

# The Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organisation

## Investing in Knowledge

By Robert Terpstra

Dr Talal Abu-Ghazaleh leads an organisation committed to the principles of wealth creation through knowledge recognition, and he has big plans for Africa.

From the humble origins of a Palestinian refugee camp to establishing arguably the number one firm in the world in the field of intellectual property (IP) and protection registration, Dr Talal Abu-Ghazaleh believes that the pursuit, in the end, was worth it. The chairman of a multipronged, multinational organisation continues to press onwards, saying he is willing to fight for an education revolution.

“If you want to know what my line of thought was throughout my life, until I started building the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organisation (TAG-Org) and during its building period, it is the concept of the

blessing of suffering. I am blessed to have suffered,” says Dr Talal Abu-Ghazaleh.

Born 22 April 1938, in Jaffa, Palestine, in the modern-day state of Israel, 76-year-old Abu-Ghazaleh says that the importance his father placed on education guided him in his pursuit of knowledge. The septuagenarian still considers himself a student, devoting three hours each day to study. “I read to study and I study like a student and this has been one of my qualities and attributes,” he says.

The scope of TAG-Org is vast and wide, offering a litany of professional services that include IP, legal work, consulting, tax and





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auditing, valuation, and translation. In fact, it is the largest translation firm in the world for English–Arabic and Arabic–English translation, distribution and publication. Approximately 15 countries in the Maghreb and Sahel regions have Arabic as their lingua franca among a majority or large minority of the countries' populace.

Abu-Ghazaleh is particularly enthusiastic about the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Knowledge Society (TAG-Knowledge). Launched in 2007, this multi-purpose centre has helped thousands of post-secondary students transition from academia to their specialised vocations. TAG-Knowledge provides training courses and recruitment consultancy services. It also highlights job opportunities and hosts various language clubs. The concept has extended to the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh-University (TAGIUNI), which began operations in late 2012.

Abu-Ghazaleh's organisation works in concert with several institutions. In effect, TAGIUNI does not teach its own programmes per se but rather acts as a conduit, signing agreements with international educational institutions. Currently, the university has a partnership with Thunderbird School of Global Management, the top management school in the world. In April this year, it signed an agreement with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) to deliver programmes to public

sector employees worldwide. The university also works with the World Bank and International Finance Corporation (IFC) as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Using British Council and Cambridge Language Skills programmes, TAGIUNI teaches English language courses. Professional qualifications like a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and Certified General Accountant (CGA) are also popular options and fulfil requirements for those wishing to pursue employment opportunities in the US, UK, Canada and Australia – four locales that serve as the top destinations for those in Africa. Says Abu-Ghazaleh: "We will be running the programmes that universities use as an admission requirement. We're also talking about including, when we're talking about professional qualifications, anything [related] to Internet technologies, like website design, software solutions, et cetera, which can all be learnt online."

With online learning (learning from a satellite location in the student's host country), students avoid the difficulty involved in obtaining visas for the countries in which they may have wanted to study. This also saves on travel, tuition and textbook costs, while the cost of living is a nonfactor and culture shock is eliminated. Sizable student loans are also avoided. Studying abroad often involves tuition costs that are doubled or trebled and high interest rates that accompany student loans must be repaid immediately when the student enters the workforce, if they become employed at all.

"Some [have forecast] the end of schools, the end of universities as we know them," says Abu-Ghazaleh. "The former president of Harvard, Lawrence Summers, [spoke of] the

avalanche that is facing universities and education. The president of Stanford called it the 'tsunami'. What's the solution? First, what's the problem? The problem is we are in a knowledge era and the educational community is still thinking whether online education should be recognised."

Currently at the periphery of the knowledge era, Abu-Ghazaleh says that a reformation of the educational institution system is a must. The first step, he says, is ensuring that a student based within Africa who is involved with TAGIUNI stops becoming an African and starts becoming a global citizen. The second step, the world needs to realise that the classroom is no longer a place where education must take place, and to which a student must carry a small library of textbooks every day.

Confirming that a particular student is who he says he is, particularly when time comes to sit examinations, has proven a problem for remote-based learning institutions. TAGIUNI solved this by establishing TAGIMETRIC centres, where individuals are biometrically verified. The robustness of this method allows universities to know that the user has been confirmed and that the student in question is indeed the person who enrolled and the one sitting the exam.

With the incalculable amount of information available online, the university places emphasis on application rather than rote memorisation. The challenge is then for students to use and not misuse their wealth of knowledge. "This university comes at a time when the knowledge era is changing everything in the world, except education and now at a later stage, educational institutions are realising this," says Abu-Ghazaleh. "All you



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need is connectivity. Universities and schools have to realise that this is the future. This Talal Abu-Ghazaleh University is something new and unique.”

A lack of confidence in the proposed shift toward online education remains a concern. The status quo renders employers and society in general to believe that a degree, that one piece of paper attained from a university institution, will always carry more weight. TAGIUNI aims to psychologically change this attitude – simply that the degrees of accredited institutions, offered online as a third party, will alter the definition of world-class education for Africa in the 21st century and chart a course for the future. “We are entering into the knowledge era

where everything will be knowledge-based, everything and everybody will be a knowledge worker and we will be using knowledge only for the creation of wealth,” says Abu-Ghazaleh.

Abu-Ghazaleh believes that TAGIUNI has developed and perfected a complete solution which, based on online teaching and learning technologies, will ensure a unique partnership exclusively with accredited institutions. For Abu-Ghazaleh, the top priority is Africa, a continent which he believe will be the new Europe of the world before the year 2050. Correlating the transformation of a continent with the year 2050 was indeed a very conservative estimate, Abu-Ghazaleh admits. “I think we are very optimistic about Africa and we

have additional optimism as a result of the speed at which knowledge technologies can accelerate this process of development in Africa,” he says.

This vision, in the end, begins with the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organisation itself. The origins of a successful, continent-wide business plan stem from within the organisation, naturally, led by example. “Every person in this organisation must be a knowledge worker, everybody. We use that in order to excel, in order to provide better services and in order to be more profitable,” says Abu-Ghazaleh. Undeterred and unsatisfied that only wealth creation will emanate from the constructs of knowledge, Abu-Ghazaleh beckons African society to establish a greater good. “If I have a legacy I would like to leave, it is the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh University,” he says. “We should reach a point where we are using knowledge wisely for the benefit of humanity.” 🌱