

“Within a few months I went on to head the department of strategic management and was involved in the transition of the bank from the last millennium into the new one, through Project 2000. This involved many initiatives, including new ways of serving customers, new IT systems, new modernised branch structures which were very prominent in Europe, and the creation of the first wealth management department.”

A natural leader

While the job offered much of what she hoped for, it also presented personal challenges.

“I was involved in the restructuring of the bank and I found it quite painful because restructuring meant a lot of people were laid off and I thought to myself, this is not what I want to do for the rest of my life, be responsible for people losing their jobs, families losing their homes and people leaving the country – it’s quite severe.”

With this in mind, Durdana quit her job with UNB and the family moved to Dubai. Teaching hadn’t been something Durdana considered as a career, though her friends, family and colleagues would agree that her charisma and drive made her a natural leader in any setting. It was through a serendipitous coincidence that, shortly after arriving in Dubai, she was asked to help out at Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) when a substitute was needed.

“There weren’t that many MBAs running around at that time who could step up to do it, so I did. And once I started teaching, I was bitten! I thought, this is what I want to do, to see those faces light – it’s that wonderful ‘Aha!’ moment when they understand. It was the exact opposite of being involved in demolishing things and firing people. It was such a positive feeling.”

The realisation was swift and satisfying – Durdana Rizvi would become a teacher.

Bridge the gap

The first nine years of her teaching career were spent at the Higher Colleges of Technology, Dubai Men’s Campus where she taught accounting, finance and strategic management. However, the urge to develop and progress which fuelled Durdana’s many successes in the corporate world, was beginning to grow stronger and make her restless. The experiences in higher learning showed her that the academe was simply stretching itself too thin.

“The subjects students cover are very wide, but they’re not very deep, so when people major in any



LIFELONG PASSION:

Durdana Saiyid Rizvi, is stepping up to the challenge of providing professionals seeking professional certification and personal development.

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one subject, say accounting, the number of accounting courses they do and the depth that they go into is very little,” says Durdana.

“I had a very strong feeling that there was a gap between what the academic institutions were giving to the students in the UAE and what the workplace required and when I became cognizant of that fact I decided that I had to try and bridge that gap.”

A thorough needs-analysis of the market compared to the skills and knowledge students were getting in higher education institutions showed there to be a disparity.

“It was very difficult when I would try to bring about changes in HCT because the college is part of a mammoth system and I didn’t have much control,” she laments.

A Learning Majlis

The idea of having something all her own, a place where she could teach exactly what she knew to be missing, began with a pilot project – a partnership between Durdana and the then-director of HCT – which they called the Financial Training Centre at Dubai Men’s College (FTC@DMC).

“It was an immediate success, our classes were full and there was a long waitlist.”

Due to logistical problems the programme was however, unable to continue, and the team honoured the commitment to the students before successfully closing the centre.

“Then I came to JLT, found the premises that would become our school, and built DSR,” she adds, with a tinge of pride in her voice.

There’s an undeniable pride with which Durdana described her happiness at how well everything’s turned out. With classes full and smiling students walking through the doors, DSR has become the incarnation of Durdana’s teaching ideology: a Learning Majlis. As a pillar of Emirati culture, the