



MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENT NETWORK
شبكة تنمية الشرق الأوسط



An Interview with
Murat Daoudov
President

Middle East Development Network (MDN)

MDN's inspiration is a blend of critical analysis from the founder's professional journey and spiritual understanding.

Middle East Development Network is registered as international consulting company, but MDN's ambition goes far beyond just being "another consultancy firm"; it actually aims at becoming an actor of the change. Its goal is to make substantial contribution to making the Middle East and North Africa a land of peace and prosperity, justice and human development, through improved governance, balanced economic development and peaceful diplomacy.

1. What inspired you to start MDN?

MDN's founders were inspired by the gaps and un-responded needs they could identify during their long careers in the fields of public policy, public administration and local government, from both practitioner and academician perspectives. Hence, as a network of like-minded people, we decided to apply the solutions we had been previously dreaming about. However, for launching such ambitious projects, a lot is needed, such as faith and strength; courage and perseverance, not to mention human, financial and technical resources. But the tipping point of long quests and dreams is the moment of inspiration that pushes you to cross the line, to engage and to make your dreams confront the reality. In this regard, the Tale of the Three Grapes was a major inspirational source which encompasses most of the values shared by MDN's team and network. This tale describes the journey of a man in 16th century between Istanbul and Baghdad, as a part of mysterious prophecy, to discover that the real treasure waits for him back home. The lesson for us was that in order to make great achievements and to find treasures hidden in ourselves, we sometimes need to undertake long and tedious journeys, with sacrifice and patience.

2. Please tell us more about Middle East Development Network.

We are a particular type of startup, a startup of governance and policy that blends different dimensions. MDN is a smart combination of three elements and stands somewhere between a private company, a civil society organization, and a research center or think tank. So Middle East Development Network can best be described as "social knowledge enterprise". Practically, MDN has been registered as an international consultancy company specialized in the fields of governance, development, and alternative diplomacy. The company has chosen the Arab world and Turkey as main focus area, although it gradually opens to other neighboring regions too. Officially launched with its then bilingual website by the end of January 2014, MDN is so far registered in three countries, with the headquarters in Istanbul, Turkey and branches in Amman, Jordan and Rabat, Morocco. Other company branches are set up to be opened in other countries. The company aims at establishing a wide coalition of partners from public and private actors like national and local governments and agencies,

international and local NGOs, international donors and companies. MDN offers professional advice, undertakes research and analysis activities, designs various programs and implements different projects for its clients and partners.

Management-wise MDN is driven in tandem by two levels of team: a strong Leadership Community made up of great professionals with wide expertise, knowledge and network; and an executive or operational team of talented youngsters that undertake the business development and contribute to the intellectual production of MDN. Giving the responsibility to very young people is the conscious policy and a hallmark of MDN. Usually on the labor market companies look for experienced candidates to recruit. But at MDN we say that we look for young candidates without major work experience. Just as we all like to buy a brand new computer or smartphone, not a "second hand" copy, and then pack it with all the software programs that we need, we at MDN want to hire young talents at the very beginning of their work career, guide them through their learning, and shape their work culture according to our philosophy. So, at MDN, people get responsibilities of developing activities and dealing with top level clients such as ministries or global companies in their early 20ties, freshly graduated or even yet at the final stage of their study. They contribute to MDN with their dynamism, energy and faith, and if they lack any knowledge or need wisdom to deal in certain situations, the Leadership Community team possesses rich experience to fill any such gaps. Basically, the two generations are in completion.

4. What is your biggest achievement so far as a startup owner?

The biggest achievement for me as an entrepreneur is the people around me that are convinced by MDN's project and truly believe in its success. I firmly believe that the human capital is the real treasure we must discover and involve in order to succeed. Our team members perfectly reflect the unique identity and specific principles MDN was built upon. As a matter of fact, the initiative of MDN brought together different people from around the globe, whether they belong to the blue or to the green of our logo which symbolize Europeans and Arabs, the Western and the Islamic worlds, working shoulder-to-shoulder with confidence for the realization of common goals. Check Our Identity to know more about the meaningful logo we designed that reflects this combination.



3. What are your three biggest challenges for growth?

- i. **Identifying the Human Capital:** MDN is a project, a network and a company which is extremely rewarding to those committed to it. MDN is more and more solicited by skilled professionals wishing to join the company; however, given the very high professional and moral standards we seek, commitment and devotion we require, and faithful and value-based behavior we expect, an accurate recruitment is a critical challenge for MDN. Accordingly, its success is highly dependent on the quality of its team.
- ii. **Strategic Business Development:** Business development calls for a lot of ingenuity as it requires both intelligence and innovation. The changing conditions of the market and its players' diverse behavior and cultures necessitates making strategic decisions, sometimes hard ones, which can be critical for the future of the company.
- iii. **Market Insertion:** In order to get MDN well inserted in the very competitive market innovation, perseverance and determination are key qualities. And, although launched with limited resources, MDN has set from the beginning very high objectives, such as becoming the number one government consulting partner in the Arab world and Turkey in five years. Governance is just the first stage, other two strategic fields, the development with a strong local economic development dimension, and alternative diplomacy are being designed and gradually implemented.

