

DUBAI

By **RUQYA KHAN**
Special to Gulf News

As a kid I always wanted to be a PE teacher; unfortunately at the time when I needed to buckle down into academia and study, I discovered life and it all went astray.

Funnily enough, life has a way of coming around full turn. Over the years I have found that I do have a passion and it appears a natural ability for educating others (so my clients tell me) and I have found other outlets that enable me to teach, all be it in other areas.

Since I moved to Dubai in 1998, I have been blessed to be able to use my skills in a number of different arenas. Fourteen years ago, I was one of the pioneers introducing salsa dance to the UAE and began giving classes at a number of venues.



Courtesy: Ruqya Khan

Phil Bedford

■ Managing director, Referral Institute Consulting, Dubai

A few years later, I qualified as a professional kite surfing instructor and I combine this with my passion for the sport.

Even in my career with the Referral Institute, I show business owners how to grow their business through word of mouth and referrals by applying systematic approach to networking through training and coaching.

While there have been a number of contributing factors to why I seem to be good at talking people from “Zero to Hero”, I think first and foremost you have to be able to respect the pupil and put yourself in their shoes.

Over the years, I have seen many instructors blame the student for not being able to pick up a subject fast enough. On occasions, they even tell them to give up and go to do something else.

I firmly believe that if the instructor is able to adapt their teaching style, take their time with the student, then anyone can be taught. The caveat is of course that the student is willing to put in the effort. I think the old adage of “those who can’t do, teach” is true but needs amendment. It should be those who are natural at something do not necessarily make the best teachers. They tend to pick things up easily and have less affinity with those

who may need more time. They are often unable to put themselves in the student’s shoes. When teachers have struggled to learn, they have a better understanding of the challenges and frustrations involved. Hence, “those who aren’t natural make better teachers”

I think respect has to start by taking responsibility for our own failing as teachers. What can we do better if we are not getting through? What areas of our own education are lacking, that we need to build on to enable our students/clients, etc., to learn?

I firmly believe it is important if you wish to provide full value as an educator to continue your own education including other areas outside of your area of “expertise”. This will arm the individual with many other tools to use in the job of educating the client.

■ As told to Ruqya Khan, a Sharjah-based freelance writer.



Networking vigour

“ I WAS BORN in Brixham near Devon, but as a child we moved within the UK a couple of times. At 15, I moved from the Midlands to a school in Devon. I lost my friends and it was a whole new environment I had to cope with.

The result was that I went from being an A-grade student to a pupil with average results. At 16, I moved into further education (A levels) when I joined Torquay Technical College. But I became more social and less academic, as a result of slimming down (I was quite plump before) and having more friends. Then I took up various jobs, including a brickies labourer, a care assistant to old people, waiter, porter...

Some people are inclined to look down on those who work in such jobs. But this phase of my life taught me to never look down on anyone no matter what their background or job because chances are I have probably done that kind of work before.

With this disruption in school, I had to give up my dream to be a PE teacher even though I knew that my heart would always be in sports. Instead, I found myself entering the engineering field. The job as site engineer's assistant (chain boy) was more fun than carrying bricks. I found engineering to be very precise and systematic. The engineers tended to work hard, and the job instilled in me a discipline that I didn't naturally have. Whenever I finished a couple of projects, they would give me more, so I was under constant pressure to succeed. That's why I enjoyed it!

All this led me to return to academics, so I started an ONC (Ordinary National Certificate) which led to three years of bachelor's degree in civil engineering at the University of Plymouth. It seemed easier for me to follow the engineering path than to get into sports.

My love for salsa dancing was born when

I embarked on my master's degree in civil engineering.

While the degree was issued by Coventry University, UK, it was in fact a joint master's degree with four other universities around Europe, recognised by Porto in Portugal, Santander in Spain, Denmark and Belgium. I spent six months in Spain completing my thesis.

