out to much broader circles than men to inform their thinking. Even the categories of informants offered by men and women differed. Here were six resources cited only by male legislators: advisor, client, consultants, experts, industry, someone. Contrast this with six resources listed only by female state legislators in this study: citizens, community, country, district, parents and world.

I have made the case that the desire to expand the circle of communication broadly and deeply, to collaborate, to energize others, to create informal networks across official lines of authority and status that many women have demonstrated can truly revitalize Jewish organizations.

It is tough today to be the CEO of a nonprofit institution. While every major management conference and publication has touted the need to say farewell to the control and command CEO, most of our agencies are basically hierarchical and there are few CEOs who are not feeling somewhat overwhelmed by their responsibilities.

When we think about women's leadership, we need to consider our CEOs, whose overwhelming schedules and conflicting pressures make it almost impossible for them to

sustain, much less build, any sense of organizational momentum in this period of rapidly accelerating change.

One of the realities that challenge CEOs of Jewish organizations is that many of our donors, volunteers and professionals are leaving. They are leaving because the bureaucracy and hierarchy of Jewish organizational life can stifle new ideas. They are leaving because of our organizations' failure to redesign the choreography of the volunteer and professional partnership. Our volunteers are leaving because they are frustrated by time wasted in meetings and ceremonies where their talents don't get used and their ideas don't get implemented. The executives are leaving because they are burnt out by an arduous workload, and the lack of respect for their professional expertise.

And the lack of diversity in our leadership - whether its women or young people, those who bring intellectual capital to the table or those who do lots of hard work - discourages people from fighting their way in; more often it leads them to try out something better.

One way that Jewish women who advance to the top of Jewish organizations can start transforming Jewish life is by challenging our organizational norms. But first, we must challenge the unrealistic expectations of nonprofit CEOs. We expect the best of everything from CEOs these days: great vision, sharp strategy, inspiring leadership, strong management, business acumen, fundraising talent and the ability to motivate staff and boards.

Most of all, we expect our CEOs to embrace the mantra of 24/7/52: a model that the Jewish community – with its emphasis on family, spirituality, identity and continuity – actually should challenge with a passion.

It probably won't surprise you to hear that the general notion of reevaluating the long hours that afflict Jewish professionals has met with little receptivity to date. But we need to recognize the implications of the shift in the composition of American families coupled with the shift in the communal agenda, an agenda that has moved away from the rescue of Jewish populations around the world or support for a young and vulnerable Israel to a more complex series of questions about the nature of Jewish identity in a time of unprecedented choice and prosperity. I would like to suggest that perhaps the all consuming work style of the Jewish communal professional is ill suited to producing the richness, reflectiveness and diversity that is required to respond to these complex questions of Jewish identity and Jewish priorities.

Ultimately, the imbalance on the issue of balance is actually good news for women and for Jews. The fact that few women are exempt from juggling forces them – and will in turn force the community – to begin the critical conversation about what we want our Jewish communal leaders to model. It forces us to look at what kinds of institutions women are attracted to and what kinds of institutions make women want to give their time, money, talent and professional expertise.

I would also like to suggest that more balanced and diverse leadership like this will be very important in terms of making our communal work places more creative and productive. Because when a leader cannot count on commanding allegiance to his or her priorities by virtue of position, then he or she must call on the power to lead by bringing people together to tackle tough questions and uncover their own answers.

In the year 2001, the work of a leader has become quite subtle: it is less about speaking and more about listening; it is less about presiding and more about facilitating; it is not only about defining solutions but more often about clarifying questions. As problems become increasingly thorny and entangled, the first important task for a leader is to simplify by synthesizing a complex series of issues, and framing them into clear questions that can be effectively considered by a broad range of people.

Rather than stand front and center, it is the leader's job to step back or, as Ron Heifetz has said in his influential book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, to get on the balcony. That means the ability to alternate between playing a role at the center of the action, and then climbing up to the balcony to reflect and observe.

By stepping back, the leader has the vantage point to uncover patterns and to use this understanding to create contexts in which people can wrestle with challenges. Exploring alternative approaches, and evaluating the efficacy of diverse strategies, has become critical to the success of every organization in a world in which old business models are being decimated by new technologies, and new technologies are being reshaped by the old laws of financial viability. Encouraging active experimentation, creating an environment of trust and collaboration, and developing the capacity of individuals and groups to learn are essential tasks of any good leader.

This new kind of leadership makes it possible for every person in a group to bring forward good ideas. This new kind of leadership expands the talent pool and fosters diversity and inclusiveness. This new kind of leadership ensures that no matter how big an organization grows, it nurtures small-scale group work – the place where creativity flourishes best. And our experience tells us -- and should tell leadership gurus like Ron Heifetz -- that it is women who exemplify this new kind of leadership.

Women also help bring a new and richer perspective to leadership work because of their multifaceted responsibilities. This perspective can help transform Jewish organizations and Jewish life.

I am going to have a chance to test the reality of my theories through a new project I have helped create, the first initiative of the Trust for Jewish Philanthropy, funded with a seed grant of \$1 million from Barbara and Eric Dobkin, a project entitled *Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community*.

The initial thrust will be to forge a new consensus among leaders of Jewish organizations about the realities of gender inequity, about the need to remove barriers for women and create serious opportunities for their advancement. The project will consult with

organizational professionals and volunteers throughout the country, and form several pilot groups of selected Jewish organizations that will commit themselves to experimenting with concrete strategies for women's advancement. We will also test ways to improve the workplace for all professionals – men and women.

There is a real convergence now between new models of women's leadership and the issues challenging the Jewish community.

For example we know we need new structures for affiliation and identity transmission, both of which are ideas women have put on the communal agenda for many years.

We know we need to redesign the ways our boards and our professionals work together to make the work more meaningful for the individual and more productive for the organizations. And we know we need to rethink the nature of the work itself. It did not surprise me when the Women's Rabbinic Network of the Central Conference of American Rabbis of the Reform Movement took on itself the mission to advocate for the recognition of same sex gender ceremonies. It did not surprise me that when Hannah Rosenthal became the first woman to head a national Jewish policy organization, she put first on her agenda a major collaborative for a Poverty Initiative. I think it is logical to assume that since women benefit less from the status quo they are more likely to challenge it. Especially when they are not-for-profit leaders.

Finally, when leadership theorists like Ron Heifetz talk about the challenge of leading without authority or creating contexts for adaptive change, or moving from the center to the balcony, who is in more of a position to practice that kind of leadership than women? Who even when they achieve high-level positions still have many experiences where they are marginalized? Who has learned well and hard the skills involved in constantly juggling, shifting focus and retaining balance?

There are high-minded implications of the difference difference makes, and some simple practical but profound ones as well. I was not surprised when Debra Meyerson reported that in one study a major bank where women had become 25% of the managers, over 5 years, there were no more meetings – except urgent ones – scheduled after 5:30. That was the new norm and those new norms can do more to revitalize our private lives and our public arenas than anything else because it will change more than the way we lead it will change the way we live.

We have often used a stealth strategy to advance our agenda – that is a great tactic sometimes but it should be weighed against the desirability of getting credit for the many creative ideas with which women have helped the country reimagine its family structures, its workplaces, and its public institutions.