

JUF News

Say no to cynicism

The Heart of the Matter

By Aaron B. Cohen
Executive Editor

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Business basics

Some cynics cite business scandals—indeed the whole economic meltdown—to tar the field of business education with one broad brushstroke. Aren't MBAs and the schools that trained them to blame for America's fiscal woes, they wonder?

While I don't have an MBA I did work for some five years at one of the Chicago area's great business schools, Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. I recall many students out to better the world and professors pushing the envelope of knowledge.

So I was hardly surprised to learn that my workplace "alma mater" was launching a program to train rabbis and synagogue executive directors in basic management skills.

Called Kellogg Management Education for Jewish Leaders (KJL), the program was conceived by Dinah Jacobs, a longtime CitiBank exec, with Donald P. Jacobs, dean emeritus. It introduces synagogue leaders to principles of marketing, governance, fundraising, financial management, conflict resolution and crisis management.

"This was a first, and as a first it was really important," said Rabbi Michael Balinsky, executive director of the Chicago Board of Rabbis and someone Dinah Jacobs credits with helping trigger the idea. (Balinsky was for many years the director of NU's Hillel.)

The story reinforces in my mind the notion that cynicism has no place in our response to the very real problems plaguing the nation and the world as we enter 2009. Turning things around requires the best efforts of good people and sound institutions, which merit our trust and support. We have such people and institutions here in our community; we need them more than ever.