

Come to Order!

Mindy Wertheimer organizes the boardroom

By SUZI BROZMAN
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Mindy Wertheimer has written a book. You probably won't pack it for beach reading, unless you've accepted a position as chairman or president of a synagogue, a community agency or some other nonprofit organization. Then it's something you'll clutch close to your heart and whose content you'll memorize.

It's called *The Board Chair Handbook*. Now in its second and expanded edition, the book focuses on the chairman's roles and responsibilities and his or her partnership with other organizational executives, and it details communications skills that can lead to a productive relationship in a nonjudgmental, respectful atmosphere.

It's a topic dear to Wertheimer's heart. She is the director of field education and a faculty member of the School of Social Work at Georgia State University. In addition to serving as a consultant to many nonprofits, she is a past president of Jewish Family & Career Services and still serves the agency in a number of roles. Her philosophy could be stated as "A strong board means a strong organization."

Wertheimer just offered a two-part series on board leadership and management

to incoming boards through the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta as a way to strengthen the fabric of Atlanta's Jewish community. The Synagogue Presidents Forum and the Affiliate Agency Presidents Forum proved so popular and useful that Federation extended and combined them with the intent of maximizing resources and giving synagogues and agencies the opportunity to interact.

Wertheimer, a native New Yorker, has been in Atlanta since 1979. Long involved in Jewish community activities, she has done a number of projects for Federation, including offering leadership programs for agencies and schools, chairing the major community study, and now working on long-range planning.

Working with JF&CS, she said, was extremely rewarding. "Part of my work is social work perspective, looking at variables that impact a situation. It gives me a way to give back to the community, looking at the big picture, seeing how I can help others."

She worked well with Gary Miller, the chief executive of JF&CS, who said of Wertheimer: "I got to know her through Georgia State. She got interested in JF&CS in the early '90s and rose through the ranks. Mindy took responsibility easily. She's a natural leader people would rally around.

She's thoughtful, organized, an excellent manager who gives credit where it's due. As a leader, she's goal- and process-oriented. I was blessed to have a relationship with her as she went through the ranks."

Miller said that because

Wertheimer understands the differences between the responsibilities of professional and lay leadership, she can guide incoming officers to delineate those responsibilities and deal with their boards effectively.

When Jewish Family Services and Jewish Vocational Services merged to form JF&CS, Wertheimer took on the job of merging the agencies and reorganizing the board from an unworkable 120 members down to 40. She staged a wedding to symbolize the merger.

"Today we're stronger," Miller said. "Two-thirds of our donors and clients are the same. It's more efficient and easier for the customer."

Federation's associate executive director, Noah Levine, also sang Wertheimer's praises. "She revolutionized JF&CS. As president, she had a lot to do with changing the board structure. Years ago, the Federation decided to offer programming for presidents of agencies and synagogues so they could dis-



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cuss issues of concern and have an easier time taking over their groups. We did seminars on roles, dealing with people and communication. In the second year, Mindy co-chaired it. She'd been president of JF&CS.

She added a new dimension in governance and board management that was well received."

As for the book, Wertheimer said: "It includes lots of communications skills. There's nothing else like it on the market. There are pieces, but not a handbook."

She said she applies her social work background in the book to look at variables that affect a situation.

So if you've said yes and are about to be sworn in, you'll want to investigate Wertheimer's ideas and advice — including creating a timeline of what you should be thinking about month to month and what your role should be over your time in the job, as well as the tools you can use for planning and organization, responsibilities you'll want to think about in advance, and goals you'll want to set and reach. It's all there in black and white, available from BoardSource by calling (202) 452-6262 or visiting www.boardsource.org. □