



Dopamine

Promoting Happiness and Positivity for Youth

By Taqiya Al-Ameri

A future filled with happiness is not achieved through physical effort alone but rather requires psychological support and emotions like hope, optimism, and positivity. With this as a point of departure, a young Emirati Saad Al-Wadami decided to establish Dopamine, a foundation that promotes a culture of happiness, positivity, and tolerance.

Al-Wadami said his inspiration came from “a will to repay the graciousness of our dear country, to leave a positive footprint in society, and to help reach the goals of the UAE’s National Agenda 2021 and UAE Vision. In line with the guidance from Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai, we endeavor to foster a lifestyle of happiness and positivity.”

He added that “happiness comes from a balanced and confident self, one that understands

exactly what is required and how to achieve it. Happiness is neither money nor status, it is a feeling that can be reached only by accepting and enhancing the self.”

Dopamine has developed diverse youth-oriented programs that promote and consolidate the foundation’s values. “Our programs range from interactive, hands-on workshops that grounded in the belief that traditional ways are no longer enough for today’s youth. Our workshops are based on the credo, ‘don’t give me the fish, teach me how to fish,’” said Al-Wadami

In addition to monthly workshops, Dopamine organizes other events such as ‘Zayed’s Smile Exhibition’ under the slogan ‘Zayed is Homeland, His Smile is Life’ which was held in the Year of Zayed 2018 in memory of UAE founding father, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan. Another event was the ‘Jar of Happiness’ put on for International Day of Happiness. Volunteers from Dopamine got



Right:
'Life is a Smile'
workshop at
Dopamine.



dispatched through Abu Dhabi city, in cooperation with 'Happiness Patrols' and the Abu Dhabi police, to distribute a 'Jar of Happiness' to drivers and passengers. The Jar contained phrases promoting the foundation's four core values—happiness, positivity, giving, and tolerance—and provided motivational tips aimed at instilling happiness into recipients.

Attracting Ambitious Youth

Dopamine has from its inception sought to attract ambitious, energetic, enthusiastic young people who wish to make a positive impact on

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the world. Al-Wadami said: “We built our reputation by participating in different community events, organizing a lot of workshops, and facilitating strategic cooperation with government and private entities. The volunteers we attracted are essentially our engine, promoting the foundation's values in society more broadly.”

Of the foundation's name, Al-Wadami said: “Dopamine is a chemical in our body that interacts with the brain, triggering many emotions and behaviors including attention, orientation, and movement. Dopamine plays a major role in feelings of pleasure and happiness. Without dopamine, we would not feel motivated, we would struggle to pay attention, our cognitive functions would be impaired and our creativity stifled. Dopamine makes us more sociable. Since it is our mission to foster a culture of happiness and positivity, we named the foundation after this hormone.”

Challenges to Overcome

Asked about the challenges the foundation had to overcome, Al-Wadami said: “First, it was



Right:
Saad Al-Wadami,
founder of
Dopamine, a
foundation
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positivity



choosing a name that reflected our values, vision, and mission. We wanted it to be distinctive and unique. Next we needed to recruit members who were highly qualified. This was the most difficult task to do. We interviewed so many people and it took months to select the best candidates. Finally, we had to obtain an operating license so that the foundation would be truly independent with its own rules and procedures and its own strategy to reach our goals and accomplish our mission.”

Elaborating on their mission, he said: “We believe that in order to be tolerant, man should be accepting of views that both agree and disagree with his ideas and should handle various daily situations in a neutral manner without any racist view. So, we first organize training sessions for our volunteers to enable them deal with people from different religions and cultures with tolerance and a smile. Last November, we had a positive experience participating in the National Festival of Tolerance through which we cooperated with the Ministry of Tolerance. Every day, we make posts on social media platforms about real life situations. By sharing sayings, statements, and life experiences from young people, we encourage tolerance.”

He pointed out that “in UAE, we live in a multicultural and multi-religious society so every one of us is from birth exposed to other cultures. Our initiatives underscore the need to respect these cultures and accept differences. We invite communities to attend our workshops and come in contact with Emirati youth so that they forge intellectual connections with various peoples they coexist with.” Social media is their primary platform of engagement. They have had moderate success with this form of outreach, which has been effective in developing the minds of Emirati youth, especially by involving them in generating media content. According to Al-Wadami, “Young people do not listen to those who say to ‘never do this or that’, such direct content does not impact their behaviors. However, hidden content does. For example, in Dopamine, we avoid telling young people ‘do not smoke, do not take drugs, eat healthy food’ directly but rather these goals are implicitly embedded in our content. To keep attracting volunteers, we have to maintain a spirit of volunteerism and give them a real sense that they themselves are what makes an event successful. We are working on several upcoming events that we will announce in due course.”

Above:
Zayed's Smile
Exhibition