

A man in a dark suit and tie is shown from the chest up, balancing a clear glass globe on his hands. The globe is suspended between his two hands, which are held flat and facing each other. The man's face is partially visible at the top of the frame. The background is a plain, light color.

INTERVIEW

MR. WORLDWIDE

WITH AN HR HERO: BADAR KHAN, SHRP



By Heather Hudson

Proving that HR is a profession with no borders, Badar Khan has built an internationally acclaimed career on world-class HR strategy and development. From his native Pakistan to Qatar, the United Arab Emirates to Europe to the U.S., he's worked with some of the biggest global companies, transforming fledgling HR departments into veritable leadership academies.

Khan tells *HR Professional* about life in the HR fast lane and why Canada is his toughest challenge yet.

HRP: When did you decide you wanted a career in HR?

BK: In 1984, I graduated as a mechanical engineer in my native Karachi, Pakistan. While working as a project engineer on two large construction projects there, it became clear to both me and my colleagues that I have a natural flair for managing, communicating and relationship building. As a result, I was introduced to the training and development manager of Aga University Hospital in Karachi and my career in HR began.

HRP: What was your first HR job?

BK: I started as an education coordinator in the training and development department at Aga University Hospital. My initial responsibilities included designing, presenting and coordinating a new staff induction program. I also developed job specifications for all the engineering functions of the hospital and coordinated and presented employee development programs. It was during this job that I learned facilitation and presentation skills, training evaluation and design and how to develop and write job specifications and descriptions.

After a year, I was selected as one of 15 HR professionals to take a vigorous three-week master's class from the Academy of Education and Development. It was a unique and rewarding opportunity and I was privileged to be one of the few who had that distinction in those days.

HRP: Tell me about your job now. What are your main areas of responsibility?

BK: I am based in Canada, but at the moment I am working as senior advisor and internal consultant to the HR department for Ashghal, the public works authority for the state of Qatar. My responsibilities include setting up the HR strategy and roadmap and conceptualizing and initiating strategic programs and policies, such as leadership development, succession planning, competencies profiling and performance management. My role is to set up these programs and develop internal capability to sustain these programs when I leave the organization.

HRP: What do you love about your job?

BK: I love being able to be a positive influence and shape the organizations and careers of the people I have worked with. Most of the organizations I have worked with were in their infancies when it came to HR systems and processes when I started, including Union Texas Petroleum and Qatargas. The feeling and recognition that I have contributed to their success is a joy.

Also, some of the young graduates I have coached and trained in Qatar are now government ministers, CEOs and senior professionals of large companies. It's rewarding to see people you have helped reach a certain level of competence.

HRP: What are the challenges you experience in your job?

BK: The greatest challenge for an HR professional is to give quality support to the core business and ensure that you have the right culture and programs in place to support the overall direction of the company. HR professionals need to fully understand the business and its needs and develop collaborative partnerships. We also need to develop credibility to ensure that employees trust us and see us as facilitators rather than policemen of the organization.



Photo by Comstock/Photos.com

HRP: What's key to leading HR during a difficult time for a client organization?

BK: It's about sharing expectations with the client organization's leadership about the work to be done and challenges at hand. We must also see that a regular follow-up process is in place to ensure that expectations are met and any fine-tuning is done well in time.

HRP: What skills are important for success in HR?

BK: In-depth business knowledge, excellent technical knowledge, relationship building skills, empathy and passion for your work.

The HR profession is becoming increasingly competitive. We need to ensure that we are in the process of continually improving our knowledge and skills.

