



Catherine Beckett mentors young professionals on their potential to be successful businesswomen. Jeffrey E Biteng / The National

Young UAE businesswomen benefit from mentoring programme

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DUBAI // Strong women in business are helping to shape the future of female entrepreneurship, in a programme to nurture Dubai talent.

Reach is a non-profit mentoring programme dedicated to helping young professionals unlock their potential.

Founded in 2013 by four Dubai-based professional women, it is the first non-profit organisation registered at Dubai International Financial Centre.

A year-long partnership aims to support and develop the skills of female professionals in financial services and related sectors.

Male and female volunteers share their knowledge and expertise in regular sessions to strengthen businesses run by women in the Middle East.

Catherine Beckett, a partner at Dentons and Co law firm, moved from the UK to Dubai five years ago. She was inspired to become a mentor after reading *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, by Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg.

"It highlighted the negative preconceptions many people have of women in senior positions," she said.

"I don't find it particularly difficult being a female partner in the Middle East. On occasion you have to work harder to prove yourself, but the majority of the Arab men I interact with are experienced in international law, so there are few issues."

Training days teach mentors and mentees what to expect and how to interact. Mock-up business scenarios pair up suitable partnerships for the year-long scheme.

Mrs Beckett was paired with Salma Ibrahim, from Sudan, an entrepreneur living in Deira who established a company that provides consultancy and translation services for banking and finance. "I had a fantastic experience with Salma," said Mrs Beckett.

"I knew the focus she wanted to have on her business and areas where she needed support. I helped her organise her business and personal life.

"Salma blossomed and it was incredible to see throughout the year. It was very rewarding, particularly to see her confidence grow."

One of Reach's key objectives is to produce a generation of female leaders for the Middle East who are confident, driven, knowledgeable and inspiring, and this mentoring help is free.

Ms Ibrahim, who worked for Emirates NBD before branching out on her own three years ago, said the opportunity to tap into the mind of an experienced businesswoman who shared similar challenges helped to grow her business.

"To speak with someone of Catherine's experience and insight was so important," she said. "Starting my own business was a big challenge and not easy. Although I had a lot of experience in the corporate world, Catherine's input was relevant.

"The business industry can underestimate the power of women. The challenge is always there. It has given me more confidence and a stronger belief that women are there for women."

Ms Ibrahim is now considering joining the Reach programme as a mentor next year.

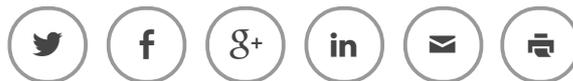
Reach bonded 25 pairs last year and this year will offer help to 51 businesswomen.

Dentons has contributed five business leaders to the 2015 programme, including head of marketing Muireann Kelleher.

"It is the framework that is set in place between the person you are trying to help that is so very important," she said.

Visit www.reachmentoring.org for more information.

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