

## The business of running a synagogue

### South Florida rabbis learn financial management and conflict resolution at Northwestern seminar

By Lois K. Solomon, Sun Sentinel  
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Synagogue budgets, strategic plans, financial crises, mission statements: All end up on the desk of the rabbi, who often has little training in organizational management.

Many learn to become chief executive on the job, but a recent seminar at [Northwestern University](#) bolstered 67 Jewish leaders' administration skills. They learned how to work with donors, market their congregations, negotiate a crisis and solve disputes among members and staff.

"It's been quite a long time since I was in rabbinical school, and we learned very little about this stuff," said Richard Agler, 57, senior rabbi at Congregation B'nai Israel in [Boca Raton](#). "There's no question we will be able to implement much of what we learned."

The rabbis — including two from [Palm Beach County](#) and three from Miami-Dade, along with their congregational managers and the executive director of Hillel of Broward and Palm Beach — attended a five-day seminar, Kellogg Management Education for Jewish Leaders, at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management. The Jewish institute, in its second year, seeks to offer the same administrative skills executives learn as they study for advanced degrees, said Dinah Jacobs, founder and academic director.

"Rabbis don't prepare budgets, but they need to know the key indicators of success, which advice to listen to, how to read financials and much more," Jacobs said. "The most pressing need is how



Rabbi Robert Silvers, left, along with board members of Congregation B'nai Israel, listen attentively as Rabbi Richard Agler discusses how to better manage the congregation.

to run a capital campaign, how to ask for money, how to follow up and how to increase the value of the synagogue for members."

Each participant paid \$2,000, although a similar education for corporate executives studying at Kellogg costs about \$8,000, Jacobs said. Private donors make up the difference, she said.

Rabbi Dan Levin, 40, senior rabbi at Temple Beth El in [Boca Raton](#), said the seminar allowed him to explore how he can run and grow the congregation as he accomplishes his holy tasks. He said the Reform synagogue wants congregants to be able to find meaningful experiences through its programs.

Levin said the synagogue allows congregants to choose the days of the week their kids attend religious school and create bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies that display the uniqueness of their families. But he said he seeks even more customization.

"People are attuned to the need for control and choice," Levin said. "We need to do surveys and get better at soliciting feedback."

Scott Brockman, executive director of Hillel of Broward and Palm Beach, said he learned he needs to separate his title from his personal life.

"I have been tempted to work long hours and work too hard," said Brockman, 42, who started work in August. "If I'm at the library or in the supermarket, I'm still in the role. I realized that as important as productivity is, I have to maintain a work-life balance. I never appreciated how difficult that would be."

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