



a&e Talks to
**Ricardo
Karam**

*A prominent name in the TV industry
and co-founder of Takreem awards*

After 20 years of interviewing some of the biggest figures from different corners of the world, ranging from spiritual leaders, to musicians and politicians, Ricardo Karam takes a seat on the other end as an interviewee this time. We generally spoke about his organization called Takreem, which has been in the works for several years, but was presented to the public in March 2010 at the Casino du Liban, in Lebanon. Being an Arab, and an active member of the media community, Ricardo felt a compelling need to convey a positive image of Arabs Worldwide, and in doing so, reveal their true identity. He planned on doing so through this award ceremony which honours successful Arabs from different fields who have positively contributed to the society. It aims to be a source of inspiration for Arabs worldwide as well as future generations, by identifying and promoting Arab accomplishments in charitable services, environmental development, education and culture amongst many other categories. The most recent ceremony took place on November the 29th in Bahrain and highlighted a list of individuals from an array of disciplines. A&e had some questions to ask Ricardo about his long spanning career, his initiative, and Arab society as a whole.

How did your extensive career in media and TV contribute to Takreem and how did it motivate and help you to start the organization?

I have to admit that I owe everything to the path that I came across, in life we choose our roads and our path we build it the way we want so we can follow it. I can say that everything I built up in my life was due to my determination and my perseverance. I mainly owe everything I came across and every single person ive met what I am today. They shaped my personality , my thinking and my vision. Takreem is definitely my baby, and it grows up from the tv world found myself in. I have always focused on the notion of success and have always interviewed remarkable and successful people, this idea triggered a bigger one which was the Takreem. This is how it started.

Who are some of the most influential people that you've met or interviewed?

I guess every single person I have met added something to my persona, contributed somehow to who I am today. Whether he is a big shot or an ordinary person I came across. My life is an interesting one because I had to meet people from all over the world. From different perspectives, different nationalities, different backgrounds, different ethnic groups, races. Whether it was a shoe repairer, a waiter in a restaurant or a housekeeper in a hotel, or a chief of state, a high caliber banker, everyone gave me something. Of course there are some people who theoretically are supposed to be more influential than others, and maybe we had a clash and they did not have any influence on me, and other people whom I expected to have a good outcome, were remarkable and had an impact on me. Some of those include the Dalai Lama, amin Maalouf, Charles Aznavour, Paolo Coelho...were all amazing and deep encounters that touched me inside.

You're considered by many to be a role model...tell us what this means to you.

Every single public person aims to be a role model for others, through his or her achievements , through what we do and through the impact of our outcomes. I've always tried to do things that are beneficial to



Laila Al Shaikhli and Ricardo Karam on the stage



Nejb Friji Sheikh Mohammed Al Nahyan and Yasma Fuleihan

my community rather than doing things just for the sake of acquiring fame and notoriety. I always wanted to be different, I always wanted my shows to be different. Everything I do, my books, everything I write, the conferences I participate in and now Takreem. The aim of everything I do is to trigger a small change in the community I live in. I hope to be able, in the future to hear this statement: "he made a change."

What are some of the skills and qualities you think a role model should have?

Someone you look up at and are proud to do so. Someone you judge positively through his achievements, those achievements are enriching the world that role model lives in.

When it comes to Takreem, why do you think it is so important to reward people in our society?

Because they are role models. We are honoring people who have made it so big and who have done it away from the limelight and we want to put them under the spotlight. We want the youths to look up at them and be impressed and say: "those are Arabs I am proud of." If you ask youths in the Arab community, "who is your role model," the answer they will give you is shallow and most of them time related to pop culture. They won't think about an achiever, who spent most of his or her life, contributing and changing the community they are living in. Takreem was created for those people, to tell the youths that they too can achieve such great things.

What do you think of our current society, where it was and where it is going?

It depends on where in the Arab world, you have new societies and you have societies that have history . the new societies are based on money, you cannot judge them. The problem is with the societies that have history , those are the ones who are highly effected by the negative aspect of money which devaluates them. Values are deteriorating and societies have become slaves of money.



The winners on the stage

How do you think Takreem could help people steer away from this mentality?

At least Takreem is a melting pot for interesting characters for people who are not slaves of money, people in the academic world, the scientific world, the medical field, the cultural field. It is like a forum that brings people together to celebrate excellence irrespective of the field, gender, nationality, geographic boundaries of people.

From all the different fields you mentioned, which would say is your favourite? Which one do you have an attachment to?

All of them are related to my heart, but I would mainly go for the entrepreneurship, because young entrepreneurship Is very important in our world because it pushes and motivates them to succeed. At the same time, I may be a bit of a feminist, the Arab woman of the year category is very dear to my heart. Women have come so far and done some big changes, whether in Tunisia or Sudan where this year's winner is from, those are the ladies we want to honour.

There are non-Arabs involved as Laureates and judges, and the winners are chosen by an international panel. Tell us why it was important to also have a Western perspective in Takreem:

Every year we honour international contribution to our society. This year we had "Actes Sud," an organization that has created a bond between the West and the East by choosing Arab writers and publishing their works.

The Arab world so far, we `ve always had the complex of the west, all the people who were recognized outside weren't recognized here such as Gabriel Yared and Amin Maalouf. I guess my previous show was the pioneer in getting those people before anyone had ever heard of them. These people have been recognized in the West, so why don't we at least get one international organization and thank it for the good things it is doing for our community.

You have quite impressive names in your board, how did you get people to support Takreem?

Of course my portfolio helped a lot. But if the project wasn't worthy, they wouldn't jeopardize their names just for the sake of saying "okay, I ally myself with Ricardo Karam because he's Ricardo Karam. They do so because the project is very important, noble, the objectives are respectful, the selection process is transparent and credible. They saw, witnessed and believed.

From all the duties and tasks that you have, what do you enjoy doing the most?

Everything! Every single aspect of Takreem , I'm involved in. IT's my little baby and it's growing but once it stands up on its feet solidly maybe I wouldn't be as involved as I am today. Whether it's the selection process, the jury board reunion, getting the partners and sponsors, every single step is interesting. But of course the ceremony itself is the most amazing time of the year. All the activities of the year converge into one big one. Putting together the last details, the rehearsal, the stage, the lighting, the music...everything is a wonderful feeling, even the stress that you live!

Tell us what a reward means to you:

The people you meet, the letters you receive, the words you hear. I have a lot of awards but the most important one is to be able to create a balance within your life between the private and the public.

There are many benefits to receiving a Takreem award including exceptional international media exposure, networking opportunities with like-minded corporations and individuals and international and regional recognition of achievements. Apart from personal benefits, the award also helps raise public awareness about Arab achievements producing hope and serving as a model for future generations.

Interviewed by: Houry Seukunian