

Can The Retail Industry Appeal To Emirati Youth?

Only a few industries can claim to offer the flexibility and variety of career streams that retail does.



Mubarak Alshamsi, Director General of ACTVET, During a Site Visit to One of YES to Work Participating Outlets.

From running a market stall to managing a souvenir shop, or even heading a global conglomerate, the choices in the retail landscape are endless. Sociable personalities can work directly with customers; quieter types can plan away business strategies in the back office.

Perhaps one of the biggest draws of the retail industry is the degree of flexibility that it offers through shift patterns. Such an environment can be ideal for many, especially those with family commitments, as well as people who like to work when others are at leisure and pursue their own interests when others are working.

Despite these exciting prospects, few Emiratis consider retail as a serious career option, perceiving jobs in the sector as inherently demeaning and lacking in status, and favouring government employment instead.

“For far too long, stubborn misperceptions have persisted about retail and the jobs our industry provides,” says Matthew Shay, president and CEO of the National Retail Federation. The truth is that retail jobs equip workers with valuable skills that are vital for success in today’s service economy, he adds.

MINDSET CHANGE

In the last few years, a major shift has started to take place – more Emiratis are showing interest in retail and considering a career in the industry. This change in attitude can be largely attributed to the Young Emiratis Start (YES) to Work, a national initiative that encourages UAE national students to engage in the private sector by offering them short-term work placements in retail outlets.

Launched in 2013 by the Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET), the program runs each summer and

As many as 2,500 young Emiratis have benefitted from the YES to Work program since its launch.

winter during school breaks and involves 10 retail partners in 308 different locations across the UAE.

The partners comprise almost all of the UAE's retail giants, including Carrefour, Abu Dhabi Cooperative Society, Juma Al Majid Group, Landmark Group, M.H. Alshaya Co., Al Futtaim, Chalhoub Group, Sharaf DG, among others.

"We're giving students the chance to work in the retail sector to bring them closer to society, to develop their leadership skills, and to enable them to experience what it feels like to be on the other side," Mubarak Al Shamsi, deputy director general of ACTVET, said during a site visit to the participating outlets.

Once selected, a student receives one week's training, followed by on-the-job experience for two weeks through morning or evening shifts. After the three weeks, they leave with a financial reward and a qualification in retail services accredited by the UAE National Qualification Authority (NQA). This qualification holds three transferrable credits that can be used in future studies.

"We usually attract candidates by meeting with them directly at schools and universities, and through social media," says Adel Arafa, media officer at Emirates Skills, a program under ACTVET focused on raising awareness of career-oriented technical and vocational education among young Emiratis.



Mubarak Al Shamsi on a Site Visit to Sharaf DG in Al Ain



YES to Work Students



Nahyan Khalifa, A Participant in YES to Work



Mubarak Al Shamsi On a Site Visit to One of YES to Work Participating Outlets

In its sixth and latest campaign, which ran from 20 December 2015 to 7 January 2016, YES to Work selected 800 Emirati male and female students in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Dubai, Sharjah and Ajman and placed them in positions across 10 industrial and commercial companies. This represents a 14% increase compared to the summer program of 2014, which attracted 700 students.

Altogether, as many as 2,500 young Emiratis have benefitted from the YES to Work program since its launch. However, with all participants still at school or university, the possibility of settling for a full-time position after the program is highly unlikely, although it could motivate them to do so after graduation

‘The students are too young [for permanent placements], although the initiative made them think

Landmark Group, one of YES to Work retail partners, plans to spend Dh150 million to open 15 UAE outlets over the next three years.

about working in the retail sector and starting up their own projects someday. Also, many of the retailers showed interest in employing them full-time.”

A BOOMING INDUSTRY

Who wouldn't want to join an industry that's growing at an average rate of seven percent every year? From about Dh160.5 billion in 2015, retail sales in the UAE are forecast to reach Dh197.2 billion this year, according to data from Euromonitor International. Moreover, in 2014, the country was ranked as the fourth most lucrative retail market in the world by the Global Retail Development Index.

In the mid-term, the UAE's flourishing tourism sector and high per-capita income, along with its quality infrastructure and ease of operation, will continue to provide ideal conditions for retail growth in the country.

Landmark Group for instance, one of YES to Work retail partners, plans to spend Dh150 million to open 15 UAE outlets over the next three years, primarily in Abu Dhabi and the Northern Emirates. Regionally, the chain expects to invest about Dh1 billion to establish 75 stores, after which it intends to employ over 20,000 people.

The UAE's flourishing tourism sector and high per-capita income will continue to provide ideal conditions for retail growth in the country.

Similarly, retail franchise operator M.H. Al Shaya Co. – another YES to Work partner – created 2,000 jobs when it opened 42 different brands at Yas Mall in late 2014. With more than 3,000 stores, cafes and restaurants in its portfolio, Alshaya has been an innovator in retail franchising, bringing brands such as Mothercare, H&M, Debenhams, Starbucks and The Cheesecake Factory to Middle East consumers.

Being part of Absher – the government initiative that aims to increase the participation of Emiratis in the private sector – YES to Work ultimately has the same objective. But regardless of what students decide to do next, or whether they join the public or private sector, they will have gained invaluable experience, which should give them an edge in today's competitive job market.

And in a society where parents often support their children in their financial requirements, summer jobs and part-time work help foster a culture of independence and self-reliance among young people – all which will positively reflect on their professional performance in the long run.

- Heba Hashem