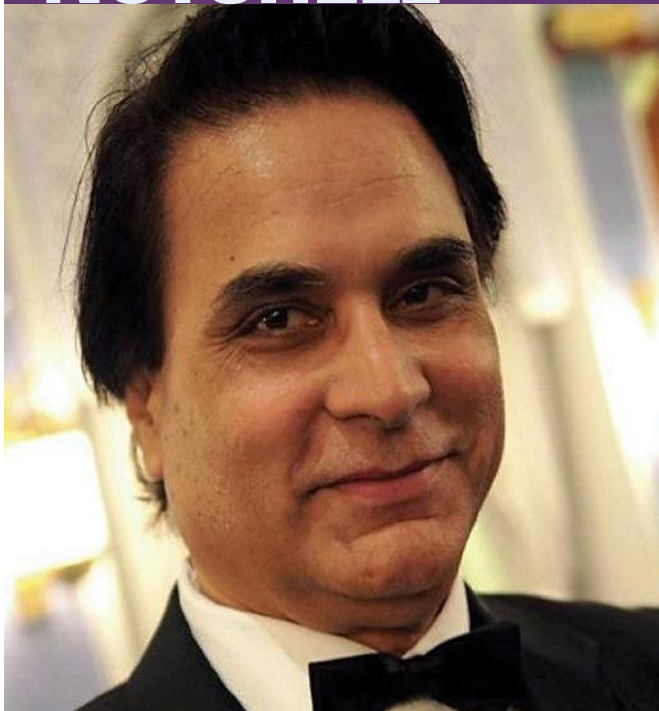
HRP: What tips do you have for new grads or those in entry-level HR jobs who want to move up the ladder?

BK: Be the best. Be a finisher. Develop credibility and trust by delivering on time and according to promises. Be passionate about what you do.

HRP: What's the future of HR?

BK: HR will become a closer ally to business and a key player in the success of organizations. A growing number of CEOs now have an HR background, which is a testament to the growing importance of HR in the organization.

IN A NUTSHELL



First job: The Aga Khan University Hospital

Childhood ambition: To become an international cricket player

Best boss and why: Faisal Al Suwaidi, Ex-chairperson, Chairman of the Board, Qatar Petroleum, because he was an outstanding listener. You felt like the most important person in the world while talking to him.

Current source of inspiration: Imran Khan, cricket player turned politician. I admire his determination and will to be successful despite heavy odds.

Best piece of advice I ever got: "Be the best in what you do and be passionate about it."

Favourite music: Old Indian and Pakistani music, Celine Dion, Stevie Wonder

Last book you read: *How to be Exceptional: Drive Leadership Success By Magnifying Your Strengths*, by John Zenger, Joseph R. Folkman, Robert H. Sherwin and Barbara Steel

How you spend your time away from work: I travel a lot, so it's important to spend time with family when I'm home. I also like to read, play Scrabble and watch cricket.

HR professionals will also become better regulated. HR professionals will be entrenched in the core business functions and have a complete understanding of the core business.

HRP: Your career has spanned many borders. What's the key to success in working in different countries?

BK: The key to success in working with different nationalities and in different countries is one's ability to adapt to cultural and regional needs. I have seen many top-class, Western-trained HR and other professionals fail miserably in the Gulf because of their inability to do this. Cultural sensitivity is critical.

HRP: What are the differences or varying priorities between the countries where you have worked?

BK: Countries in the Gulf are oil and gas rich and the workforce is predominantly made up of expatriates, who are good coaches and mentors. But the priority in this region, after profitability, is to develop their national talent. One of my main contributions in these regions was putting HR programs in place that were specially adapted to the psyche and needs of this region.

Working in the U.S. during the early stages of my career taught me professional work ethics and the need for competence, a sense of humour and openness in sharing information. That culture is all about contribution and achievement.

I'm relatively new to Canada and I find it more difficult to make inroads here compared to any other place I have worked before. In

A GROWING NUMBER OF CEOs NOW HAVE AN HR BACKGROUND, WHICH IS A TESTAMENT TO THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF HR IN THE ORGANIZATION.

—Badar Khan, SHRP

this age of globalization, we need to be more open and receptive to international experience. There needs to be some concrete effort at the highest level to make the assimilation process easy for foreign-trained workers.

HRP: How has your international focus helped shape your own thoughts on HR?

BK: It is all about adaptability and understanding the needs of culture and the organizations. The skillset needed is the same everywhere; it's your ability to change and adapt to new surroundings that is most important. ■



NORTON ROSE FULBRIGHT

Wherever you are, you're never that far from our experienced team of employment and labour law professionals. With 75 lawyers dedicated to this exclusively management-side practice, Norton Rose Fulbright's Employment and Labour Law group in Canada offers tailored and effective solutions by taking into consideration our clients' industries, competitive environments and corporate cultures.

Law around the world
nortonrosefulbright.com

Toronto John Mastoras 416.216.3905	Ottawa Charles E. Hurdon 613.780.8653	Montréal François Côté 514.847.4464	Québec Jocelyn F. Rancourt 418.640.5003	Calgary Bill Armstrong 403.267.8255
--	---	---	---	---