

# Winning the hiring war for millennials

Attracting the next generation of female leaders is a priority for professional service firms in the Middle East, explains PwC's Partner and People Leader Emma Campbell



Identifying, attracting and retaining top talent is a priority for most professional services firms in the Middle East. This can be particularly challenging when the field of candidates is narrowed to focus on highly-specialised areas like consulting, tax and accounting, or when hiring GCC nationals is a priority.

PwC Middle East places a strong emphasis on recruitment and development programmes aiming to secure a talented, diverse and motivated workforce. The current focus is on hiring nationals – in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman in particular.

One of the biggest challenges is highlighting the benefits and rewards of working in the private sector, when many are accustomed to highly attractive public sector opportunities. With the objective of encouraging young Emiratis to opt for a career in the private sector, PwC launched the Watani programme.

## The Watani programme

Targeted at graduates, both recent and those with less than two years of work experience, Watani is a three-year programme that extends the opportunity for ambitious and talented UAE nationals to work, travel and study with PwC in the UAE and the UK in all areas of the business.

The Watani programme starts in September each year, with a tailored induction aimed at familiarizing the graduates with PwC business and brand values.

The induction is followed by an accounting skills certificate, specially designed for the Watani programme by PwC's Academy, in association with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

On completion of this course, participants have the opportunity to work alongside PwC professionals, with the potential to travel across the region. Once they complete the Watani programme, graduates are eligible for Senior Associate roles with PwC, and PwC works closely with, and mentors, Emirati youth who are the region's leaders of tomorrow.

## Gender balance

PwC is also specifically focused on the next generation of female leaders in the region. As part of International Women's Day, PwC aimed to identify what the next generation of female leaders want, in particular, focusing, in particular, on the millennial age range.

The finding was that this generation of women is more assured than previous generations, with 51% of female millennials confident that they can rise to the most senior levels with their current employer.

So what's important to them? PwC's survey results found out that career progression is fundamental, as is a strong record on diversity, equality and workforce inclusion. Work-life balance is important to nearly all female millennials, who value flexible working hours over financial benefits.

Clearly, women are a critical talent group for ongoing growth, building trust and helping clients important their challenges. Nowhere is this truer than in the Middle East. At PwC, women are provided with an inclusive environment through their careers, with the resources, role models, mentors and support that contribute to their success.

## Flex framework

For example, a "flex-framework" allows all PwC employees to manage commitments outside of work more easily, whether that's children or older relatives, and the maternity policy allows for 6 months leave after having children.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), less than one in five women (less than 20%) in the Middle East are actively employed. However, across PwC's entire business, 30% of employees are women.

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Addressing the gender balance isn't just a regional issue, it's a global one. PwC actively supports the HeForShe campaign, a solidarity movement for gender equality that brings together one half of humanity in support of the other half of humanity, for the benefit of all.

At the World Economic Forum 2015 in Davos, PwC's global chairman Dennis Nally, became an IMPACT 10x10x10 champion, committing to taking game-changing action to achieve gender equality within and beyond their institutions.

The goal over the coming years will be to increase the representation of women in senior leadership dramatically.

For the first time, a comprehensive global evaluation of the rates of women across all levels will be undertaken, with a specific focus on women in leadership.

Based on the insights from this evaluation, each PwC firm will be able to develop tailored interventions to address any potential barriers.

The next generation of women leaders aspire to more than their counterparts aimed for, even a few years earlier. From a gender perspective, females in our region rightly expect, and are demanding, a level playing field.

Those organisations that can deliver this – be it through Human Resources policies, cultural change and career support – they are the ones that will succeed in the region.

## Diversity

PwC hired more than 250 graduates in September 2015 across the business in the Middle East, an annual increase of 60%.

This group exhibits the widest ever range of candidates based on gender, nationality and background; 80% of this year's graduates are Arabic speakers, joining from across 4 continents, and comprising of more than 35 nationalities.

As HR leaders, we need to realise that our region's millennials now aspire to grow professionally more than ever before. We must identify and encourage that aspiration, and ensure the effort doesn't end with an offer letter, but extends throughout a career, be it through professional certification or global experience.

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