

FULL REPORT

WITH KIND REGARDS: THE BIVRACHA STUDY

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# WITH KIND REGARDS: THE BIVRACHA STUDY

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## ARE JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS LIVING UP TO THEIR VALUES?

Chances are high you have a story you can recount about a friend or colleague who has been treated poorly in the Jewish nonprofit sector. They may have felt isolated, scared, financially vulnerable, or deeply hurt by the incident. It may have resulted in their professional growth being stunted, an impact on physical and mental health, a loss of passion, a feeling of abuse, or termination from their job.

As a group of Jewish professionals, board members, coaches, and consultants, more than once we have heard the phrase: “Well, you know how Jewish organizations are...” While some may dismiss it as a flippant comment from a disgruntled employee, we have uncovered a more pervasive experience of the professionals in our field when it comes to power dynamics with their colleagues and employers.

More than two years ago, eJewish Philanthropy published our article *With Kind Regards: Embracing Our Workplace Values*, where we called attention to, and initiated a conversation about, experiences we had heard from professionals in Jewish nonprofit organizational life. <sup>1</sup> As readers reached out to share their opinions and personal stories, we heard repeatedly that employees of Jewish organizations did not feel their treatment aligned with the values listed alongside the mission and vision statements of their respective organizations.

In August 2019, we convened an independent group of consultants and organizational leaders to discuss and ensure that our colleagues are treated with kindness and that organizations live up to the values they espouse in their foundational documents and public communications. During our meeting, questions centered around the scale and scope of the problem: How many people have been impacted? Tens? Hundreds? Thousands? All agreed that even one is too many. Still, an understanding of the breadth of the problem was vital to developing sustainable solutions. To answer these questions, in Summer 2020 the group distributed a survey entitled *Bivracha: Valuing Kindness in the Jewish Workplace*, to our networks in the Jewish nonprofit space. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *With Kind Regards: Embracing Our Workplace Values*. Sara Miller-Paul and David Phillips. eJewish Philanthropy, September 14, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> *Bivracha: Valuing Kindness in the Jewish Workplace*. eJewish Philanthropy, August 6, 2020.

We engaged colleagues to collect data within a neutral, confidential framework. Our research questions explored inquiries about power dynamics to help us better understand how some organizations treat their donors and volunteers differently than the professional staff, and to learn whether there might be an impact on health and well-being of working in the communal space. Using this data, our aim was to provide an expanded understanding of the Jewish nonprofit space to help ensure that all Jewish organizations become and remain kind, values-based, great places to work, and that employees are protected from abuses of power.

We expected to receive 100-200 responses; after receiving more than 400 survey responses and conducting over 60 qualitative follow-up interviews, it is clear that there exists a need to better align our organizations with the values they aim to uphold and we, as a community, strive to protect.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The group determined that a mixed-methods approach, with quantitative and qualitative findings informing one another, would deepen and contextualize our findings. Through the administration of the 2020 *Bivracha: Valuing Kindness in the Jewish Workplace* survey and conduction of confidential, semi-structured interviews, we gathered more than 400 survey responses and over 60 qualitative interviews. The amount of data and the number of respondents demonstrates the salience of this dialogue.

The survey was developed by independent consultants from CFAR, in conversation with the Bivracha leadership group and with input from members of the Bivracha working group. The survey was distributed through social media, email, direct outreach and eJewish Philanthropy. Additionally, we found that many individuals reshared the survey and encouraged participation within their cohort groups. 98% of respondents identified themselves as currently or recently having worked for a Jewish nonprofit organization (JNO).

The survey asked 31 questions, after which respondents were offered the option to request a one-on-one interview to share their narrative. Of the over 80 respondents who originally expressed interest, 60 interviews were completed. In addition to expected attrition from availability, some determined that sharing their narrative would be too emotionally wrought and declined later in the process. The demographic data allowed us to analyze the results through intersections of experience, gender, age, Jewish expression, and ethnic background.

The complex nature of organizational power dynamics requires a careful approach to capture reliable and actionable data. We chose to focus questions on how and why employees leave organizations. This clear picture of one aspect of an employee's experience offers great insight into the overall scope of the problem.

We want to clearly acknowledge that this survey and its derived data is limited in its scientific scope. We could not create a census of all Jewish communal employees, so we are not able to generalize about the field from this data. Instead, the following report serves as an articulation of the experiences of the 400+ respondents. While the instrument itself gave each respondent the opportunity to share positive experiences of working in the Jewish nonprofit space, we recognized the potential for response bias. Opportunities for further research should be intentional in the recruitment of underrepresented minorities to share their experiences, particularly people of color.

We also included questions regarding observations made of others' experiences in the workplace. Designed to provide a sense of the color and timbre of these issues, this feedback does not represent the lived experience of these "other" individuals. In retrospect we

acknowledge we should also have asked about the extent to which racism in the workplace was experienced. Further research addressing the unhealthy power dynamics that can arise from inappropriate uses of donor influence would also be beneficial. Of course, the potential for interviewer bias can be assumed on factors such as expectations or opinions.

To mitigate these challenges to the extent possible, we ensured that the survey instrument was devised by experienced individuals who bring knowledge of survey methodology and design to advise on the framing of questions as they relate to bias.

Data was analyzed by an independent research team. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a standardized protocol sheet that was replicated with each outreach. Prior to and throughout data collection, interviewers were provided training to ensure consistency of approach. Following qualitative data collection, interviews were collected and distilled using an anonymized 'blind' process, whereby interviews were given a number and the leadership group analyzed and categorized potential themes independently. After this was completed, the research team held a discussion to identify common themes and threads.

