



Jaymie Saks: Bringing a Business Perspective to the Jewish Women's Archive

Position: Chief Operating Officer, Jewish Women's Archive

Start Date: June, 2003

Education: BA, University of Pennsylvania; MBA, the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania

Previous For-Profit Experience: 15 years of experience in management consulting and business development, including Computer Science Corporation and Fidelity Investments

Previous Nonprofit Experience: former Big Sister

Organization Information: national nonprofit membership organization that works to uncover, chronicle, and transmit the history of American Jewish women; founded in 1995; based in Brookline, MA; 15 employees; \$2 million budget

Jaymie Saks joined the Jewish Women's Archive (JWA) in June of 2003, after more than 15 years of experience in management consulting and business development roles. She is responsible for daily operations and for implementing the Archive's five-year strategic plan. A former Big Sister who is active with the Wharton Club and the CSC Index online alumni community, Outdex, Jaymie oversees a budget of \$2 million. She received her MBA from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

"I graduated from business school in the middle of an economic downturn. It didn't really deter me from finding a job I liked, but the market instability was pretty disconcerting. It wasn't necessarily easy for me, or for my classmates, to feel a level of confidence in our career choices.

"And I would find myself running home at night to do the things I really cared about, my volunteer work. I was aware of the disconnect—doing what I loved at the end of the day, not during the day. But it was September 11 that prompted me to really look closely at what I was doing professionally. I wanted to make sure that I was doing something that counted. I asked myself, what would people say at my funeral?

"I was always telling myself that I would join a nonprofit someday... when I could afford to. I had a lot of stereotypes about nonprofit work and the people who did it. I stayed open to finding a private sector job—but I began to network.

"I looked for bridgers, although I didn't know the word then. I knew that there were differences between the sectors and I wanted to know what the challenges were. To be honest, I also did a cost-benefit analysis which indicated that I had little to lose. Nonprofits were hiring; for-profits were not. The worst case scenario was that I would be able to do something that I really care about for some period of time.

"Through my networking I found an incredibly welcoming community. Every person I contacted gave me guidance and connected me to other people. That certainly wasn't happening in business!

"Because of my business development background I assumed I would find a path through fund raising, but that was not so. Interviewers understood what I had to offer, that I had potential as a senior leader. But, to do a specific functional job like development I would need a lot of training, and organizations want people who will hit the ground running. It frustrated me



then, but I understand it now that I am hiring for those roles!

"Gail Reimer [Executive Director of the Jewish Women's Archive] kept coming up as someone I should talk to. She was looking for a general business thinker and implementer for the chief administrative role in the organization. When I was offered the job I asked for the COO title and got it—a bit of a leap of faith on both sides.

"Many bridgers told me that the roles are the same in both sectors. I don't think the experience is the same at all. The JWA staff members have devoted their lives to their mission; I'm the only one with a general business background. I feel really good about adding the business perspective—that I've had a major impact on the way people across the organization think about the ways in which we need to improve. People are now starting to think about marketing in a positive light. And we're transitioning to a more formal performance and compensation review system.

"But, honestly, it's not easy when you're used to being around all people who have a shared knowledge and understanding of what you're trying to do, to business concepts and tools.

"I've learned not to come on too strong with business rhetoric. Some things seem obvious to me, because they involve common business practices. For example, one person in the office was responsible for answering the phones, hunting people down, taking messages—no voice mail—and this took up a huge amount of her time and energy. It was clearly unproductive, so I installed an automated attendant. This wasn't such an obvious solution to people who were more concerned with what kind of organization we are, and how we appear to treat our constituents.

"I never had conversations about these things in big companies; if something was more cost-effective you just did it. In a nonprofit you have more process; you have to get your ideas across differently.

"I believe there is a huge need for business thinking in nonprofits, and any business person who chooses this direction will find that their knowledge and skills will be highly valued. My advice to other bridgers is to join an organization whose mission really calls out to you. In my experience, the business skills required are pretty basic, but you have a lot of opportunity to have an impact if you are sensitive to the organization's needs. And the COO role is a great entry point for a businessperson.

"I'm not sure I would have joined a nonprofit in a different economy. But now that I have I can't imagine going back."

March, 2005

About Bridgestar: Bridgestar is a nonprofit organization. Our mission is to support and strengthen nonprofit organizations by enhancing the flow and effectiveness of passionate and highly skilled leaders into and within the nonprofit sector. Learn more about Bridgestar and join our vibrant community (free) at www.bridgestar.org.