



Finding Common Ground

LESSONS IN FORGING A WORKING RELATIONSHIP THAT DRIVES RESULTS

Take two rising leaders, one from the corporate world and another from the non-profit sector, put them together for a few years and what do you get? Results, and lots of them. Meet **Matt Cohen**, Regional Manager at M&T Bank and **Jill Feinberg**, Vice President Development and External Affairs at Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital. Three years ago, they were each moving into new professional roles and were thrust together into leadership positions on the Mt. Washington Pediatric Foundation Board. This is a story of rocky roads, grit, determination, lots of heart, and a huge investment of time from these two leaders. In the end, they formed a unique partnership that generated positive results for Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital and its Foundation. It's clear that Jill and Matt's winning formula came from trust and open communication.

BACKGROUND

Our story begins when Jill Feinberg was appointed to the role of Vice President at Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital (MWPH). In this role, her portfolio of responsibilities included philanthropy, marketing, communications, community outreach, and management of the hospital's Board.

At the same time, Matt Cohen, a rising star at M&T Bank, was assuming his position as Board President for the Mt. Washington Pediatric Foundation which raises and funds programs at the hospital. He was appointed to the board ten years prior due to his strengths in leadership, strategic thinking, and banking. When he originally joined the board, he was dispatched with one message from his boss - don't screw it up. In joining the board, Matt was not only professionally invested, but became personally committed to the mission of MWPH - one which extended to his family. In Matt's role as Board President, he was expected to perform the status quo including chairing a

"I got to witness two leaders struggle, learn and have fun along the way. Oh and the Mt. Washington Pediatric Foundation has never been stronger!"

-Sheldon Stein, CEO, Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital



few meetings, attending some events, joining a few calls, and weighing in on opportunities from time to time. For Jill's role as Vice President, she was expected to create awareness around the events and activities of the Foundation and raise money. As long as these actions occurred, things would be good, and Jill and Matt would have done well in their roles.

Status quo is not in Jill's or Matt's vocabulary

Below is an interview with Jill and Matt that highlights the ups and downs of two professionals in new roles, forging new ground - no playbook but plenty of opportunity. Here is their story.

JF = Jill Feinberg

MC = Matt Cohen

Q: How did your working relationship start off?

JF: Our working relationship started off with some challenges. The early challenges of our relationship had more to do with how we approached not only our respective roles, but how we wanted to communicate with one another. We were never short on energy as we set out to champion new board initiatives.

MC: We inherited a Foundation that had been in place for eleven years. Jill and I knew there was room for growth, we just hadn't shared that clearly with one another. Our working relationship started off choppy.

JF: At the start, our expectations of one another were not in alignment. I viewed Matt as an extension of my team at the hospital and Matt viewed his role as an experienced volunteer.

MC: Looking back on it, we never sat down and talked about one another's strengths and how best to leverage one another.

Q: Was there a turning point in your working relationship?

JF: Yes - a lunch meeting at Byblos in Federal Hill. We met later in the day; there were no other customers and we talked and ate for more than two hours.

MC: It was nothing fancy or all that formal. I invited Jill to lunch, and suggested that we plan to talk openly with each other. In my work life, I have learned that when two good people struggle to find their partnership footing, the root cause is usually communication. The goal was to create a casual atmosphere to become "work" friends.

JF: Over lunch we began to let our guards down and talk openly about things that were bothering each of us. It was difficult but the lunch was a clear turning point for Matt and me. We built authentic trust that day. It's funny because, prior to the lunch, Matt asked me to think about what was going well, as well as areas for improvement. I wrote up a list of ideas and brought them to the lunch. Of course, Matt didn't! But regardless, we each had the same things on our minds!

Points of Pride

Developed New Programs

- Community Health Advisory Board: partners tasked with the common goal of keeping the community healthy and safe
- Abilities Adventures: program that uses sports and leisure to empower teens post-hospitalization



Abilities Adventures trip to Park City, Utah

"For me, the Mt. Washington Pediatric Foundation Board has become a unique and diverse board with tons of energy. I really look forward to our meetings because I always learn something new."

-Roslyn Stoler,

Leading Philanthropist and Secretary, MWPH Board of Trustees and MWP Foundation Board of Trustees



Q: What were you able to cover during the lunch?

MC: We talked openly with one another. We brainstormed ideas such as our shared vision for the board, succession planning for board leadership, and the ideal relationship between the board and staff. This was all very important, especially because we were about to launch a fundraising campaign. The meeting allowed us to dream big together and reset our working relationship. By having open and honest communication we were able to reach a new level of trust.

JF: I learned from Matt that I was relying on him too much. I was looking for his approval or support and Matt just wanted me to feel empowered to move things forward. We both had a sense of urgency to get things done and we just needed to learn one another's working style. At first, I wasn't really comfortable with his sense of urgency, but later I learned that this was his way of encouraging me to trust my instincts to get the job done.

MC: There's no question the lunch was a turning point for me. I had to take a step back and understand how my skills could best be used to support Jill, her team, and the organization. I also took time to articulate my commitment and what that meant in terms of my time and availability. What's amazing is we both had crazy high expectations of what we wanted to accomplish.