These findings were shared with trusted colleagues who were encouraged to challenge assumptions and suggest alternative interpretations.

Though we know all data collection processes are open to interpretation, we endeavored to be transparent and invited thoughtful partners to participate and provide counsel. Any omissions or errors are the sole responsibility of the research team.

All survey response demographic information can be found in Appendix B.

### COVID-19 IMPACT

We are cognizant that the survey was undertaken during a pandemic and are grateful so many people took the time to participate. Though we considered asking questions related to the impact of the virus in the workplace, we chose to remain focused on the overarching theme of those workplace behaviors, and the circumstances by which individuals left their places of employment. Twenty-two percent of respondents had left their positions after March 1, 2020, given a survey distribution between August 6 and August 20, 2020. Like all research conducted over the past year, this study's findings were impacted by Covid-19. While the extent of this impact cannot be measured, the validity of respondents' lived experiences, Covid-related or not, remains all the same. This study provides us with a glimpse into the kindness or lack of kindness with which respondents were treated in the workplace, and during a global pandemic that continues to test the fabric of our industry's infrastructure. Their stories are just as, or even more salient than ever before.

## THE DATA WE GATHERED: KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Beyond the demographic information, the survey was split into two core areas of investigation: (1) the respondents' own experiences and (2) their observations or knowledge of the experiences of others. For the majority of categories the responses were fairly consistent between these two groups. Of course, the corollary of the percentages that hold negative feelings are those that have overwhelmingly positive experiences. In every case the positives outweigh the negatives, and we note this in the analysis findings below.

We have identified key findings (below) that we believe help tell the story of being an employee in the Jewish nonprofit sector. We have outlined each, followed by accompanying survey data, and then interview thematics or narrative comments. We then follow each finding with analysis and reflections. As a reminder, it is estimated that there are 73,000 Jewish communal employees across the US.<sup>3</sup> We have categorized "positive" or "negative" responses as follows:

<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>
Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree
Agree	Disagree
Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree

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<sup>3</sup> Are Jewish Organizations Great Places to Work?, Leading Edge, Fall 2019, page 4.

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Respondents report that their role in a Jewish communal organization had an impact on their well-being.

- 73% indicated positive and 27% negative mental health impacts.
- 80% indicated positive and 20% negative physical health impacts.
- 76% identified as female and 24% male, yet distribution of responses across gender were nearly identical

## FROM THE INTERVIEWS

*"I am [now] in a better place. It took me a long time to get over the prior experience. I do not trust as easily now. I am working hard to bring people on-board who I know will act appropriately. It is not easy."*

*"Impact [of my experience] left me a mess. During my last year, I constantly second-guessed myself. I overcompensated. It impacted my emotional and physical health, and it oozed out into every aspect of my life. It was a demoralizing experience."*

*"Talking to colleagues was helpful. I needed a mentor, advisor. Therapy helped and talking with my wife. Ultimately knowing there was a way out of the mess by escaping if I really needed to... because I had support available from family."*

## ANALYSIS

From both the perspectives of Jewish values and human resources, we know that the mental and physical well-being of an employee is critically important. For a sector that *prides itself* on its values statements, and which is beginning to fund mental health initiatives for constituent groups, this finding was notable in its not yet achieved aspirations.

## STAKEHOLDER RESPECT

While 77% of staff felt they were treated respectfully by stakeholders, 22.5% felt they were not.<sup>4</sup>

### INTERVIEW NARRATIVES

*"I would be thanked publicly and credited.... then when I asked to be treated as a professional that was perceived as unreasonable. They could not wrap their heads around that this was my profession. My advocacy for benefits was considered rude.... I was fresh out of college and really did not know what or how these things should work."*

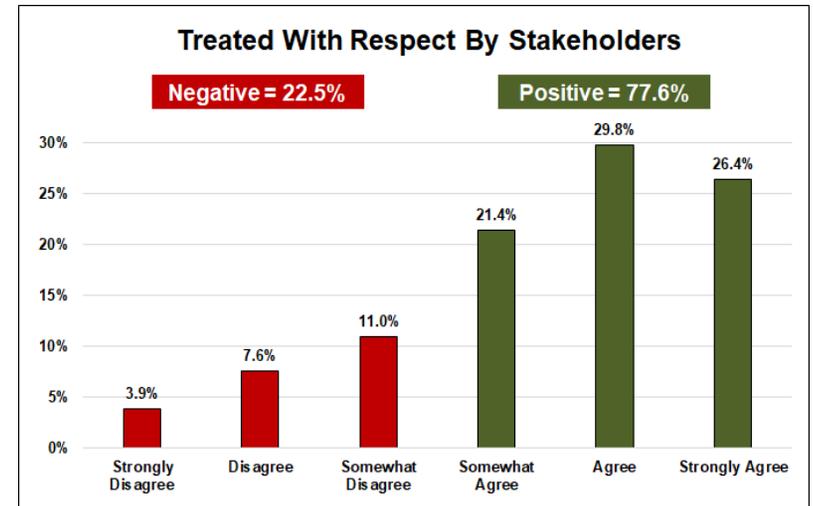
### OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

*"I have been at my congregation for 23 years and am blessed to have a healthy community that strives to treat its employees fairly and well."*

*"The Board treats professionals like servants-- no respect"*

*"It's a big bummer that such a small crop of passionate people, in a field that needs educators but never seems to have enough or pay enough, experience the mistreatment that I, too, experienced."*

*"The stakeholders are incredibly important and [yet] there is a need for them to express themselves in peaceful/kind ways as opposed to being antagonistic."*



<sup>4</sup> The term 'Stakeholder' can have different meaning to people in different contexts, in this case we left the term vague for respondents to self-define.

