

## Rabbis hone business skills to deal with changing times

By FRANCES KRAFT, Staff Reporter

Thursday, 01 January 2009



**TORONTO** — Three Toronto rabbis were among 56 rabbis, executive directors of synagogues, and other Jewish leaders who honed their business skills earlier this month at an intensive, invitation-only, four-day program at Northwestern University's prestigious Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Ill.

### Rabbi Chaim Strauchler

“There has been a general trend over the last 10 years to recognize that rabbis in particular have a need for developing certain skills that are needed for synagogue management, in addition to what has been the traditional skill set – the ability to study and teach Torah; to lead tfillah; to guide, advise and counsel people; and to preside over life-cycle events,” Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl of Beth Tzedec Congregation told The CJN.

The rabbi is on the advisory board of the newly established program – called Kellogg Management Education for Jewish Leaders – which included sessions on conflict resolution and negotiation skills, marketing and leadership, financial management, crisis management, and fundraising.

Rabbi Michael Dolgin of Temple Sinai Congregation and Rabbi Chaim Strauchler of Shaarei Shomayim Congregation, along with their shul's respective executive directors, as well as Beth Tzedec's executive director, were the other delegates from Canada. Most participants were American, while five were from the United Kingdom. The Reform, Conservative and Orthodox movements were equally represented.

“I think for a long time we had the idea that we don't want to be a business,” said Rabbi Frydman-Kohl.

Synagogues are more similar to non-profit than for-profit businesses, but the not-for-profit model is not an exact fit, either, he said.

However, he noted, there are “large swaths of ideas” from the business world that are applicable to synagogue life.

“One of the big differences is that corporations are managed by CEOs and COOs and CFOs, and that determines the direction of the company... The same is true of large not-for-profits, but synagogues are really much more like communities, like small towns or villages, so there are different relationships, and the rabbi or executive director doesn't simply determine the direction, but rather the lay leadership and the membership play a significant role in concert and in dialogue with the religious and professional leadership.”

Requests from rabbis led to the development of the program, the school said in a press release. It

added that a 2006 survey of Conservative rabbis and lay leaders found that lay leaders want their rabbis to “do more as fundraisers and managers of people.”

Rabbi Strauchler, who came to Shaarei Shomayim in August, noted that because of the nature of western society, with its large number of dual-income couples, many organizations don't get the type of volunteer involvement they did a generation ago.

“As people's time is more limited, more of the responsibility falls on the professional staff,” he said.

The rabbi – who was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford University in 2001 and has a background in science, English literature and Bible – said there is “certainly a learning curve.

“It's difficult, but I also believe it's rewarding... championing our most essential organizations.”