Meet the man behind Takreem, the awards ceremony that champions exceptional Arabs

Mark Anthony Karam  October 15, 2019

Ricardo Karam, a renowned television host and producer and the founder of Takreem, shares with AMEinfo some invaluable insights into how the event was born, and what it has achieved over the years.

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Over the past 10 years, one awards show has made it its yearly duty to celebrate the Arab visionaries that often go unnoticed in our corner of the world. Takreem, which means honoring, or an honoring ceremony in Arabic, is an awards show that celebrates exceptional Arab men and women from all walks of life, be they doctors, professors, humanitarians, entrepreneurs, and more. Behind this one of a kind show is none other than Ricardo Karam, a renowned Lebanese television host and producer, who through his decades-long experience has brushed shoulders with countless Arab luminaries that he saw would often go unnoticed or uncelebrated for their achievements. Hence, Takreem came to be.

In this interview with AMEinfo, Karam shares all there is to know about Takreem and its 10-year journey, as well as some of the lessons he's learned along the way.
Given your decades-long experience in the media, and your numerous interviews with exceptional and high-profile individuals, what was the final trigger that pushed you to create your own awards show, which we now know as Takeem?

I was the pioneer in the Middle East to dedicate airtime to the success stories made by Arabs. People got to know Nicolas Hayek, Zaha Hadid, Carlos Ghosn, Reem Acra, Paul Orfalsa and Tom Barrack through my TV shows. Having surveyed the interest of a whole public and especially young people looking for role models that they can identify with, I decided to found a sustainable platform that inspires, motivates and pushes forward. Hence, Takeem was born.

Takeem is the proof that the Arab world harnesses unlimited resources with the hope of changing the negative perceptions it is continuously tainted with. Today, I am proud to have contributed to this noble cause, and to work with high quality men and women who are working for change against all odds. I am proud to be one of those artisans of a new look at the Arab world, a look of confidence, enterprising, resolutely ambitious and forward-looking.

Read: Takeem turns 10: Pioneers gather from across Arab world in prelude session

What did you hope to achieve with the founding of Takeem? 10 years later, do you find that you've achieved that goal you envisioned?

I had hoped to create a space of light where the accomplishments of the Arab world are recognized and not neglected, a place where the Arab youth can feel that their efforts and their dreams will not be wasted. After 10 years, I believe that TAKREEM has successfully contributed to making a difference.

I chose to stay in Lebanon yet the horizons were open to me. I wanted to create a "social impact". My ultimate goal was therefore to encourage future generations in the Arab world to strive for excellence and to remain true to the fundamental values of respect, ethics, humility, passion and empowerment.

My work focuses on highlighting the intellectual and political heritage of the Arab world, its figures and examples on which to build to build the future.

Did I achieve the goal I have envisioned? I leave it up to you.
Last year at Takreem: You don’t need to travel for medical care anymore

Throughout the years, you’ve surely met countless visionaries since the event first launched. What have you learned since then, and has your perspective on the Arab World shifted?

My view of the Arab world not only remains the same, but even more. I am deeply convinced that Arab world remains a place of hope, creativity, and giving.

Despite all the wars, the refugee crisis, the high unemployment rates; the Arab youth is resilient and every day you see entrepreneurs, artists, scientists, educators, architects, businessmen, and bankers not only embracing success but contributing to the betterment of the world. The change that we seek starts within each one of us. The world lacks empathy and kindness, and the Arab world is no different. It is time for the Arab world to have a new kind of leadership, one that leads by example, and it is up to the people themselves to bring about that change.

Read: Takreem Award Ceremony awards Arab champions

Last year, you launched the first iteration of TAKminds, an extension of Takreem’s ideology and spirit. What is the long-term plan for TAKminds, and what was feedback like following the first iteration?

A community has been formed around Takreem, bringing together former laureates, contributors, friends and new encounters, who are calling for even greater diversification and frequency of Takreem meetings. Their wish finally materialized through TAKminds, which aims to show how actors of change and new talents are addressing current societal challenges and are weaving together the threads of education, technology, business, media and, the arts in order to build more sustainable future. TAKminds employs an engaging model that can be adapted to your needs: forums, think tanks, conferences, meetings and online content. TAKminds is a way for us to take a step forward, to create new synergies and to engage in a conversation that is both exciting and necessary.

Last year, we hosted Kailash Satyarthi, a Nobel Peace recipient, as well as experts who shared their insights on important issues such women empowerment, urban development and the impact of the arts on culture.
This year will mark the second edition of TAKminds, and is set on November 8 in Beirut, a museum and an urban cultural center which celebrates the history of Beirut and namely the civil war. The TAKminds Forum will be dedicated to the Broken Builders of Tomorrow’s Arab World: the ones, young and older, who are striving to rethink, reshape, rebuild the region when they themselves have cracks, traumas, and obstacles that have been inflicted by that same region and its history.

We are bringing people together to share their memories, views and experiences of the past and how its influencing and shaping their future and the future of this region as a whole.

**Last year at Takreem: The future of cities is not smart, but village-like**

In your opinion, how has Takreem influenced the Arab World? Arab luminaries and innovators had finally found a venue where their achievements are celebrated, in a region where they're usually brushed aside in favor of media tales of pessimism and submittal to the status quo.

In a region where only rulers, CEOs and entertainers are acclaimed, TAKREEM has created a credible spark of positivity where unsung Heroes can showcase their accomplishments and innovations and be an example for the future generations.

The uniqueness of Takreem lies in the transparency, professionalism and impartiality of the selection process for the laureates. This starts from the call for applications and the constitution and verification of the files, to the deliberation of the Jury board composed of eminent personalities, and finally to the meticulous work of the Selection, which is made up of respected experts from civil society, the academic world and the economic fabric of different Arab countries.

We aim for TAKREEM to not only be a stage that honors Arab achievers but one that also bridges and connects people with each other to find solutions for a better tomorrow.

**What can we expect from this year's event?**

This year, we will be celebrating 10 years of passion, dedication and hard work. Therefore, we have organized 3 truly amazing days. Beirut, the city of diversity, contradictions, romanticism, creativity, and the love of life will be hosting 1000 guests from all over the world.

**Last year at Takreem: Sami Hourani: The doctor with an entrepreneurial streak**