## ANALYSIS

Respect is a fundamental expectation of any employee. Leading Edge's 2019 employee engagement survey identifies it as one of six key criteria that indicates a healthy work environment.<sup>5</sup> From it flows self-worth, productivity, and the desire & passion to help the organization meet its goals. A lack of respect from stakeholders, e.g., supervisor, executive, or board member, can have a devastating effect on the individual and the morale of the organization. With a quarter of the respondents reporting this lack of respect when leaving their job, we wonder about the effects of this on a staff team who experiences these behaviors secondhand. Of note, those who make \$50k or less (67 respondents), 30% gave a negative response to being treated with respect by stakeholders.

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<sup>5</sup> Are Jewish Organizations Great Places to Work?, Leading Edge, Fall 2019. Leading place to work criteria includes trusted leaders, common purpose, respected employees, talent development, clear salary and benefits and diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

## WORKPLACE SUPPORT

When describing leaving their jobs, 35% of respondents felt a lack of support from their supervisor and 16% felt unsupported by colleagues.

### INTERVIEW NARRATIVES

*"My boss was dishonest and made promises he couldn't keep. He said he would pay me significantly more money than he did, and when I spoke to him about it, he screamed at me and said, 'I would never be happy.' This supervisor poisoned a culture that was 'really beautiful', and I had to leave."*

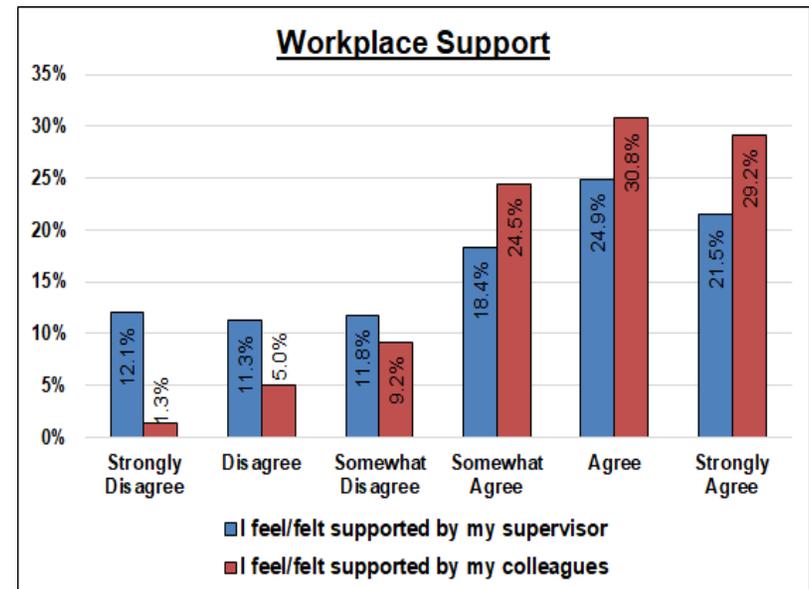
*"The first 3 months was rough. I had no onboarding/transition plan. The organization had a sink or swim mentality."*

*"I also did not have any kind of internal support network that would've made any peer support possible. I had close colleagues inside the organization, but there was no sense of a need for the development of internal peer mentorship/support/internal sponsorship."*

*"Almost everything I was doing was getting a lot of glowing feedback, then I felt 'ambushed' in a conversation with HR and my new boss... This was the first time I'd ever been terminated from anything. I'd never gotten in trouble at any job before, whether lifeguarding, Jewish camp... This felt like a mark on my record. ..."*

*"My direct supervisor was really intellectually challenging, and I loved the work...but then a professional from another organization was brought into the agency, inserted into the hierarchy, and became my supervisor. It became very clear at a certain point that they didn't have a great deal of supervisory experience and were unfamiliar with the organizational culture."*

*"The turning point for me was when they brought on a consultant as my full-time supervisor. From there, the dialogue and culture shifted. I was left out of staff meetings and planning meetings. Eventually, I was called into an HR meeting with my supervisor. It felt like an ambush and was a total shock to me."*



## ANALYSIS

Strong and supportive supervisory relationships underpin a framework for trust, taking risks, professional and programmatic growth. Efficient, thoughtful, and supportive supervision can be a buttress against low productivity, employee conflict, absenteeism, embezzlement and other crimes, and low job satisfaction.<sup>6</sup> With so much riding on this relationship, it is distressing to know that approximately 35% do not experience supervision positively. A lack of supportive supervision can result in talent leaving while poor supervisors retain their jobs, further embedding this negative cycle.

The 2019 Leading Edge survey reinforces challenges faced in workplace support.<sup>7</sup> While 59% indicated they received meaningful feedback on their performance, 41% did not. And for the fourth year in a row, Leading Edge found that fundamental management practices in Jewish organizations are far below the U.S. benchmark, specifically relating to meaningful performance reviews and ongoing feedback. Based on the data we found, we believe that a major challenge in the training of managers is the art of supervision. Anecdotally, we did not hear about formal training in this area. We also found scant evidence that employees are taught what to expect from a healthy supervisory relationship.

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<sup>6</sup> Supervision: A guide to practice. John Wiles & Joseph Bondi, The University of Michigan, C.E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1986. Digitized 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Leading Edge - Are Jewish Organizations Great Places to Work? Fall 2019.