5. Are there any factors that may prevent you from realizing your business dream?

Problems and barriers are the spring head of MDN's project. MDN was born out of permanent questioning of the roots of current problems in the wider Middle East and relentless quest for solutions for its dysfunctioning institutions and failing governance. The lack of trust of the people in the region in that they can succeed in changing the region's destiny and in that they can build successful and effective institutions, can also constitute a major threat to MDN's success. However we decided to face the challenges and to dare working on non-traditional solutions.

6. What is your opinion about a TEAM? Do you work well on your own or do you work better with a team of others?

Along my career that consists mostly of work in the non-profit sector, whether government or civil society, I have been rather an autonomous worker, although able to lead and to inspire others. However, MDN is my first role as entrepreneur and my own learning process. There is a saying that the best learning is the teaching, meaning that when you teach or explain something you yourself find a chance to refine your knowledge. Teaching and educating the young team of MDN and leading the Leadership Community are both very challenging endeavors. Probably the best part of this enterprise is the learning or the teaching process; we consider ourselves a school or a "university" for our young team. The greatest pleasure of this adventure is to co-work with these young enthusiasts on building their and our future. The earliest these young people, and many others from the region or beyond, are given the real chance to take responsibilities and to shape the world, the soonest our future will change for better.



local firms that do business at local or at best on national scale in their countries. on the other side, there are multinational firms, the global brands that all come from the West and operate throughout the region with the local offices. There was no in-between actor, meaning that it would have genuine local roots, but would ambition to act as a regional player, covering the whole Arab and Turkish market through its branches and its effective network. Among our objectives is to become the main operator of knowledge and experience exchange between Turkey and the Arab world, within the region and between the region and Europe, America, Asia or Africa. Born locally and borne by local energy and resources, but with regional, international and even global vision. MDN is on the way to become the first international brand of its kind that originates from The Middle East, that is well rooted in its civilizational and cultural ground, inspired by the history of this region, and at the same time courageously transversal, as it embraces best international experience and ambitions to make substantial contribution to the development of standards and know-how in and outside this land. This character makes it unique, and therefore, the ambition is to get a "license to live" for such new player on the market.

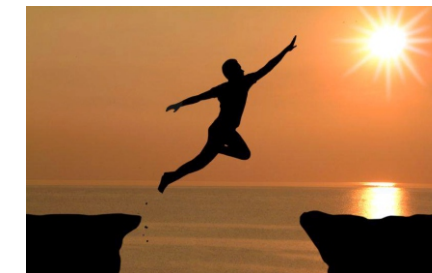
As to the specific goals for the next year, we would like to achieve the following: to make fully functional the branches already registered, to establish effective teams in several other countries of the region, and to establish solid partnerships with several major client institutions in order to prove our quality and capacity. In terms of activity areas, after our successful start in the chapter of governance in 2014, we expect to follow up with the chapter of development next year, with the focus on economic development and business networks. As for the following year we intend to gradually develop our third chapter, the alternative diplomacy for peace and cooperation throughout the region and beyond.

8. If you could give one piece of advice to someone thinking about starting a business, what would it be?

Faith, perseverance and diligence.

Interview Courtesy:
Asghar Azmi
Bureau Chief - Karachi

“NOT YET” AND “NOT NOW” ARE YOUR BIGGEST ENEMIES!



By Athar Imran
(CEO Sybrid)

I have frequently written about change. Change sucks because its difficult to get out of our comfort zone, no matter how uncomfortable that comfort zone may be. We sometimes simply change at a superficial level when what is really needed is a Change of Heart. And what we are most scared of is not the final destination but the ensuing chaos as soon as change happens – something that Stockholm experienced as it moved to the right on September 3, 1967.

We are typically convinced that change ultimately leads to something good. If only, we can take and sustain the plunge that leads us to the promised land.

What is most difficult is to take that plunge. And once we do, it's equally difficult to sustain the plunge in the immediate chaos that follows. Most of us either don't start at the first hurdle, or fall back at the second.

Lets focus on the first hurdle – not taking the plunge for the fear of what may follow, despite knowing that the promised destination is what we want (and sometimes what we need).

Seth Godin is a fantastic writer, speaker and thinker on entrepreneurship and building communities. His

it's too early. It almost always fails because it's too late”.

And he goes on to say about the reasons of not doing and the fear of chaos...

“It's not time,” “Take it easy,” “Wait and see,” “It's someone else's turn” – none of these stalls are appropriate for a leader in search of change. There's a small price for being too early, but a huge penalty for being too late.”

And then he also gave probably the world's simplest yet

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model of tribes for communities is simply awesome, and the book a must read for any leader.

Godin said of this fear of taking plunge, and the core motivation behind it, brilliantly in his Tribes book:

“The largest enemy of change and leadership isn't a “no.” It's a “not yet.” “Not yet” is the safest, easiest way to forestall change. “Not yet” gives the status quo a chance to regroup and put off the inevitable for just a little while longer. Change almost never fails because

most powerful relationship to illustrate what the literati would dub as “strike the iron while it's hot”

Change always has a context – an optimal window. It's not abstract, timeless or an invariant. It is a function of time, environment and opportunity.

Success equals to grabbing the opportunity of change at the right time and taking the plunge through chaos. A wait for certainty is a wait forever.