

Graduates

Earning an M.B.A. on the Wing

Yariv Keren, who spoke on behalf of the graduates at a graduation ceremony of the Open University, spent so much time working abroad that he was able to attend only five tutorial sessions during the course of his M.B.A. studies. Now Chief Financial Officer for the giant EDS Israel company, he credits his OUI education with increased knowledge that has helped him as a person and as a manager.

When Yariv Keren, 39, is asked where he spent most of his time after he completed his Bachelor's degree in Accountancy and Management, he is likely to answer "in the air." Due to demands of his work, he spent much of his time abroad, in Latin America, Europe and Africa. Yet that didn't stop him from working towards an M.B.A. at the Open University. Completing assignments on airplanes and in hotels, he says, not only gave him the feeling that he was doing something for himself, far from home, but also helped him a great deal in his work.

In his speech at a graduation ceremony, at which he represented the graduating students, he thanked "those responsible for developing the methodology of distance learning at the Open University, because without them, I wouldn't be standing here today. I certainly couldn't have earned a degree anywhere else by attending only five tutorial sessions in the entire course of my studies."

After stints at the Finance Ministry and a start-up firm, Yariv Keren became Financial Officer for Latin America in Netafim, one of the leading firms in the world in the field of irrigation. His work took him to such exotic places as Brazil, Peru, Chile and Costa Rica. "I would be away from Israel for two weeks to a month at a time – altogether some 150 days a year. I wanted to study for an M.B.A. degree, but it was clear that under these circumstances,

the only place I could study was at the Open University. Not only did the university give me the opportunity to study from a distance, but I was impressed by the high quality of the material and the pedagogical method. I liked the fact that I could study by myself, in my own time, place and pace. That suited my life.

"From the beginning, I enjoyed my studies and found them interesting and challenging. When you work abroad, cut off from home, you are very isolated. On weekends, you want to take a break from work, but often you find yourself in places where there is nothing to do. My OUI assignments gave me a good feeling – a feeling of home. I enjoyed every minute I spent on them, because I felt that I was doing something for myself, and not drowning in work."

Later, he became Finance Officer for Zim, responsible for Europe and Africa, which also required travel to places such as Gdansk, Cork, Liverpool, Marseilles, Mombasa and Lagos. The fact that he was able to submit assignments by Internet greatly helped him.

Yariv is now working as CFO for EDS Israel, a leading provider of IT solutions and services with some 140,000 employees abroad and about 1,000 in Israel, and he credits what he learned at the OUI with helping him become an effective manager.



"My aim when I started studying was simply to enrich myself as a person, but I soon found that what I was studying was of great value in my work. The theoretical knowledge was a complement to intuitive knowledge and the combination of theoretical and practical knowledge was wonderful. Today, because of what I learned, I feel I am a better manager."

So highly does he regard the level of education at the Open University that he says he particularly values employees and prospective employees who have studied at the OUI: "Open University graduates are people who have demonstrated the ability to learn on their own, to deal with difficulties and to overcome them. They can think independently and have self-discipline. These are qualities that are of great value in the business environment. I encourage our employees to study at the OUI."

He also points out that last year, an international assessment committee under the auspices of the Council for Higher Education praised the M.B.A. program at the OUI and ranked it above other business schools in Israel. "The results didn't surprise me," said Yariv, "but it was nice to get confirmation of my own opinion."