

Conference Call • January 20, 2005

Topic: The Balancing Act: Maintaining Family and Career Focus with Jane Shapiro

★Bio:

Jane Shapiro is the president of the Alliance for Adult Jewish Learning and founder of Jane Shapiro Associates, a consulting firm for adult Jewish education. She is also the mother of four sons now ages 15, 18, 22 & 25.

★A brief summary:

Jane Shapiro was working towards her Ph.D. when she had her first son. After a three-year hiatus from work, she had no problem finding great part time jobs in the Jewish community. She never finished her Ph.D., but her part-time work ultimately led her to a full-time job when she was ready. In the part time work, she felt she could keep her creativity going as well as have the flexibility she needed to take care of her small children.

“When you leave home, it has to be to do something worth your while. Pick what you love and what will help you grow,” Jane said. She offered these three questions as benchmarks:

- What do you love to do in your work and what is busy work?
- What kind of work will make you feel that you are growing professionally?
- In what kind of work are you an expert or a leader?

★From Part-Time to Full-Time:

During Jane’s three-year hiatus from work, she became involved as a volunteer in her child’s school. She found this dissatisfying. She missed having professional standards to which people were held accountable. Jane began teaching classes at night for the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School. While it was hard to leave her family at night, the job was good for building her professional skills and she enjoyed it. Jane expressed that the work/family balance is not always a satisfying one. Though leaving her family in the evening for work was difficult, ultimately she was lucky that the skills she gained enabled her to leverage the opportunity when it came time to pursue a full time position.

After years of teaching at night, Jane was in a position to become the Associate Director of the Melton School. Because she had so much to add to the school, at this point, they worked with her and her family needs. She was able to leave every day at 3 p.m. and was home for her kids when they got home from school. Jane found that as her children grew older and her family responsibilities became less demanding, her professional ambitions grew. She said that it was a natural progression as her career aspirations filled the place of her familial obligations.

★Finding a Mentor:

“While I did feel that I had to find my way as a Jewish working Mom, I could not have asked for a more outstanding mentor, colleague and teacher than my director, Dr. Betsy Katz. She

exemplifies in every way what it means to be a pioneer in a field (adult Jewish learning) and an outstanding leader without ever compromising her standards of kindness and integrity. So much of what I know I owe to her,” commented Jane. Jane also attributed her success to a very supportive husband and kids. There were also individual women in the office who were sympathetic to her choices and could lend support for her decisions.

★Lessons Learned: Tips from the Field:

- Your commitment to mothering should not end at the door. When you are at work, let your colleagues know that you have children and family responsibilities. If they want to schedule a meeting late in the day, tell them that you have to check your family’s schedule. Be proud of your work as a mother and know that it makes you a better professional.
- On the other side of the coin, integrate your professional life into your home life too. Talk about what you do at work and show your family that work makes you happy.
- Bring your kids to work. A piece of what defines their mother is the desire to service the Jewish community.

Jane encouraged JCSA Networking Parents to advocate for family friendly policies in the workplace. She especially focused on the importance of professional development and learning opportunities for part-time professionals. In terms of returning to the workforce, Jane encouraged parents to market themselves by thinking about what skills make parents unique and to sell what parents are good at. Jane encouraged our continued dialogue and advocacy outreach through JCSA Networking Parents.