



In loving memory of
Rami Makhzoumi 1977 - 2011



At the age of 32, Rami Fouad Makhzoumi is already president and CEO of Future Pipe Industries, one of the largest private fiberglass pipe manufacturing groups in the world, and a member of the Regional Board of Directors of Young Arab Leaders (YAL).

Makhzoumi joined YAL in 2005. Driven by a strong faith in the Organization's mission, he has played a significant role in the leadership and growth of the Organization, together with his colleagues in the BoDs. According to Makhzoumi, the youth, leaders of the future, are the greatest asset of the Arab World. He is committed to ensure that the programs YAL develops will harness the potential of Arab youth, and leverage their contribution to development in the Arab World.

Arab civilization in the past is an inspiration for Mr. Makhzoumi who believes that the potential is there for a second Arab Renaissance and that Arab countries should seize the current opportunities to lay down the infrastructure of a second Arab Golden Age. Makhzoumi is personally involved in several YAL committees and initiatives, such as the Entrepreneurship Initiative and Education Initiative in the UAE. He has had a leading role in many successful initiatives undertaken by the Organization and is also a prominent YAL key speaker in events.

Proposed Q&A for a print interview of a YAL BoD member on Entrepreneurship

Q.1. Would you please introduce YAL to our readers?

YAL is a pan-Arab non-profit and non-government organization that has taken upon itself to help Arab youth secure employment through quality education, training and entrepreneurship opportunities and be active in the economic development of Arab countries.

YAL was founded in 2004 during the World Economic Forum at the Dead Sea (Jordan) thanks to an initiative by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. We have 475 members, who are prominent business leaders and we are physically present in 9 Arab countries although our services cover the entire Arab world.

Q.2. Does this mean that you finance education and small businesses of some Arab youth?

What we do is actually more important than financing and has priority over the finance issue. We create ideal opportunities for Arab youth to acquire the modern skills and knowledge it takes to become an entrepreneur or self-employed and adapt to the requirement of the job market. As you well know, money cannot make an entrepreneur but a good entrepreneur can make good money. The opportunities we create in partnership with leading regional and international businesses give the chance to the youth to work closely with prominent entrepreneurs and get hands-on entrepreneurship-oriented experience that sets the ground for the youth to think entrepreneurship and take initiatives of establishing their own small businesses.



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Q.3. Why the focus on entrepreneurship?

At YAL, we believe that entrepreneurship is the vessel for the future. Hence, Entrepreneurship is not a choice, it's a MUST. In the US, Europe and other parts of the world entrepreneurship has already gone mainstream as a job-machine that governments, right or left, rely on to create jobs for the youth. Regardless of the strength of their economy, governments cannot secure employment for all citizens; the case is even truer in the Arab World where the economies are stumbling and education systems not linked to the development needs.

According to The Economist Special Report on Entrepreneurship (March 14th – 20th 2009), the US remains a beacon of entrepreneurialism, creating an average of 550.000 small businesses every month in the period between 1996 and 2004. This would give you a clear indication to the vital importance of entrepreneurship for economies and employment generation.

In the Arab world, we are facing certain facts that give strong case for entrepreneurship. For instance,

- 65% of Arab World >25yrs of age
- The Middle East has the fastest-growing labor force of any part of the world.
- Just to keep pace with population growth, the Middle East must create 80 million new jobs over the next 15 years
- Fifty percent of those unemployed are between the ages of 16 and 24.
- Over the next decades, the Middle East will enjoy the lowest dependency ratio (its economically active population ages 15 to 64 vs. its economically dependent population) of any region in the world.

Obviously, Arab economies are currently not ready to absorb the young population and engage it in the desired development. The above figures are actually double-edged; on the one hand, they could mean that Arab countries are blessed with an enviable wealth of young people that can potentially fuel the economy. On the other hand, they could mean that Arab countries are steering towards a serious crisis, if they're not already there. The Arab world is, in fact, at an intersection to choose between considering the youth a strength and opportunity for growth or a weakness and a threat for their prosperity.

YAL is aware of this complicated situation, and as a thought-leader that sees opportunities in threats, we have taken upon ourselves to enable the youth and arm them with the know-how and skills they need to add value to development in the Arab world rather than be a heavy burden on it. We believe that Arab young population is a great opportunity that Arab countries should invest in by providing the necessary direction. We trust the capabilities of Arab youth and try to provide them with the "direction" they desperately need.

