



Walk into the headquarters of any Jewish women's organization and you'll see women well represented in the executive offices and the boardroom. Take the same tour in a Jewish communal organization, and you'll see something else: men. Nearly always. Isn't it time for women to take a stand about taking a seat at the decision-making table?

Thirty years after the feminist movement, led largely by Jewish women, transformed the world, how has the Jewish community changed? How has the influx of talented, capable, educated women into the workforce transformed Jewish communal institutions for the better?

Sadly, not much. Thirty-four years after the ordination of the first woman rabbi, the Jewish community, at both the professional and volunteer level, looks similar to the corporate world. Men, more frequently than women, achieve sought-after positions of higher prestige, influence, visibility, and financial reward. And even when men and women occupy seemingly comparable positions in the work force, men are paid more.

Is it fair or reasonable to hold Jewish communal organizations to a higher standard than the general American culture?

Yes, because the Jewish community claims to value families, and if that is true, it needs to work harder to make the Jewish community a better place for women to work. Yes, because as beneficiaries of affirmative action and the Jewish commitment to higher education, Jewish women represent a large, talented labor pool that is poorly utilized and, without marked change, will likely redirect its considerable energies and expertise elsewhere. And yes, because Jewish organizations are falling far behind the

improvements being made by non-Jewish nonprofit organizations when it comes to women's leadership.

So, what does it take for women to have a seat (or, more accurately, half the seats) at the table? First, it takes listening to women, hearing what is really happening, and acknowledging that there is a problem. In a 2005 Ma'yan study of 365 Jewish women across the country, nearly half of the respondents reported being discriminated against on the basis of gender in the Jewish community. Forty-two percent experienced pay inequity. Roughly two-thirds believed women were underrepresented as communal leaders. Only three in 10 felt that they "often" had a way to make their voices heard about issues of local concern to them. The Jewish community at large will only become aware of women's rumbling discontent and its corrosive effects when it makes listening a priority.

Second, it requires speaking up and taking action. Over the past several years, Advancing Women Professionals (AWP) has succeeded in helping the United Jewish Communities (UJC) to dramatically increase the number of women speakers at its premier event, the General Assembly, and to broaden its reach to women through its Mandel Executive Development Program, an initiative designed to train successors for the UJC's top



Time Warp: For today's Jewish community, the all-male boardroom is more than just a memory.

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leadership posts. In 1995, five women and 16 men were selected. Last year, there were 12 women and 13 men.

Often it is necessary to look beyond the numbers to root causes. When the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services in New York sought to expand and strengthen women's executive leadership, it turned to AWP to help institute a broad-ranging, flexible work plan to recruit and retain excellent staff.

Public outcry can also be a useful strategy. More than 100 letters and a few embarrassing op-eds poured in to the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute this spring after it planned a major conference on the Jewish future with no women on the guest list. The institute was forced to scramble at the last minute to find female participants.

And finally, women cannot wait for someone to confer power, voice, and authority upon them. The annals of history — from the Maccabees to the suffragettes — demonstrate that authority is claimed, not bestowed. Brave souls who are willing to stick their necks out have the chance to make real historical change. >

## Three Power Points

No woman occupies the chief executive position in any of the 20 largest American Jewish federations.

Only 27 percent of the national board members of American Jewish organizations are women.

Only one woman occupies the top rabbinical post in a large Conservative congregation.

Sources: Advancing Women Professionals, Ma'yan, and the Rabbinical Assembly.