## EXIT INTERVIEWS

67.5% of respondents who left positions in the field did not receive an exit interview. Of the 32.5% that did receive an exit interview, almost 50% received them from individuals that could be considered inappropriate and/or potentially unqualified (supervisor = 27% and Board member/senior leader 22%).

## INTERVIEW NARRATIVES

*"We live in a landscape that nobody wants to say: you know what, things may be improving at this agency, but [the] field treats people like crap, people burn out, people leave and [there's] no exit interview and [they] aren't honest about why."*

*"I had an exit interview with [the] HR consultant. I spoke with her for over an hour, [and] told her the whole story. [She] ended up quitting herself, horrified. So many people [were] so miserable."*

## ANALYSIS

Current literature suggests that "a thoughtful exit interview—whether it be a face-to-face conversation, a questionnaire, a survey, or a combination—can catalyze leaders' listening skills, reveal what does or doesn't work inside the organization, highlight hidden challenges and opportunities, and generate essential competitive intelligence."<sup>8</sup> It is considered a standard practice for organizations to learn about why an employee left and the employment experience during their tenure. Further, it is a final opportunity to treat the departing employee with respect and kindness. While 48% of respondents who had an exit interview had an HR manager conduct it, it means that more than half were interviewed by potentially inappropriate parties, including Board Chairs, CEOs, or direct supervisors. Without the use of a trained professional the employee may not feel comfortable sharing their true reasons for departure, or they may reframe to protect the organization and/or not want to offend the individual conducting the interview. While HR managers tend to be best-positioned and qualified to undertake the interviews, they too can be subject to internal politics and pressure that accompany a departure. Still more organizations in our field may not be large enough to have a formal HR function.

In some of our qualitative interviews we found that exit interviews only took place because the employee demanded it.

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<sup>8</sup> "Making Exit Interviews Count", Spain and Groysberg, Harvard Business Review, April 2016.

## LEGAL COUNSEL

A quarter of the respondents felt the need to consult legal counsel during the transition period. Of those responding about a friend/colleague, 23% confirmed the need to consult with legal counsel.

## INTERVIEW NARRATIVES

*"The organization deliberately 'played around' with legal obstacles knowing it would cost me cash out of pocket."*

*"They wanted her to sign a 10-page legal document that she would not work in the [local] Jewish community"*

## ANALYSIS

Consulting legal counsel is not an issue for concern on its own. We learned in the qualitative interviews that for some, it was deemed to be necessary based on the threatening behavior of their employer. Some also reported it was a tactic used by the employer to "bleed me dry" and result in an agreement that benefited the employer as the cost of legal counsel outweighed any legal guidance or litigation which is deemed as expensive and risky.

## FAIR TREATMENT

Just over 30% of those terminated, and 20% of those who resigned, felt that they were treated unfairly.<sup>9</sup>

### INTERVIEW NARRATIVES

*"I attempted to get unemployment and was denied because the board member the director was engaging to work with me was a labor relations professor and knew how to tell the state that I did not qualify. They did not extend my health insurance; COBRA was too pricey and no unemployment!"*

*"I was on the job for 1.5 years, the Board Chair and Vice Chair walked in with a police officer and escorted me off the premises. There was no forewarning. During my tenure I had one performance review, which was positive. I was told I was being fired 'for cause,' but cause' was never defined. I was not paid for the 1.5 years remaining on my contract."*

*"It took three weeks to negotiate an agreement. My personal belongings were left in my old office. I had to take a family member with me to remove them for fear of intimidation. I no longer will take personal items and place them in an office as you must be able to leave with a minute's notice."*

### ANALYSIS

Though it is notable that 70% of people did not indicate they were treated poorly during termination, that a full thirty percent felt poorly treated caught our attention, as did the 20% who resigned. This sense of injustice was reinforced during multiple interviews. The notion that people are terminated is not problematic on its own: however, this decision should result in the process being as kind and humane as possible.

From our qualitative data, we know there are those who formally resigned, but who were given the option to resign for positive optics, which comes with the added weight of not being able to receive unemployment benefits. We do not have data on how often these "resignations" occur, though anecdotally it is a familiar tactic.

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<sup>9</sup> Note: we did not define "fair" for the respondents - this question aimed to get a sense of how they *felt* at the time of leaving their job.

We have learned that when a termination that feels unfair takes place in the Jewish nonprofit space, the reality is that alternative Jewish communal employment can be difficult to find, especially in smaller communities. Given a finite number of jobs available, one can be effectively dismissed from their community as well. Some chose to no longer work in the Jewish community, whereas others felt expelled from their home community with little chance of re-engaging, personally or professionally. Some shared that this can be extraordinarily demoralizing and painful, given that they had sought work in this field because they were community-minded and hopeful for Jewish engagement.

Simply put, the process of dismissing professionals who do not perform can be kinder and more respectful. Though it might cost more in severance, discomfort, and time, our values prioritize employees leaving with dignity.

"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary—go and learn it!" — Rabbi Hillel (Shabbat 31a)

## DEPARTING THE ORGANIZATION

Of those who resigned or were terminated, we asked them to help identify the rationale for their departure [multiple answer select]. The numbers break down as follows:

- a) 50% believed they were not set up to succeed in the role.
- b) 48.5% felt the person in a higher position used power inappropriately
- c) 26% felt their work was acknowledged and appreciated.
- d) 14% resigned and it was not their choice.<sup>10</sup>
- e) 17% felt their future career was threatened.

