

Success Story: Enabling Excellence through Staff Development

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You go to a restaurant. The setting is superb, the food excellent; but, you are not greeted on entry, or shown to your table, and the waiter knows nothing about the menu. This is what the guest will remember and tell their friends when recounting the experience; we recognize this as bad service. Many of us would have experienced bad service in museums and science centers. The staff could be unclear about their role, have poor knowledge of the content, or be nervous to engage with the visiting public. Akin to the restaurant example, poor staff performance lets down the most impressive of buildings and compelling of exhibitions.



Destinations such as the Etihad Museum in Dubai and Mishkat Interactive Center in Kingdom Saudi Arabia have recognized that the success of any audience experience relies on a dedicated and enthusiastic staff committed to delivering exceptional visitor services and making learning an extraordinary experience. **Talents|KCA** have been working in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region for several years to recruit, train, and mentor local teams to deliver engaging and meaningful audience experiences.



In 2011, **Talents|KCA** began working with Mishkat Interactive Center, recruiting and training Riyadh residents to work in the new science center. During recruitment, they looked for individuals who had not necessarily worked in informal education before, but who had a spark and the potential to develop within the team and deliver great audience experiences for Mishkat. Since then, Mishkat has continued to go from strength to strength with its impact being recognized nationally and internationally.

It is undoubtedly advantageous for a destination to be staffed by a team of people who are invested in the region and understand the needs of their audiences. Helping activate museums, science centers, and visitor experiences through developing local teams is a core strand of **Talents|KCA** work. Some of their recent projects include training scientists to talk about their work, helping management teams ensure the success of their center, and developing staffs' presentation skills.

The Energy Exhibit in Khobar forms part of the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture and aims to spark an interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects for students aged 7-14 years. The Exhibit opened at the end of 2016 and **Talents|KCA** worked with their management team to help identify and solve problems that occurred during the testing and opening period, and plan the center's offer for families, students, and teachers during its inaugural year.



Enriching learning experiences does not have to be restricted to inside four walls. In fact, the effectiveness of taking learning into more unusual locations is continually being seen through outreach programs and at festivals. The Abu Dhabi Science Festival has been steadily growing for the past few years; this year, **Talents|KCA** developed and produced a new show about the spectacle of flight for the Abu Dhabi Education Council's "Lema?" outreach program. The team trained the show's presenters, building on their experience and developing their confidence, resulting in a spectacular learning experience that engaged audiences of all ages.

January 7th saw the opening of the new Etihad Museum in Dubai, a landmark project that celebrates the unification of the Arab Emirates in 1971, and the progress made by the country since. The effects of the union were profound on the lives of the Emirati people and continue to be so. Emiratis have a wealth of family stories and memories about life before the union and changes experienced since. With a subject area so recent and affecting, who is better placed to share this history and staff the Museum than local people, each with their own family history to tell. **Talents|KCA** have been working with the Museum's visitor services team, helping them develop their communication skills, respond to public enquiries, and deliver memorable tours of the Museum inflected with personal touches that engage and inspire visitors.

In London, the **Talents|KCA** team trained scientists who are developing humanitarian demining technology. The scientists want to take their work to science festivals around the United Kingdom, and even to communities affected by landmines. Training helped the scientists distil their complex research into tangible concepts that school and family audiences can meaningfully engage with.

NAMES strives to encourage excellence and innovation in informal science learning. For this to happen and museums and science to be activated and inspiring, it is crucial that staff share this goal and are invested in both their team, institution, and wider community. The right training and mentoring for staff, at all levels, provides a foundation for teams formed of local talent to go out and make learning extraordinary for their audiences.