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concept of the Majlis – meaning ‘place of sitting’ in Arabic – is vital to the essence and success of DSR. Everything about it has been designed with a singular thought in mind – that it has to be as inviting and pleasant an environment as possible.

Reach full potential

In line with DSR’s mandate to bridge the gap between what the academic institutions are providing and what the market really needs is the goal of providing their students with an education in a fun and attractive environment where they enjoy what they’re learning.

“The culture that we’ve developed within the organisation is to embrace the students, give them a great learning experience, and help them reach their full potential. We have small classes and our professionally qualified teachers provide individual differentiated attention that students need to succeed. I want this to be a place where people want to come. I certainly do!” says Durdana.

With the doors of DSR opening on December 4 2011, the first year saw the team toiling hard to get everything off the ground. The cornerstone of Durdana’s educational philosophy is to provide the highest quality education, so naturally she insisted that DSR must offer an internationally recognised professional qualification. DSR is a proud Partner in Learning with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW). Moreover, they provide the complete ICEAW ACA qualification and are in the process of becoming a Gold Approved Learning Provider of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

A winning approach

While success goes hand-in-hand with ambition, Durdana is conscious of the need to be unhurried with the development of DSR, choosing to start one thing and developing it to its fullest before moving on.

“We’ve accomplished so much in so little time; we are growing, but we will grow only when we are satisfied to move on to the next level,” says Durdana.

“We spent the first year developing the ICAEW programme and this year we’re going to spend on further developing our ACCA programme and maybe next year it will be another qualification.”

Based on the satisfaction of the students and the quality of accountants DSR has produced thus far, it’s clearly a winning approach. Professional development should happen at all levels of an institution and Durdana values the importance of having teachers who are just as dedicated to their students as the students are to their studies. Earlier in the year three DSR instructors travelled to London for the 2013 ICAEW Tutor Conference for just this reason.

“We were the first teachers ever to go from Dubai. We attended the conference to interact with the ICAEW exam markers and find out what it is they are looking for. That was an important initiative towards improving our own standards, improving how we teach and showing our commitment to improving any which way that we can.”

Strong family support

Unsurprisingly, the support from family, friends and colleagues has made an impact on how smoothly the first year of DSR progressed.

“My husband is extremely supportive. He’s an ICAEW FCA and he’s been helping us with keeping our books and he’s always there to advise and give support. My elder son, who’s doing his ACA at the moment, has also been an amazing support. And I’m very proud of my youngest who will be starting at Ernst and Young in June after his graduation. I consider myself very lucky.”

Furthermore, having to shift gears regularly between teaching obligations and the responsibilities for the everyday running of a business also means that the team which Durdana has put together, is one that she trusts completely to do their jobs competently in her absence.

“Our Programme Manager, Jehan Shibli, has done an amazing job with our students and especially of taking a lot of responsibilities off my hands. I couldn’t give it up so easily because I want to have that personal contact.”

Despite a growing list of duties and responsibilities, that personal connection with the students is still one of the most important and rewarding features of the job. While the commercial interest is an important aspect of running a business, the focus of DSR is still heavily on providing a quality education.

“I always feel that if the value you provide to a customer is higher, then the price they are paying you will sell. So the difference between the value to the customer and the price is what makes you special, what will get people to come to you,” says Durdana.

“On the other hand, the difference between the selling price and the cost is your profit. So the difference between the value to the customer and the price I charge is huge, and that is the critical success factor of DSR.”

Balancing values and culture

The value of the education Emirati students are finding when they step into class with Durdana is due in large part to the rapport that she has developed with them through a decade of dedication and learning that began at HCT.

“I am able to bring together discipline and caring. The thing is – if you’re tough and you don’t care, you will have a rebellion. But if you’re caring students will take a lot of toughness from you.”

The care which students are shown and the understanding of their personal predicaments, circumstances, and culture are particularly important when trying to balance the Western and Eastern values and cultures which tessellate so frequently in this country.

“I have that balance and that makes me successful with my students – they will take a fair amount of rigor and discipline from me in exchange for my understanding.”

Students at DSR cover a wide range of backgrounds, levels of experience and age. To a typical teacher this might pose a challenge, but for Durdana it came as an opportunity to observe and encourage the development of softer skills which she believes have created well-rounded, cooperative individuals.

“When I started my first class the oldest student was fifty and the youngest was twenty-one and the two became best friends. The younger one was studying in university so he brought in really good technical skills in accounting while the older one, the COO of a branch of HSBC, brought in an amazing amount of experience.”

It is clear that Durdana Rizvi has struck a comfortable balance in her role as director and course leader at DSR Professional Training JLT. The compassion, commitment and collaboration Durdana has engendered in her students, teachers and team are perfect companions to the comfortable setting of the bright and modern DSR classrooms. ■