## INTERVIEW NARRATIVES

*"Long story short: there were a number of things my supervisor said that were legally actionable – threats verging on legally actionable--and I decided to cut and run."*

*"At one point I decided to try to approach my supervisor's supervisor and the response was 'we love you; we want you to succeed, and she came here with a 5-million-dollar grant, there's nothing we can do about this.' I recognized at that point there wasn't room for me in this space."*

*"I have now worked in a professional setting for two years which is alarmingly the opposite of toxic. So, it's now obvious to me that it wasn't anything I did, but that [my previous work] place wasn't setting me up for success."*

*"The people involved with the organization were power-hungry. Rather than helping to do good for the community (which happened to be a wealthy area), we didn't get support from other staff to deal with volunteers"*

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<sup>10</sup> 20% resigned and felt they were treated unfairly, whereas 14% resigned and it was not their choice - two separate questions in the survey instrument.

## ANALYSIS

The high percentages represented by a) and b) above signal a lack of healthy practices in the ways in which Jewish organizations handle employees leaving. Further research could dig into whether these responses signaled a lack of supervision, inappropriate allocation of work, or mismatch between job description and individuals' skillsets.

The high incidence of inappropriate use of power also speaks to the training of supervisors, and those they supervise, on the maintenance of a healthy relationship. Indeed, it is crucial that those promoted receive training on management best practices.<sup>11</sup> We say this to highlight that if "supervisees" could be trained to be savvier about this relationship, they would have more resources should power be used inappropriately.

While we are heartened to hear that 26% of individuals felt their work was acknowledged when they left the organization, its inverse is more notable to us. Creating a culture of recognition leads to increased employee engagement, the retention of top talent, and high performance.<sup>12</sup> We feel this is crucial not just when someone is employed, but also when they leave.

Forced resignation was also heard in our interview narratives – an incident which could impact the individual's ability to apply for unemployment benefits.<sup>13</sup> Framed as a face-saving opportunity, this leads us to question whether the reality of employment in the Jewish communal space is skewed, as it can also be beneficial to the organization's perception in the public sphere. Connected with this issue is that of non-disclosure agreements, on which further research is merited.

The concept of future careers being threatened, beyond being out of line with values of kindness and respect, connects to the real concern of individuals in smaller communities who fear for their ability to work in the field for which they have training, experience, and passion.

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<sup>11</sup> Further research would serve to investigate whether "promotion by attrition" contributes to this issue, in which those are promoted because they are able to stay at the organization (despite many leaving), rather than because of interest or talent.

<sup>12</sup> Hastwell, Claire. "Creating a Culture of Recognition." *Great Place to Work*®, [www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/creating-a-culture-of-recognition](http://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/creating-a-culture-of-recognition).

<sup>13</sup> Lucas, Suzanne. "Forced to Resign: What Are Your Options?" CBS News, CBS Interactive, 6 Aug. 2012, [www.cbsnews.com/news/forced-to-resign-what-are-your-options/](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/forced-to-resign-what-are-your-options/).

## WORKING IN THE FIELD

Using the Net Promoter Scale (NPS), we found that only 19.4% of respondents said they would promote working in a Jewish nonprofit to their friends or colleagues. Instead, 46.6% of respondents were categorized as detractors and 34% were categorized as passive. The overall NPS score was -27.

## INTERVIEW NARRATIVES

*"The relationship with my supervisor was not good. It was not a good mix because my supervisor focused on skills and areas that were not part of my job description. Several of the responsibilities were not in my skill set and were not discussed at hiring. It did not seem to matter; my supervisor was tough and not compassionate. I did not feel valued or listened to. The environment was not supportive in any way."*

*"We hired lots of young people because they were cheap, and we could get significant work done. If they left, which they usually did after a year or two, there were always plenty more to hire."*

*"I learned it was not me, it was the circumstances and I learned and so must everyone. If you need to leave, do it and do not look back."*

*"While Jewish organizations tend to operate at times like a family and at times like a business, [I found that] they invariably fail to use the more appropriate of the two approaches when dealing with challenges and/or conflict."*

## ANALYSIS

Although it's important to note that this survey did not use a representative sample, a net promoter score of -27.3 with over 400 respondents points to a systemic need to drive a healthier working environment to sustain talent over time. Otherwise, as companies such as Amazon and YouTube have learned using the NSP themselves (and scoring in 2021, respectively, +25 and +59), talent will shift to other industries.<sup>14</sup> This has a significant impact on the leadership pipeline in this sector.

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<sup>14</sup> "Google Net Promoter Score 2021 Benchmarks." *Google Net Promoter Score 2021 Benchmarks* | *Customer.guru*, [customer.guru/net-promoter-score/google](https://customer.guru/net-promoter-score/google).

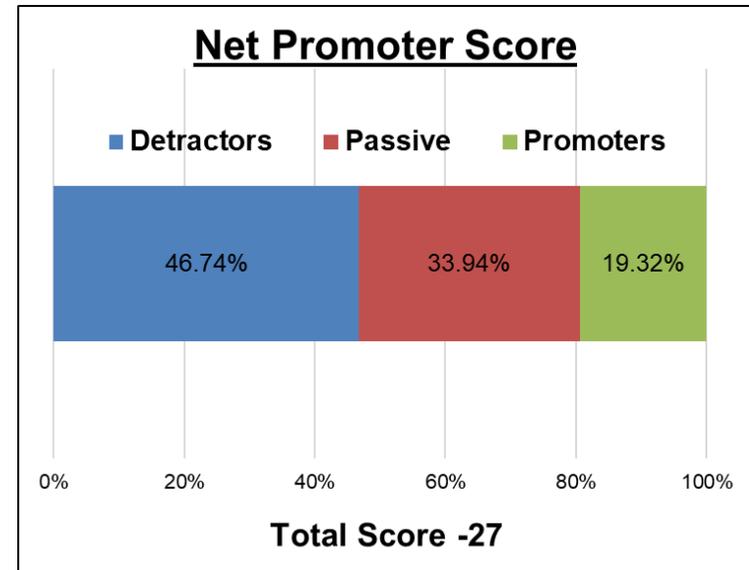
When analyzed across age groups, this data becomes even more relevant for future discourse:

