



Looking to the future: Fahad Al-Raqbani

Fahad Al-Raqbani talks with a combination of awe and pride about his seven-year-old son; his mastery of the internet, of high technology and his ease in a rapidly-changing world. For Al-Raqbani junior and others of his age, progress and change go hand in hand.

The biggest changes Fahad Al-Raqbani has seen in his own lifetime are here at his own front door, in the United Arab Emirates, where his country has experienced ‘dramatic change’ in such a short time. He is enthused and energised by the speed and focus on the direction, particularly as he talks about the new breed of young leaders emerging in the UAE, leaders that will carry on the vision and success of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the founder of the nation.



It’s not that long ago, he says, when Emiratis were a minority in the workforce, particularly in decision-making roles. He is encouraged to see that this is also changing, and “not just because they are nationals, but because they have the right skills and knowledge for the jobs.” Al-Raqbani is one of these skilled and knowledgeable nationals, and as Deputy Director General of the Abu Dhabi Council for Economic Development he spends his days working hard to

make the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 a reality. Al-Raqbani is one of the main proponents of the grand plan for Abu Dhabi, a focus of ambition and expectation, and one he says will be achieved specifically because the country is giving its young people the very best education.

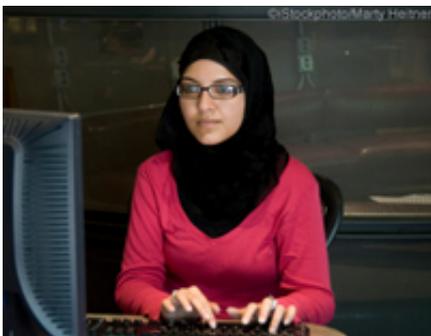
Learning from successful people around the world is one way of helping develop this young country. “We are very proud of what we have achieved over the last 38 years,” he says, adding: “It has taken other nations so many more years to achieve what they have today.” He knows that the pressure is great, as the UAE has had to do so much so quickly. Within the 2030 plan, education is a huge focus, a necessity as Al-Raqbani says, that will ensure that “the proper education for our children will ease the access to leadership.”

The educational system in place in the UAE has fundamentally changed in recent years for elementary as well as higher levels. The strategic process that the government has in place will ensure that the people with the right qualifications will lead emerging sectors and new organisations. The UAE Government took the innovative step of choosing emirati nationals to study at home and abroad and to qualify in leading sectors. Al-Raqbani says “this gives us an education component that is starting now

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and developing the skills and talent required for a specific sector.” The idea being that the skilled nationals will work their way up in a specific sector and when the leadership roles emerge, the local talent will be there to lead the way and “participate in the further development of the nation.”

This is part of the strategic plan for Abu Dhabi and is being reinforced with bright emirati men and women attending the best universities around the world and on their own doorstep. “The local universities have developed in recent years and more recently the existence of the Sorbonne, the New York University and more recently INSEAD is helping to develop leadership capabilities.” The INSEAD Leadership Summit in the Middle East, held recently in Abu Dhabi, was a particularly useful event, bringing “examples of leadership from all over the world and learning from their example.” Abu Dhabi has plans to nurture and expand the educational sector in the years to come.



Having the right qualified people in place is essential to the development of any country, within the private as well as the public sector. “Education is a major component to achieve the success you aspire to,” Al-Raqbani says. The UAE is aspiring to be a global leader by 2030 and by placing emphasis on the educational system is one way of making sure the foundations will be strong. The American think-tank and research-based Ethisphere Institute promotes the idea of 10 Global Sustainability Centres in the world by 2020 and while Abu Dhabi has its 2030 plan, it still ranks on the list of key cities like London and Hong Kong as one to watch. By 2030, the population of Abu Dhabi is projected to more than double to three million citizens, a situation Al-Raqbani knows will put even greater demands on the people and resources of Abu Dhabi. While acknowledging the success he sees around him, he knows it can’t get complacent. “The need for leadership is greater than ever in such a fast-changing environment,” he says, and giving the young population access to the best education is the best start.

Sustainability will be the key as the city moves towards diversification over the next 20 years. Industries such as healthcare, technology, infrastructure, aerospace and education are all

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being promoted and developed. “It’s not enough to say we have been successful once, we must maintain that success and keep innovation going and encourage entrepreneurship.” He applauds the INSEAD Leadership Summit as one example of helping encourage innovation and promote leadership.

The appetite to learn has always been evident among the people of the UAE with emirati nationals scattered around the world, attending leading universities and learning essential skills. “Talent has no nationality today,” says Al-Raqbani. “You’ll see UAE nationals working as doctors, engineers and faculty professors around the world.” He is looking forward to seeing these skills brought home to facilitate “the continuation of the leadership and the wise innovation and strategic thinking of the current leadership of the UAE.” This unity he says is essential to maintain the success of UAE and to contribute to the development of the whole region.

Al-Raqbani is honoured and inspired to be one the UAE young leaders but he knows this comes with responsibility. He thrives on the innovation and energy he sees around him in the fast-changing landscape of Abu Dhabi. He finds new ideas and innovative possibilities watching the youth of the country charge ahead embracing newness and change. He knows it’s his duty and the duty of his peers to encourage young people to be creative and innovative. “People will learn from what is happening around them,” he says.

Universities and academic institutions are a great source of ideas where “bright young minds need to be nurtured.” He calls this the “necessary infrastructure” that must be provided to get the very best performance from students, many who will become the potential leaders of the future.

So, as Al-Raqbani junior connects with his busy father over email and researches school projects with a technology that looked futuristic only a few years ago, Fahad Al-Raqbani is confident that his young son and UAE children of the same age have an exceptional bright future ahead. “If you want a better future, if you want leaders for the 21st century and even beyond that, you must give them access to a world class education. This is what we are doing in Abu Dhabi today.”

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