

Jumeirah Group, Dubai

“We’re not used to Emiratis waiting tables – but everyone has to start somewhere”

How Jumeirah Group is attracting UAE nationals to the hospitality sector – and keeping them there with exceptional development opportunities

WORDS KIRSTY TUXFORD PHOTOGRAPHY AFP-SERVICES/MAHMOUD KHALED

There are plenty of eye-catching numbers surrounding Jumeirah Group, the Middle East’s globally renowned luxury hotel brand – whether it’s the 321 metres its flagship Burj Al Arab hotel protrudes into the Dubai skyline or the 15,000 people it has recruited over the past five years. But one of the most impressive concerns something less immediately obvious: 13 per cent of its employees are now UAE nationals.

That’s strikingly unusual given hospitality has traditionally been seen as an unlikely industry for Emiratis to work in. Parent company Dubai Holding has set a mandate for Jumeirah to increase its UAE national workforce by 1 per cent annually – and the company says it is having no trouble meeting and exceeding this target.

Jumeirah has invested heavily in Emiratisation given its pivotal position in the local economy, and also has the power of its name and reputation to help attract local talent. “It’s the most popular local

hotel brand,” says Azza Al Marzouqi, group director for national recruitment and development. “It’s a privilege to have Jumeirah on your CV and it’s a big boost to anyone’s career. We also offer packages that equal anything in the public sector, and employees have the opportunity to travel.”

But the pull for nationals is more than just the brand and remuneration package; it’s all about training and leadership opportunities, says Al Marzouqi. Jumeirah has designed programmes specifically to attract nationals, most recently a Future Leaders Programme,



Case studies

and 20 in the UAE have been selected for a new high-potential programme, for instance, with half of those graduating the scheme in Europe already moving into a new role.

"If you don't know what people in housekeeping do, you won't be able to manage those people"

The way talent is managed has undergone huge changes since new CEO Stefan Leser joined the group in February 2016. "We are making sure we can invest in internal talent and have a clear idea about who to grow," says Haggag. "It was always there, but it is now more integrated and connected to the business.

We are using technology – a proper system for performance management, which allows us to identify talented people internally, plan for future vacancies and organise talent reviews. This wasn't the case before; it was more ad hoc."

The firm is also placing social media at the heart of its

recruitment strategy. "We want to become an employer of choice, and this year we have partnered with LinkedIn to ensure that Jumeirah will be featured to attract external talent. We used to have about 190,000 followers, and in three months it jumped to about 205,000. We are looking at new ways to connect with members, to show what we do and share the good stories that happen in the business," says Haggag.

A new e-recruitment system, he adds, will be available by the end of the year and will use an app to match candidates' traits to Jumeirah's culture and principles. Haggag believes technology has huge potential to enable HR and is especially impressed that the impetus comes from the top.

"Whenever you share data with the CEO or executive committee members, they ask questions – they are involved," he says. "I was pleased to see that, starting from our CEO, all performance reviews were completed within the time frame. That tells you something: this company is serious about giving feedback and evaluating performance."

But it doesn't all have to be about the serious stuff. Jumeirah is enabling employee feedback on just about anything, and offers prizes for innovative ideas that offer better service or add value to the company. The latest suggestion is particularly ambitious – an open-air cinema at the top of the Burj Al Arab, a previously unused space. You'll need a head for heights – but as an example of how committed the company is to listening to everyone, it will be hard to beat.

says Al Marzouqi (pictured right). "But we are measuring the programme, not the people – we want feedback from the business about the design of the programme. Once we are happy that it works, we will run it again."

Unusually, part of the training for UAE nationals involves them serving food in a hotel restaurant.

"Culturally, we are not used to seeing this, but the candidates we have chosen are open-minded and even willing to work in housekeeping," says Al Marzouqi. "What I'm seeing is very promising for the future. They have to start by doing these things because tomorrow they could be the director of housekeeping and, if they don't know what an employee in housekeeping does, they won't be able to manage that person effectively."

According to Al Marzouqi, there are plenty of candidates wanting to sign up, especially among the younger generation, and the gender split is roughly equal. Jumeirah also operates a National Graduate Management Programme, which offers around 30 candidates a year-long opportunity to experience different roles on the hospitality side of the business. "One of the challenges is the wages in hospitality, so we made it more attractive by offering a salary increment if candidates complete the first year."

But what Jumeirah calls 'continuous growth and people focus' extends beyond national programmes to motivate the entire workforce. "We emphasise the importance of feeling passionate about what you do and the service delivered," says Hossam Haggag (main picture), VP for talent and leadership. "We are looking for our employees to be exceptional – doing the job is good, but what can you do to improve?"

Self-development is key, he adds, and feedback is not only given on performance, but also on realising potential. Ten promising managers and assistant managers in Europe



which gives managers and general managers three to five years' exposure in on-the-job leadership training internationally.

The first two graduates from an initial intake of 12 will complete their training next year and be placed into operational leadership roles. "They will be measured annually regarding performance and progression,"

Jumeirah Group

