Short sessions offer executive education students a deeper dive into key subject areas
By H. Lee Murphy
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William Geary, president of Nelsen Steel Co. in Franklin Park, is a respected steel processing executive and the leader of a workforce of 65. But his 1990 MBA from DePaul University was beginning to look dated, and he decided it was time to go back to school, at age 50, for a refresher.

On some Thursdays and Fridays, Mr. Geary is in the classroom at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management taking seminars on team-building, sales and marketing.

“ar have an MBA, but my background was always finance,” Mr. Geary says. “By going back to school, I'm rounding out my education.”

At Nelsen, the improvements are evident: Taking a tip from his team-building studies, he has tried to be less dominant in Nelsen staff meetings. “I push my team to bring out more of their own ideas now,” he says.

Back in the early 1950s, Kellogg pioneered short-session adult education for executives like Mr. Geary, and now most universities with MBA programs offer similar classes, typically ranging in length from a couple of days to a week.

The University of Chicago's Booth School of Business offers executive education here and at campuses in London and Singapore. Some classes are custom-designed for corporate clients. The interest is high, with Booth hosting 3,300 executive education students a year, compared with 800 full-time MBA students.

These programs are expensive, with a three-day consortium at Booth for public-company directors priced at $7,500.

SHORT ON TIME

Christine Selvaggio, 27, took a new job as director of marketing at logistics consulting firm Trend Set Inc. in Greenville, S.C. With little background in freight shipping, she enrolled in a two-day class on supply-chain management at Loyola University Chicago in October.

“I've thought about getting an MBA, but I just don't have the time now,” Ms. Selvaggio says. “What I needed was a good, basic presentation about logistics, and that's what Loyola gave me. I was surrounded by students from around the country who work in sales and warehousing and distribution functions and learned a lot from both them and my instructors.”

The instructors aren't all academic types. John Caltagirone, the former chief operating officer of Skokie-based grocery delivery service Peapod LLC and now a logistics consultant based in Chicago, teaches part of the Loyola supply-chain class.
“A regular faculty member takes the first day and talks business theory. Then I take the second day and spend 80% of my time talking about real cases,” Mr. Caltagirone says. “If Wal-Mart is introducing something new, we'll kick that around for a few hours.”

Harry Kraemer Jr., the former chairman and CEO of Baxter International Inc. in Deerfield who is now a clinical professor of management and strategy at Kellogg, teaches non-credit classes on leadership and mergers and acquisitions, among other topics.

He's been a big believer in adult ed since his days at Baxter a decade ago. “Having an MBA is a tremendous experience, but taking a five-day class at Kellogg on just mergers and acquisitions allows people to focus deeply on single topics,” Mr. Kraemer says. “At Baxter, we always had some internal training but, on the other hand, we liked the idea of people going outside and enrolling in executive education. We wanted our people interacting with executives from other companies and getting a broader perspective.”