- Respondents between 18-35 years old (n=84) had a Net Promoter Score of -47, nearly twice as negative as the sample-wide score
- Respondents aged 66 and older (n=46) had a Net Promoter Score of -4, which is significantly more positive than the sample-wide score

These scores, themselves, point to a generational discrepancy in experiences within the Jewish Nonprofit sector that, for the sake of talent acquisition and organizational longevity, should be studied further. We have heard of the experiences of organizations or departments with intended turnover: the jobs did not pay well, but since the entry-level work was in demand, the expectation would be for the individual to stay in the organization for a year or two.

Without proper supervision, support, or investment in development, these roles did not serve as steppingstones to a career in the Jewish professional space; rather, there was no expectation of excellence, anticipating that there would be someone new and eager to take the job when this person burned out. Rather than develop the talent pipeline for future leadership, these organizations sought cheap labor, despite the churn it produced.

At the same time, we found that 89% of respondents feel part of a larger Jewish communal sector<sup>15</sup>. This is a powerful notion and speaks to the root of why many people chose to work for the Jewish community, in a field that can provide a sense of connectedness and belonging.



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<sup>15</sup> Survey data question #14 asked "I feel like I am part of a larger Jewish communal field." 38% strongly agreed, 27.4% agreed, 23.2% somewhat agreed, 3.7% somewhat disagreed, 3.9% disagreed and 21.9% strongly disagreed.

## OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS

Given the uniqueness of personal identification with mission in the Jewish communal space, further research is merited to benchmark the Jewish nonprofit space against the secular sector. At the same time, we believe it is important that leaders in this field set standards and hold Jewish institutions, employees, and fiduciaries responsible for behaving according to the values we purport to hold dear. With the ability to influence Jewish nonprofit organizations, leaders carry a sacred obligation to treat communal employees, regardless of religious identity, in a caring, kind, and thoughtful manner.

Rather than simply create a data source, our intent is to create conditions for change within the Jewish nonprofit field. In consultation with various stakeholders and informants,<sup>16</sup> we have identified the need for solutions to the difficulties described in the findings above, some of which are already beginning to be solved, to improve the landscape of Jewish communal employment.

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix A.

## GOOD NEWS: GREAT WORK IS ALREADY HAPPENING!

Even within this project's short timeline, remarkable change has been taking place in this space. In fact, these changes are so dynamic that while we have attempted to identify those that speak to our survey and interview findings below, we know it is likely to be incomplete. This is a space where change is happening from an institutional top-down perspective and with grassroots organizing. We believe the bidirectionality of this work to be crucial to its success. Some of these initiatives were sparked by #metoo or the pandemic, whereas others were created out of a long drive for greater equity or efficacy. Each initiative is additive.

The 'We Need to Talk' study<sup>17</sup> was a primary piece of work that laid the groundwork for discussion and acknowledgement of issues that have been buried for decades. Passionate professionals are building a series of safety nets that will hopefully protect and encourage more people to enter the field and therefore result in stronger Jewish communities, and we have attempted to collate both types of change work into our list below, as both are related to our findings.

With change taking place at such speed, we want to acknowledge that the complexity and breadth of the system means we will not have captured close to the creative and practical work being undertaken - it is simply not possible - which is a good thing! "A rising tide lifts all boats."

Listed below are those initiatives and efforts that most closely match our areas of study for striving for equity, kindness, and value-driven behaviors in the field of Jewish communal work.

- The SRE Network serves as a network, grantmaking, and movement-builder and is comprised of more than 140 organizations committed to implementing the SRE Standards for Creating Safe, Respectful and Equitable workplaces. Membership includes **participation in an assessment tool**. Those who complete it receive a link to the SRE Toolkit with **additional tools and resources to assist with implementation of standards**. SRE Network serves as a **catalyst for building the kind of long-term movement** needed to create a safe, respectful, and equitable Jewish community and larger society. SRE has invested over \$3M in efforts to advance gender equity in Jewish spaces.

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<sup>17</sup> "We Need to Talk Report." *SRE Network - Safety Respect Equity*, 2019, [srenetwork.org/research-learning/we-need-to-talk/](https://srenetwork.org/research-learning/we-need-to-talk/).

- Ta'amod has partnered with Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse (JCADA) to create a **"one-stop" resource space for individuals who are experiencing crisis, trauma, or need advice**. Their efforts cover mental health support nationally, as well as connection to legal services in the DC area.
- Sacred Spaces is working on a **Resource Toolkit for organizations creating policies for employment and boards**, called Keilim, with an expected end-of-year official launch.
- Leading Edge has conducted surveys of Jewish communal organizations to **determine employee engagement metrics and track them over time** since 2016. The data is available to the community in the aggregate and data specific to individual organizations is shared with leadership to help raise their scores over time.
- The Gender Equity in Hiring Project is convening working groups on ethical terminations, with the goal of creating resources for employees to **navigate unemployment** and employers to **guide compassionate termination**.
- JPRO and JFNA have collaborated on the RISE initiative to **provide resources for career, mental and financial health** to individuals who have experienced a job loss due to the pandemic, including career coaching and skills training.
- Leading Edge's CEO Onboarding program includes **support for new executives in working within lay/professional boundaries and power dynamics**.
- Boardify and Leading Edge both run programs to help provide lay leaders with **resources for effective and healthy board-staff relationships**.
- JPRO's WellAdvised program connects individuals with challenges at work to **support from experienced leaders** in the field.
- Ta'amod's safe respectful workplace training engages with Jewish communal institutions and all who work, learn, or worship at them with a lens of Jewish values and ethics while also providing **legally compliant training to make harassment intrinsically less likely**.
- JPRO has launched a Jewish Professionals Cohort with The Management Center to create a **tailored experience for management training** specific to the Jewish nonprofit space.