JF: We didn't drink at lunch, but it was as if we both took a swig of truth serum. We got honest with one another. Saying you can be honest with someone is very different than actually being honest with someone. That honesty with one another launched a series of great results for the Foundation and the hospital.

MC: We both wore our thick skin to the lunch and it really paid off. I recall the salad was really good as well!

Points of Pride

Launched Centennial Campaign

- Expanded expertise including: consultant, new major gifts and database positions, and volunteer leadership
- Developed case for support responding to community needs

Q: Was one lunch enough to solve your issues?

JF: No.

MC: Absolutely not.

JF: We walked away knowing that we both wanted the same thing – success for the hospital. We established some ground rules for communicating with one another from frequency to agenda topics. I learned a lot during this time. Matt really became an advocate for me and the development of my team and my role.

MC: Each of our regular calls or meetings allowed me to become more passionate about the work of Mt. Washington and helped me solidify the kind of work I wanted to steer as Chair. Jill's insight was invaluable to me.

Q: What worked well about your partnership? Why were you two successful?

MC: I believe in any good relationship there's a give and take. Jill and I centered one another as we got to really know each other. Accountability is really important to me so, when someone says they are going to get something done, there needs to be trust that it will get done– even if the manner or style is not how you would do it. Jill and I have been through a lot together in our respective roles, including COVID-19.

Points of Pride

Deepened Board Relationships

- Board members involved in hospital's strategic planning
- Foundation funding and clinical priorities aligned

“As a result of the work that Jill, Matt, and the Foundation are doing, Mt. Washington is providing support services for communities beyond the four walls of the hospital.”

–Sheldon Stein, CEO, Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital



JF: I could be completely honest with Matt and share challenges and my ideas for solutions. He became my biggest advocate and paved a path for my ideas to succeed. For example, soon after this lunch, I came to Matt to discuss some concerns about our data integrity. Matt listened to me and he supported the creation and hiring of a Database Manager. This position was a game changer for my team.

MC: I really enjoy strategic thinking. The problem with strategic thinking is without the know-how and the team to execute, you can't take an idea to a strategy. The balance Jill and I created, allowed our ideas to turn into strategy and then the strategy to success.

JF: An important moment for me was meeting Matt's family. It showed me his deep passion for his family and for the hospital. He truly believes in MWPH and transferred that enthusiasm to his family who also supports the hospital. That was very meaningful for me to see and experience first-hand. Matt asked me to help design an important family donation to the hospital. Knowing Matt both personally and professionally helped me trust him and learn to rely on his strategic and frankly, selfless advice.

Points of Pride

Engaged and Supportive Board

- Built out a committee structure to ensure that every board member has a voice
- Created succession plan for executive team

Q: What piece of advice would you share with others entering roles similar to yours?

JF: Right away, get to know one another. Learn what makes the other person tick. Matt and I both wanted to be successful as new leaders. Very soon after our lunch meeting, it became very natural to support and empower one another.

MC: Find time early in the working relationship to sit down and get honest about why you are in the role, what you want to get from the experience, how you like to communicate, and what issues get your attention.



MWPH Community Advisory Board (CHAB) toured Pimlico Elem/Middle as a step to expand community benefit for children and families in the Park Heights neighborhood

Q: How has this partnership changed/shaped you?

MC: Without a doubt, I can say that my leadership skills strengthened because of my relationship with Jill as well as my role as chair. The experience on the board translated well to my work at M&T. For example, during the pandemic, I am learning to say things more directly, I am hitting things head on, and I am trying not to let issues linger. Ultimately, I want to use my time to help people at work and in the community.

JF: Matt's spirit motivated me and his unwavering support helped me stay true to myself. I learned to trust my instincts and elevate my voice among diverse stakeholders. I learned to stay focused on the mission of the hospital when developing a strategy; but also to listen to feedback from others to keep shaping the path to get there.

"Just look at the Abilities Adventures program and the results we are seeing. Early on there was some skepticism around this program but the energy and enthusiasm that Jill, Matt and the program leaders brought to the initiative was infectious and it has just taken off. I love it!"

-Roslyn Stoler,

Leading Philanthropist and Secretary, MWPH Board of Trustees and MWP Foundation Board of Trustees



Points of Pride

Updated Approach to Manage During Pandemic

- Streamlined communications so every board member is informed and available
- Created board stewardship program to engage and thank supporters

LESSONS LEARNED

Jill's

- Be your own advocate.
- Involve people strategically.
- Create an overarching strategic narrative that board members can parlay to the community.
- Establish consistency among stakeholder groups such as executive teams, board members, staff, and donors.
- Define the board's value proposition within the hospital.

Matt's

- Focus on people's strengths and find ways to engage them.
- Partnership relies on honest communication and trust.
- Feedback is a gift if you are open to it.
- Listening is an active process that can generate results.

Jill and Matt's 4 tips to accelerate your working relationships

- 1 Find clarity early in the relationship.
- 2 Expand your relationship beyond the work, find the common ground.
- 3 Complement one another's strengths and help compensate for their weak points. But don't resent one another either.
- 4 Use your time with each other wisely.



Learn more about the important work of Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital by visiting [mwph.org](https://www.mwph.org).

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