



TZAMERET FUERST

‘The New Face of Jewish Philanthropy’

By Aliza Davidovitz

When one thinks
of leaders of

Jewish organizations, the picture that tends to come to mind is that of a male who is over 60 and has a furrowed, worried brow. They worry about Israel, the next generation, Jewish continuity, anti-Semitism and other relevant issues that affect Jewish well-being and perpetuity. And though driven with the best of intentions, often their solutions and approaches are wrinkled and stodgy too.

Thus, when Tzameret Fuerst walked through the door for our interview, it was as if a fresh breeze had blown in and dispelled the stuffy air that has come to linger in the hallways of traditional Jewish organizations. I was struck by her exuberant energy, radiant smile, her beautiful white teeth and big happy eyes. Fuerst, a petite, young Israeli woman in her 30s, heads Dor Chadash, one of the most dynamic Israel-oriented organizations in New York City. She has undoubtedly broken the mold of Jewish leadership in the Diaspora.

Dor Chadash, brings together Israeli and American Jews to make meaningful connections to Israel and each other. And though it literally began as an outdoor

barbecue in October 2003, started by David Borowich, with just a handful of Americans and Israelis coming together, the outcome of her leadership has been the super-sizing of what was already becoming a successful, growing organization. Today, the organization boasts over 11,000 members, double what it was just two short years ago. Fundraising dollars have grown by 900% to accommodate over 40 top-notch Israel-centric events a year, with something for everyone who loves Israel. From Elie Wiesel, Alan Dershowitz and A.B. Yehoshua to Bibi Netanyahu, Ami Ayalon and Boogy Yaalon all the way to the hottest parties and Israeli film premiers of the year, even New York's Mayor Michael Bloomberg participates in Dor Chadash events.



Labeled as a “party organization” at first, Fuerst has put her non-stop energy and razor sharp skills into creating an organization that offers young people meaningful and thought-provoking programs. And though Dor is certainly responsible for creating some of the coolest and largest parties in the city for the Israeli and American Jewish community in New York, that is but one of a myriad of fascinating activities the organization offers. “One of our biggest priorities was establishing a social action arm for the organization to provide hands-on programs to support local Jewish and non-Jewish communities,” Fuerst says. “We have tremendous leadership talent on our board and I am fortunate

to be working with the most innovative Israeli and American Jews in New York City that help infuse New York with a good dose of Israel in the most meaningful ways.”

Fuerst, who lives in Manhattan, says that New York City was critical in helping build the organization's momentum. “Over eighty percent of our members reside in the city. Moreover, our location attracts a multitude of powerhouse U.S. and Israeli speakers, entertainers and political leaders. And so we are able to leverage our connections to get them to contribute their time and meet our members.”

For Fuerst, the role of Dor Chadash chairwoman is instinctive and natural. “I am the archetype of the Dor Chadash constituency,” she explains. “I inherently understand what Israelis experience abroad.” In addition, because she spent her

formative years growing up the U.S.A., she can just as easily relate to American Jews as well. In Dor Chadash language this would make her a “hybrid”, e.g. someone who is a mixture of Israeli and American Jewish origin--either born in the U.S. to one or both Israeli parents, or born in Israel but have spent most of their life in the U.S.

And where in most cases experience would be a hand up to success, Fuerst says that in her case it was the opposite. “I think it was actually my typical Israeli ignorance about basic concepts like “Jewish continuity” and “unaffiliated” that enabled me to approach the Jewish community with a clean slate and open mind,” she explains. “I was not confined to pre-existing notions of Zionism, post-Zionism, or any other “-ism” that was being tossed around.” And though she paid heed to concerns across the board, she listened most of all to her instincts. “I focused on what would engage the cynical parts of me first and foremost, and took it from there.”



Born in Israel, Fuerst was still a toddler when her parents moved to Los Angeles in pursuit of the American dream.

Everything was on track. Her parents built successful careers, the family grew, they assimilated into American society, and then, very abruptly, when Fuerst was 14, her parents packed everything and returned to Israel.

Many years later, Fuerst would discover what had triggered the family’s move back. “Apparently, we had assimilated a little too well,” explains Fuerst. “One day I came home and asked if I could go on a date with Chris, a non-Jewish boy. My parents made the mistake that

Israelis living abroad often make. They were unable to relate to what the Jewish community had to offer and thought that my siblings and I would retain our Israeli heritage through them. It was simply not enough.”

The reality is that most Israelis are not choosing to move back putting the next generation in danger. It is estimated that as many as one million Israelis reside in the U.S., with some 250,000 concentrated in New York City. Fuerst and her colleagues on the Dor Chadash board want to ensure that these Israelis and their children will retain their heritage. And, they have succeeded. In addition, while luring Israelis back into the fold, the organization has tapped into unaffiliated, young American Jews as well. In the Jewish organizational world attracting either of these audiences on a consistent basis is worthy of the Nobel Prize, but attracting both is an incomprehensible accomplishment. What’s Fuerst’s recipe?

“Listen to your constituency. It’s that simple. Marketing 101.” she explains. After 12 years of marketing multi-national brands before dabbling in Jewish organizational life, she knows what she is talking about. “The tricky part is carefully selecting your target audience. Dor Chadash targets mostly “unaffiliated” Israeli and American Jews who did not find a home in organized Jewish life, but need an avenue to experience their culture —something Fuerst could personally relate to. Dor’s programming is tailored to young people and helps them become closer as a community and their passion for Israel while reaching out to others. “The result is a stronger Jewish identity now and, in the long-run, a stronger Jewish future,” Fuerst says.

As the mother of two small boys, Fuerst has made “the next generation” her top priority and wants to take everything she has learned about sustaining Jewish identity in the Diaspora and apply it toward children of unaffiliated Jews in New York and around the country. She is secretive but promises an amazing new program that will be launched in the fall of 2008 to deal with Israeli and Jewish identity for the next generation.

“In my journey as a philanthropist and Jewish leader, I’ve come to realize that we have a great challenge ahead of us and not a moment to lose,” she says. With young leaders like Fuerst at the helm, generation NEXT, is in good hands.