

Tailoring bespoke programmes to tap Emirati talent

Only then will private entities be able to lustre that government jobs hold

Job seekers at the recent Careers UAE exhibition at the Dubai World Trade Centre. It is important to develop industry-specific skill sets in Emiratis to generate sustainable employment opportunities and a reduction in the future dependence of the organisation on expatriate hiring.

**Published: 06:48 May 29, 2015
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Dubai: Of all the challenges currently facing any ambitious organisation in the Middle East, ensuring you possess the right human talent may be one of the harder nuts to crack.

Continued regional geopolitical instability, the arrival of international competition, the rising cost of living implications and dropping oil revenues are external realities that directly impact your ability to attract, develop and retain the right international talent.

Amplify this by the perceived pressures to attract and retain Emiratis to the private sector and the challenge easily become insurmountable. So how do you attract local Emirati talent when they are paid more in government, get better benefits and work fewer hours?

If you do manage to attract local talent, how do you build an organisation that allows you to retain them by promoting them every two years? Finally, how do you source that local Emirati talent who has the specific skill set and work ethos to ensure the short-term profitability and longer-term success of a private sector enterprise?

Problems cannot usually be solved with the same mindset that created them. So, we now need to change our approach. Organisations looking to build their own Emirati talent pipeline by developing a programme that combines industry-specific education, taught by experienced practitioners, and supported by active position rotation throughout the organisation is one proactive solution.

It will allow us to prepare national employees and Emirati leaders for future responsibilities whilst we mould them to both our business requirements and work ethos.

The aim of such an academy should be to develop industry-specific skill sets in Emiratis to generate sustainable employment opportunities and a reduction in the future dependence of the organisation on expatriate hiring, therefore also resolving the issue of attracting expatriate employees.

Such an educational programme could be a blend of technical and practical training, over an extended period, followed by longer-term employment opportunities with the organisation. The programme could include on-the-job coaching by experienced staff and the appointment of personal coaches responsible for assisting individual Emiratis to gain the practical knowledge and skills to succeed.

The successful completion of recognised industry specific qualifications and graduation could be the required finale for a guaranteed offer and permanent position within the organisation.

The upfront costs of developing such a programme, specific to your industry and organisation, can be large. However, these costs are by far outweighed by the longer term gains and the ability to develop Emirati talent; a key differentiator going forward.

If you retain the individual Emirati you've developed a national resource that meets your requirements. If they are poached from you, you've developed a reputation for producing highly trained nationals, which will help you recruit the next top batch from local universities. Either way you, and the national, win.

You may also wish to recruit top local graduates straight out of university before their work ethos has been tarnished or misguided. If you can, sift through the top graduates from Emirati universities and proactively select the best. And remember, hire for attitude and train for skills.

In 2006, in my position as Founding Chief Operating Officer of the Dubai Financial Services Authority (DFSA), the DFSA launched its 'Tomorrow's Regulatory Leaders Programme'. We had recognised the opportunity to make a contribution towards the UAE's Emiratisation initiative while, more importantly, investing in developing our own pool of young Emiratis to become leaders in the financial and regulatory sector.

That programme is now recognised as an outstanding achievement and a leading example of successful Emiratisation. Some nine years later and on my departure from the DFSA, nearly 30 per cent of regulatory staff were highly skilled and performing Emiratis.

CEOs and organisations must now recognise Emiratisation as an opportunity and a positive solution by proactively creating your own development programs to produce your own pool of future expertise and talent.

The writer is a former Programme Lead and Executive Advisor to the Board at Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) and founding Chief Operating Officer of the Dubai Financial Services Authority (DFSA).