→ Jewish Women's International "At the Table: Men as Allies in Workplace Equity" works with male Jewish professionals, donors, and lay leaders to **cultivate a workplace culture of safety, respect, and true equity** in the day-to-day operations and interactions, goals, and core values of Jewish organizations.

## FILLING THE GAPS

Concomitant to the initiatives listed above at the cutting edge of change, there are still areas where we believe gaps remain in finding solutions. Our intent is to be descriptive and encourage discussion, debate, and action, rather than be proscriptive or imply we have found a solution to each opportunity. The potential solutions below, we hope, will be nuanced and/or incorporated into current efforts. We are encouraged by the brilliance, commitment, and talent of those already focused on these issues.

- Providing **career planning and transition support** for individuals who are out of work for reasons other than the COVID pandemic.
- Providing **legal support** for individuals outside of Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC.
- Ensuring all individuals working in Jewish organization, both large and small, have **awareness of their rights and easy access to the resources** referenced in this section and above.
- Creating a recommended communal **approach to exit interviews** to ensure employees have the opportunity to share their experiences with their employers.
- Collecting **data on exit interviews** to offer support on thematics for organizations and in the sector as the aggregate, helping organizations see their gaps in approach to employment and to provide opportunities for commendation and improvement.
- Creating a **recommended approach to terminating individuals** in keeping with organizational values and state laws which are cognizant of the personal impact felt by employees in the Jewish nonprofit space.
- Creating a neutral, **extra-judicial committee for mediation** between individuals and/or organizations. This may be especially helpful in cases where the only recourse for abuse of power is the board chair or CEO, who may be the perpetrators, or for those with fewer resources for employees.
- Expanding the **manager training throughout the field**, with an emphasis on developmental focused supervision as well as task focused supervision.
- Training employees to **know what to expect from an appropriate supervisory relationship**.

- Bolstering education of employees around **what to expect from an employer**. This would include helping to train professionals how to ask the right questions and to recognize “red flags.” Examples could include a regular course on the rights and responsibilities of the Jewish communal employee, a cohort of professionals starting out in the field together, or an advocacy handbook.
- Creating a **system for organizations to be identified as healthy, safe, values-based places to work**. Possibilities could include developing a “hechsher”-style rating that indicates an organization has taken certain steps to address and reinforce positive systemic culture and to act as vanguards of their values, modeled after the American Camp Association’s voluntary accreditation program. Shared data such as staff turnover and exit interview themes could all help develop a picture of organizations and their willingness to invest in staff and culture.
- Finding a way to **gather employee data safely and confidentially from small organizations** (less than 6 FTEs), to get a sense of the aggregate engagement from these types of institutions.
- Providing **support for individuals who want to find a way back into Jewish community** after leaving their professional role and don’t know how, particularly in smaller communities but in larger ones as well.

## LOOKING AHEAD

We are both struck by the enormity of the challenges ahead and yet buoyed by the resilience and willingness of people to step forward and engage. On behalf of the authors, we hope this study constructively catalyzes the conversation and gains momentum for this work, as this was a passion project for all of us.

We have many individuals to thank (see Appendix A for a full list), although a number wish to remain anonymous. We know with this work comes the potential for fallout with employees or clients. We are hopeful that one day the notion of engaging in this type of work does not come with risk to one's career.

At the root of our findings were three consistent challenges: magnitude, power, and the status quo.

## MAGNITUDE

The fact that so many respondents completed the survey and requested interviews meant we rethought our approach and requested additional volunteer support. This was in addition to those who engaged to provide input, guidance, and perspective into this work. Numbers matter, and the more people engage with this project, regardless of perspective, the greater the momentum.

With a conversation of scope came the reminder that many people indeed love their jobs and are satisfied with their supervision, respect, and workload. Questions from advisers helped us grapple with questions like: for which of our colleagues is it acceptable to abuse, overlook, or under-appreciate? If the field employs over 75,000 people, how many can be considered collateral damage? Having heard the stories and been witness to the impact, our perspective is clear: even one person is too many.

"Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world." — Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:9; Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sanhedrin 37a.

## POWER

A constant theme throughout our investigation is that of the abuse of power and how the differential therein can be used both to support or debilitate professionals. When we heard of power being used as a control mechanism or threat, it was often wielded without regard to the values and beliefs enshrined in the organization's founding documents. In instances where this power differential is leveled, thus discarded as a mechanism of leverage, we found instances of cultures of kindness and respect. Power, we recognize, is often an intrinsic part of many employment structures, but we must safeguard leaders' ability to be judicious, sparing and not belittle or hurt their team members. These checks and balances are crucial to monitor the power of supervisors, volunteers, and fiduciaries of our organizations. If we can level this dynamic, we can create better workplaces, increase productivity, and ensure that the sentiment of "Well, you know how Jewish organizations are..." becomes a distant memory.