Hence, YAL has focused, among other things, on spreading a culture of entrepreneurship among the youth through our programs and campaigns because improving entrepreneurship will not only provide a possible source of self-employment,



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but it can also generate more jobs over time with the growth and expansion of its enterprises. Let's keep in mind that world's top brands like Google, Wal-Mart, Microsoft and Facebook all started as small businesses.

Q.4. Do you think that you have been successful in that so far?

Definitely; if you take into consideration that we are a relatively new organization, I think that what we achieved is amazing; we have equipped more than 7000 young Arabs (students and fresh graduates) with sophisticated skills highly required for the job market and self-employment. But, we want to build on that and maintain the momentum.

Q.5. how?

I think that society has role to play here rather than keep watching and criticizing governments' actions. As an active organization in the community, YAL is committed to serve the youth and create more opportunities for them to get the right knowledge and skills, but our efforts will remain limited without the support of other organizations and particularly the business community. It is no longer time to sit on the fence and watch the situation indifferently, we need a quick focused and coordinated action from everyone with a stake in this issue and I think that society at large and the future of Arab countries, all have a stake in this because the grace of having a young population will turn out into a curse if we keep things going the way they are.

Q.6. What kind of enterprises you focus on?

We focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The Entrepreneurship and Innovation program, for example, aims to nurture innovation among small/medium entrepreneurs or students who learn from the experienced and successful YAL members and partners functioning as hosting companies. The Program serves as a primary platform where mentoring, adopting, socializing and networking of young entrepreneurs from both emerging and well-established companies in the region, can be accomplished. It also directs the attention and interest of policymakers and stakeholders in the region to the challenges and opportunities associated with innovation and entrepreneurship, with a view to overcoming the former and investing in the latter.

Also, we develop entrepreneurship programs in partnership with leading businesses and institutes. Our programs aim to create an environment where knowledge, resources and connections with the corporate world and business "know-how" are provided to young entrepreneurs, in order to promote innovation and creativity and create employment opportunities for the youth in the region.

The list of our partners features world's leading companies, Microsoft, Boeing, Daimler AG, CNN, DIFC, Larta Institute, Tatweer, HSBC, ShowTime, to cite but a few. Experience with these companies gives beneficiaries the opportunity to learn from prominent entrepreneurs in diverse cultural and business environments, which broaden their enterprising knowledge and gain them efficient skills.



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Q.7. What about the future? What will YAL do for Arab youth?

I think that we have come a long way since inception five year ago and that YAL is now at the frontline in the battle for Arab youth. We'll dedicate more efforts to creating original highly efficient programs that are job and entrepreneurship-oriented in collaboration with the business community. We look forward also, to expand our physical presence in the Arab world and impact as many young Arabs as possible.

The Arab World has been riddled with, to put in bluntly, outdated, misaligned, and superficial organizations claiming to be Pan Arab, and who represent the interests of the Region and its people. These organizations either broadly have a political or even a religious nuance in their agendas. Although YAL is only 5 years old, it was created as a vehicle to listen to and provide solutions to the new and defining generation of our future - our Youth. We have broken down many traditional barriers, defined by our preceding generation of nationalistic boundaries, and have defined common values predominately based on the commonality of not just language but desire for the betterment of society. We are doing this by concentrating, on Education, Entrepreneurship and Dialogue Exchange. We have taken it upon ourselves to create an Arab-wide organization, with Arab wide objectives, focussed on common initiatives of empowering our youth to make an impact.

The common roots, language and commercial ties entrenched within our history, are the basis for creating a commonality of language, that of taking our fate into our own hands, and making an impact driven from grass roots. Accordingly, we have created an organization of Young Leaders, many of whom are Western Educated, who share the belief that we must act. We must listen and build programs accordingly. All our programs, to date, have echoed this philosophy, from bridging the Gap, through our US, European and Asian Dialogue Forums, our cross multinational exchange programs, our fellowships, scholarships, and mentoring initiatives.

Our actions have spoken for our beliefs. This is what makes us unique. We as an organization are young, we as a membership are made of young influential leaders ranging, from business, to arts, to literature etc, and those we are targeting are the defining youth of our Region's Future. What unites us, is our dire need for change and our unwavering intention to achieve it. Hence we are "the" platform, i.e. the launch pad for ensuring there is no political skew in achieving our agenda of greater social change. Our commitment and loyalties remain to enabling our new leaders to be the beacon of change and hope for generations to come, from within the Region and our fellowmen outside it.

Accordingly, I believe that if we, at YAL, continue to build upon the foundations that we have, and continue to drive our inclusive philosophy of empowerment, than YAL may well become the Region's best hope and vehicle for our Youth to positively impact not just our geography but the world as a whole.