

## **To those entering Jewish communal service**

**by Erica Brown**

This September I will celebrate 25 years as a Jewish communal professional. Twenty-five years ago, the Berlin Wall was still up, Nelson Mandela was still in prison and the Former Soviet Union was not yet former. No one could have imagined a 9/11. There had been no Hurricane Katrina, no tsunami on the other side of the world and no earthquake in Haiti. We knew nothing about genocide in Darfur. There were no emails. There was no Internet, and friend was still a noun. There was, however, electricity.

Reflecting on the next 25 years, I'd like to make five recommendations:

**Be a multiplier:** The book, *Multipliers*, talks about two kinds of leaders: diminishers and multipliers. Diminishers say no, take the credit but do not share the blame, don't thank others or compliment them on their work because it might diminish from themselves. Diminishers disengage conversation, stop robust communication, make us small believing that they become larger as a result. Multipliers build us up, stretch us and give us the encouragement to do impossible things. They challenge us to engage in rigorous debate and act in collaboration. They love to make others feel good. They take the blame for themselves and give others the credit. Diminishers litter our field. True multipliers are a rarer breed. Become a multiplier.

**Be an educator:** We need educators - teaching degree or not. We need to teach people to speak with respect, to value opinions unlike their own, to create genuine and authentic dialogue. When people cannot speak peaceably at a Shabbat table about whether or not they are Republicans or Democrats, if they are for Jewish settlements or against them, we need to be civil, model civility and expect civility.

**Be a cultivator:** Today's networking is vast but often lacks the depth it takes to inspire and motivate people to care. Technology can be a cover and a mask. Use it to deepen what's already there. Without depth, we don't foster the kind of professional and lay friendships that carry us through darker moments and help us celebrate the joy of our work. And at a time when too many Jews are involved in high-profile crime, cultivate integrity. When consulting some years ago for a global Jewish institution trying to reimagine its work, I suggested enhancing Jewish ethics. The CEO looked at me and said, "That's not our job." How wrong he was. That is my job, and it will be your job as well.

**Be a fascinator:** A fascinator is a type of hat, a very elaborate arrangement. We, too, need to fascinate. Be interesting and interested. Be curious about the world and others. Too many Jewish communal professionals over time are bored and boring. Read the latest literature in Jewish sociology and keep up with trends in Jewish life. Don't give presentations that are stale or predictable. See your job as inspiring others to take the next step in Jewish life. Judaism is a fascinating religion/culture/history/ethnicity, and we are on its frontlines. Represent it well.

**Be an innovator:** Steve Jobs said that his goal was to make a ding in the universe. And what a ding he made. How would you answer a question a colleague who recently asked me "What would Steve Jobs have done had he bought the federation system?" Clayton Christenson in *The Innovator's Dilemma* speaks powerfully about

disruptive technologies: acts, behaviors and ideas which interrupt normal ways of thinking and acting in the universe and cause, as a result, a sea change in the way that we think. In the follow-up book, *The Innovator's DNA*, Christensen and his co-authors identify five traits of an innovator: associating, questioning, observing, networking, and experimenting.

People today are turning away from Jewish institutional life. The next wave of leadership is not interested in buildings and membership, dues and long meetings.

Brand loyalty doesn't work the way it once did. The American Jewish community has spent well over the past 100 years building a remarkable labyrinth of Jewish institutions to be now told that Jewish institutional life is no longer relevant. Baby boomers are deeply troubled by this behavior. Let's applaud it. For all the initials of our Jewish alphabet soup, the one letter we've paid little attention to is the "J" in Jewish and now a population is rising in leadership and asking "Why Be Jewish?"

We don't have a compelling answer because we've been too busy talking about boards, politics and fundraising.

Become positive disruptive innovators. Every advance and development that has characterized my 25 years in the field was a result of disruptive innovation, from the fall of communism to the rise of terrorism. It wasn't always positive, but it was always shattering and stunning.

For the past decade, the tagline of Jewish life has been *tikkun olam* - go fix the world. I hope I don't offend anyone if I tell you the opposite. Do a little damage. Make a ding. Disrupt the world. Go out into this vast universe and break a few things, not for the sake of breaking them, but for the sake of putting them together differently to maximize impact and efficiency, to force meaning, to live a creative Jewish life that attracts others.

With one caveat. Be careful. Don't break Jewish institutional life until you've figured out a way to replace its core values and its incredible gifts. But make life a little uncomfortable for yourself and others because we only grow from a place of discomfort. Break something because you truly love it and then tell us how your positive disruption changed the world.

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