

Building your Business**Committed to his community**

Running a successful insurance practice is only one of the activities that drives Mark Halpern. When he's not advising clients on the benefits of charitable giving, he's giving his time to a host of community organizations and charities

By Susan Yellin | Mid-February 2014

The list of charitable donations to which Mark Halpern devotes time and knowledge reads like a directory of hospitals and Jewish charitable organizations.

"In my family, we were raised with an ethic always to give back," says Halpern, president and owner of **illnessPROTECTION.com Inc.** in Markham, Ont. "It's the cornerstone of our Jewish heritage to act charitably and do the right thing."

Halpern, as a financial advisor with the certified financial planner and trust and estate practitioner designations, believes that he and his colleagues share the opportunity and responsibility to encourage their clients to think of charitable organizations when they are planning their estate. Doing so could mean assistance for any group that is meaningful for the client, such as hospital patients, children, the elderly or others who are disadvantaged.

"As trusted advisors," Halpern says, "we are uniquely positioned as the gatekeepers to help our clients leave larger legacies and create money for people in a way that benefits them, their families and the charitable organizations they choose to give to. No other profession can do that."

Halpern is a member of the professional advisory committee of the Jewish Foundation of Greater Toronto, the endowment arm of the United Jewish Appeal Federation (UJA). The foundation has assets of more than \$500 million in current and future gifts and distributes \$20 million annually.

Halpern's role on the committee is to work with his clients and fellow advisors to educate them on philanthropy and how it can benefit both clients and charities.

"It's not like someone comes up to me announcing they want to gift \$1 million to charity," Halpern says. "It's an emotional process when people start thinking about charity. We can show them there's a lot they can be doing for charity that benefits the donor and his or her family in a big way. Even small dollars can make a big impact."

Halpern tells his clients that there are three possible beneficiaries of their estates: their families, charities or the government - the latter of which can take 23%-50% of his clients' assets. When asked which two beneficiaries they want to leave their money to, most people choose family and charity.

As an example, Halpern cites the recent case of a cardiologist client who had too much life insurance for his needs. Instead of just cancelling the surplus coverage, Halpern suggested that the doctor gift that "extra" policy to charity. The doctor liked the idea and donated the policy to four worthy causes, including MacKenzie Richmond Hill Hospital, where he works, and to the Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket, Ont., to which he often refers his patients.

Halpern also sits on the Allied Professional Council of Markham-Stouffville Hospital, which recently raised \$50 million for an expansion. "I enjoy working with charities to develop planned- giving programs," he says.

In 2012, Halpern completed the ING Half-Marathon in Miami in support of Chai Lifeline, a charity that takes children with life-threatening illnesses to a summer camp designed to meet their unique needs. He raised more than \$18,000 and was recognized as the top fundraiser in Canada for the event and second across North America.

Halpern also teaches at Ryerson University, the University of Toronto, York University and University of Western Ontario

about ethics and leadership through the Jewish Business Network, a student-run organization to which he provides counsel.

Halpern and his wife, Rhonda, have been married for 18 years and have five children age 17 and younger. So, it's no surprise the couple conduct marriage classes.

Halpern developed an early appreciation of caring and compassion when his father died of a sudden heart attack at age 50 - with no life insurance. Halpern's mother was forced to go back to work at age 48 to support the family. Despite financial hardship, she always managed to find time and money to support charitable organizations, including the National Council of Jewish Women, the UJA, Meals on Wheels, the Canadian Cancer Society and the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

"She didn't have much money to donate," Halpern recalls, "but always ended the year with a stack of charitable receipts and generously gave her time. I remember her tutoring new immigrant adults in our home or on the phone to help them learn English."

Teaching by example, Halpern's mother instilled the message that in giving to charity, donating time can be just as effective - if not more effective - than simply writing a cheque.

Halpern, an active member in the financial advisory community, has spoken across Canada and the U.S. at Advocis's summer schools and events hosted by the Conference for Advanced Life Underwriting, Estate Planning Council of Toronto, World Critical Illness Conference and others. He acts as a mentor to several Advocis members by providing career advice, an activity of particular significance to him.

"I am so grateful and blessed," says Halpern, "that I have been able to help my clients and build my career in a wonderful industry with the help of fantastic mentors."

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