It was during my time in Spain that I got involved in local dance classes. If you look at me, you wouldn't guess that I can teach salsa pretty well. My paternal granddad is a dancer so I guess salsa comes naturally to me. The thing about salsa is that it evolved from the streets and was part of the culture; there were no "official" salsa instructors in those days. When I returned to the UK, I began to teach salsa in the evenings, after my day job.

When I arrived in Dubai, there was already a very small group learning the dance. Soon people started asking me to teach the advanced level of salsa (which I'd been teaching in

the UK). It's been nearly 12 years of teaching in Dubai and in total 17 years of dancing. Salsa gives me a gentle boost as opposed to an intense adrenaline rush. I relate it to the experience of having a cup of fresh-roasted coffee. My salsa group, Salsa Dubai, is one of the longest running groups in the UAE.

One of the best things that happened to me through teaching salsa was that I met my Australian wife, Michelle. She is of mixed heritage: Zulu, Indian, Portuguese and some English. We were friends for three years before we decided to take things forward. It is sad that we don't get to dance very often these days because her work schedule requires her to start work quite early on in the day (she is a Key Stage coordinator – like a deputy headmaster – of the Rashid School for Boys).

After my stint in Spain, I returned to the UK but I couldn't get employment thanks to the recession (this was 16 years ago). Instead I settled for a sales job in recruitment within the engineering field. Four years later an opportunity to work in an engineering job came up, but at that point I had enough with statistics and figures, I was not interested in taking a pay cut and decided that the path to sales was the best for me.

It was sales that brought me to Dubai in 1999. I think the more relational side to

Phil Bedford kitesurfing in Dubai. "It is the ultimate adrenaline kick," he says



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Phil Bedford... "There is no point in waiting till you retire to have fun."

SILVIA BARON/ANM

business in the UAE suits me well. I soon started getting quite a few orders by qualified referrals (effective word of mouth marketing) through networking.

I realised that this was the ideal way for me to do business. I didn't know that something called the Referral Institute existed at the time but I had heard of BNI (the world's largest business networking group). I quickly transitioned from getting business in for the company I was working in, to being handpicked to take on the regional director's role for BNI. This ultimately led me to the Referral Institute and here I am, as the Referral Institute's master franchisee/master trainer, enjoying every bit of my work as it is a healthy combination of sales and training!

I set up the Referral Institute in Dubai last year. I believe that if you are connected with successful people who are motivated to help you and you are proactive in finding the right referral partners, success will be yours. I've met and worked with people who are motivated to succeed despite the odds. They don't make excuses to succeed or get business.

A key part of finding effective referral partners is to understand behavioural styles. Think of the number of times you've walked into a networking event and met people you've instantly bonded with while others have left you uncomfortable. It's something about their behaviour that either makes you comfortable or not. Chances are they feel the same around you. These come down to behavioural styles – how quick you speak, whether you smile too much or the way you dress.

By understanding what their behavioural style is and learning to adapt to it, you will find that you can still do effective business with them and, better still, become powerful referral partners. Behavioural styles can help people gauge if they are more suited to be an accountant than a salesperson.

My path in life has been of a rebel.

The rebel aspect in me is kept happy through extreme sports such as kitesurfing. I am an IKO (International Kiteboarding Organisation) level 2 professional instructor having got my initial

qualification in kitesurfing in the Dominican Republic while I was on a five-week honeymoon.

I like the fact that I do not have to wear a wet suit in the UAE when I go kitesurfing thanks to the warm temperatures here for most part of the year.

Kitesurfing for me is the ultimate adrenaline kick. I get to teach so I get the opportunity to see my students succeed, see them get on to the boards. My advice to anyone who wants to learn kitesurfing is to ensure that your instructor is qualified.

I love great relationships.

I believe that life has to be enjoyed thoroughly. Imagine when you are 90 years old and you say, "I wish I had done this or spent more time with my family." There is no point waiting until you retire to have fun. We need to live in the now, be with the people we enjoy being with and delight in what we do to the fullest.

For more information about the referral courses, email phil@referralinstitute-me.com

– Preethi Janice D'Sa is a Dubai-based freelancer