"Love your fellow as yourself." — Leviticus 19:18

## STATUS QUO

There are many passionate and talented professionals who are taking up challenges related to organizational culture daily. They are creative, determined, and unrelenting in a desire to improve the environment and prospects for employees in Jewish nonprofit organizations. We have also experienced a groundswell of individuals, entities, and funders willing to step forward and challenge the status quo. To continue taking up this *mission* will take brave, forward-thinking leaders. We hope that skeptics are brought to better appreciate that the problems are real, and the consequences of continued negative behaviors and actions will be to the detriment of the field.

"It is not your obligation to finish the work, nor are you free to desist from it." — Pirkei Avot 2:21,20

We are heartened by the bright spots. We know that many Jewish communal employees feel content with their workplaces, and that remarkable work is being done by professionals in the diversity of Jewish spaces in North America and beyond. Our emphasis is to highlight those practices that are impacting retention, promotion, and attraction to the Jewish communal field, which we want to see grow and flourish without risk to the individuals who make it special. Though careers can be difficult at times, they should also provide training and be educational, supportive, and intentionally kind places.

As the volunteers responsible for the research and recommendations expressed above, we are grateful to those who have stepped forward to help. What comes next? We await your responses with interest.

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## APPENDIX A: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND GRATITUDE

We wish to acknowledge the following individuals who gave of their time and expertise freely. Their input, guidance, and counsel during various stages of this volunteer-driven effort made it possible. Each individual listed has given their consent to do so, and are listed as themselves, not representing any organizations with which they may be affiliated. We also note that not every opinion expressed in the report is endorsed by every participant.

Amy Bram

Sandy Cardin

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Jonah Geller

Erica Goldman

Meredith Jacobs

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Kyle McCracken

Nicole Nevarez

Rabbi Vanessa Ochs, PhD.

Nate Phillips

Judith Rosenbaum, PhD.

Sara Shapiro-Plevan

Elana Silber

Rabbi David A. Teutsch, Ph.D.

Rhoda Weisman

Mark S. Young, MPA/MA

## APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FROM THE SURVEY

Please note demographic data was not collected from those who participated in the qualitative interviews.

**Q2. Which gender identity do you most closely identify with?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
Female	68.1%	286
Male	31.19%	131
Nonbinary / Gender nonconforming / third gender	0.0%	0
Prefer not to answer	0.48%	2
Prefer to self-describe	0.24%	1
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>420</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>17</b>

**Q3. How would you describe your race/ethnicity?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
White or Caucasian	97.62%	410
Black or African American	0.24%	1
Hispanic or Latino	0.71%	3
Asian or Asian American	0.48%	2
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.24%	1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.24%	1
Other (please specify)	3.33%	14
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>420</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>17</b>

**Q4. How old are you?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
18-24	3.1%	13
25-34	19.76%	83
35-44	19.52%	82
45-54	23.57%	99
55-65	21.9%	92
66+	12.14%	51
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>420</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>17</b>

**Q5. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
Yes	1.43%	6
No	97.38%	409
Prefer to self-describe	1.19%	5
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>420</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>17</b>

**Q6. As a current or former employee of a JNO, how long have you been, or did you serve at your current/last organization?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
Less than 1 year	5.48%	23
1-2 years	16.9%	71
3-5 years	30.24%	127
6-10 years	18.33%	77
11+ years	29.05%	122
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>420</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>17</b>

\*Note: 16% employed for 11+ years were also part of a leadership team.

**Q7. How would you describe your religious affiliation?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
Agnostic	0.48%	2
Atheist	0.48%	2
Buddhist	0.0%	0
Hindu	0.0%	0
Jewish – Conservative	28.81%	121
Jewish – Reform	28.81%	121
Jewish – Orthodox	6.67%	28
Jewish – Other	30.48%	128
Mormon	0.0%	0
Muslim	0.0%	0
Orthodox (such as Greek or Russian)	0.0%	0
Protestant	0.0%	0
Roman Catholic	0.24%	1
Nothing in particular	0.95%	4
Something else	3.1%	13
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>420</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>17</b>

**Q8. What is your Jewish ethnic background?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
Mizrachi	0.26%	1
Ashkenazi	94.81%	365
Sephardic	3.9%	15
Ethiopian	0.0%	0
Prefer to self-describe	3.64%	14
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>385</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>52</b>

**Q9. What most closely describes or described your current or last situation as an employee at a JNO?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
Permanent full time (40 hours plus or minus)	90.91%	370
Permanent part time	7.62%	31
Seasonal	1.47%	6
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>407</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>30</b>

**Q10. What is (or was) roughly your job level?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
Individual contributor	18.43%	75
Manager with at least one direct report	24.82%	101
Manager of managers	4.67%	19
Executive/Leadership team	47.17%	192
Other (please specify)	4.91%	20
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>407</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>30</b>

**Q11. What is (or was) the department you work(ed) in?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
Development/Fundraising	16.22%	66
Finance/Operations	3.69%	15
General administration/Support staff (not department specific)	8.11%	33
Grantmaking	4.42%	18
Human resources	0.49%	2
Information technology	0.0%	0
Marketing/Communications	5.16%	21
Programming/Direct service provider	36.61%	149
Other (please specify)	25.31%	103
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>407</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>30</b>

**Q12. What is your current or former salary?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
Less than \$50k	17.44%	71
\$50k-\$99k	35.63%	145
\$100k-\$149k	19.16%	78
\$150k-\$199k	10.57%	43
\$200k+	11.06%	45
Prefer not to say	6.14%	25
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>407</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>30</b>

**Q13. Have you left your position since March 1, 2020?**

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Responses
Yes	22.11%	90
No	77.89%	317
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>407</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>30</b>