



COMPASS

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Towards a New Vision for Youth Work in North America IDRIS ELBAKRI

A couple of years ago, I read an article in a local Muslim-community newsletter in which a young American convert lamented the disconnect that she observed between Muslim youth and their community mosques. The author offered a four-point program for addressing this major challenge, advocating positive change on the individual and family level, education and a stronger connection with community organizations. This article, first written two years ago and since then revised slightly, was partially motivated by the insights provided in the aforementioned article.

The second motivation for writing this article is a desire I have had for some time to put down in writing lessons and conclusions that I have drawn from my community experiences in North America, lest I lose them to old age and a fading memory.

It is difficult to diagnose accurately the reasons for this disconnect between young North American Muslims and the mosques. Imam Zaid Shakir offers some very valuable insights in his excellent article "Flight from the Masjid". Suffice it to say here that the reasons are many and complex, having to do with cultural heritage, leadership models, community vision and personal attitudes. This disconnect is not limited to young people; mosques still struggle to be sister-friendly, senior-citizen friendly, and even English-speaker friendly. At the heart of this challenge is the sad, but true, failure of the core institution of the Muslim community, the mosque, in realizing (or even identifying) its real mission. Mosques suffer from a lack of vision and an outdated leadership model. They feed emotions, sell rhetoric and offer an

Islam of do's and don'ts. In addition, a critical challenge that continues to be unmet by many so-called "community" centers is the lack of a family-friendly environment. I am terribly concerned that "Finding Nemo" offers a more attractive family experience for Dad, Mom and kids than the average Islamic center event.

The entrenched, high-inertia leadership paradigm of the typical mosque has caused visionary community members to move ahead to meet many of the community's needs and fulfill its Islamic mission. They form organization aimed at women empowerment, community service, youth programs and civic participation. In essence, segments of our community are moving ahead and leaving the mosque institution behind.

Given our current state of affairs, what would be the elements of a successful youth initiative that can bring young Muslims closer to a positive experience with Islam? I use the term "youth initiative" very loosely to represent a mosque, youth group, or any other form of organized work that seeks to address this disconnect. I use the term "initiative" because it is general and accommodates many ideas and forms. The ideas offered herein are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, but are rather the outcome of one Muslim whose faith experience was molded in the North American context.

1. Pure intentions. This is a central theme of the faith and it rings true: successful outcomes depend so much on the seed of motivation in a sincere heart.

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Conversation with thinker

TALAL SARWANI

Note: The following conversation happened a long time ago across an Internet Messaging system. It refers specifically to the opportunity at Rutgers University, but it easily applies to just about any association of Muslim students, which is why I share it with you here. ISRU stands for the Islamic Society of Rutgers University.

- (00:15:50) thinker: back
- (00:21:57) thinker: u there?
- (00:22:05) wanderer: yah
- (00:22:18) thinker: just saw some illin' Amr Khaled stuff
- (00:22:33) thinker: it was a rerun .. but a good reminder
- (00:22:35) thinker: for me anyway
- (00:23:10) wanderer: nice
- (00:23:20) thinker: the pioneer Muslims
- (00:23:57) thinker: were 45 people
- (00:24:10) thinker: that the Prophet peace be upon him had started with
- (00:24:13) thinker: of the 45
- (00:24:17) thinker: interesting breakdown
- (00:24:21) thinker: 28 men, 17 women
- (00:24:27) thinker: 34 rich, 11 poor
- (00:24:52) thinker: reps from 16 tribes
- (00:25:39) thinker: within 3 years, those 45 grew to 200
- (00:25:48) thinker: all that was done under the radar

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(00:25:57) wanderer: mashaAllah
 (00:26:20) thinker: looking for the leaders, rijaal .. meaning dependable, movers and shakers (not simply men)
 (00:26:46) thinker: after 3 years and now 200 ppl in size
 (00:26:53) thinker: at this point the move is made to go public
 (00:27:25) thinker: and some lessons from how he did, and how he (peace and blessings be upon him) dealt with the curveballs along the way .. Abu Lahab, etc.
 (00:27:43) thinker: ppl trying to cause trouble
 (00:27:49) thinker: Abu Lahab was his uncle of course
 (00:27:55) thinker: so close ppl rejecting him
 (00:28:03) thinker: for personal interests over the Truth of Islam
 (00:28:21) thinker: no ego .. refusing to respond in kind or to argue with him
 (00:28:29) thinker: and those 200
 (00:28:42) thinker: were facing 25-30,000 Quraish
 (00:28:46) thinker: and those 200
 (00:28:51) thinker: made moves
 (00:28:53) thinker: made waves
 (00:29:03) thinker: that shook up a community that large
 (00:29:10) thinker: bring it back to now
 (00:29:24) thinker: on different levels
 (00:29:25) thinker: ISRU
 (00:29:46) thinker: we have about 100 who you could (w/ little effort) get to come regularly to ISRU
 (00:29:57) thinker: even if you say 50
 (00:30:26) thinker: 50 rijaal (from the men & women) should easily be able to have a profound effect on 3000 Muslims
 (00:30:49) wanderer: :)
 (00:30:56) wanderer: that put a smile on my face
 (00:31:08) thinker: 200 out of 30,000 is 0.67%
 (00:31:31) thinker: 200 out of 25,000 is 0.8%
 (00:31:41) thinker: either way, under 1% made that much of a difference
 (00:32:00) thinker: 50 out of 3000 is 1.67%
 (00:32:22) thinker: and that's such a conservative estimate on how many we can easily get to be dedicated
 (00:32:41) thinker: and our odds are better than those of our pioneers
 (00:32:51) thinker: in fact
 (00:33:17) thinker: our odds of dedicated Muslim workers at RU that we can get, if the goal is 200 let's say
 (00:33:30) thinker: there are about 30,000

2. Communal, not “movemental”. One approach to youth work aims at (re) building models of the (twentieth century) Islamic movement. This includes recreating modes of operations, mechanisms and affiliations. This approach is not without appeal. Many have come to Islam as beneficiaries of one movement or another. One can certainly look at the Prophet’s (S) efforts as directed towards establishing a movement, especially the Meccan period. However, a more powerful, empowering and (potentially) all-embracing model is one where we see the Prophet (S) as a community builder. A perfect movement strives for perfect members. A perfect community embraces everyone, including young Muslims struggling to accept their faith.

3. Relevance. A youth project (indeed, all community life) must be born out of the womb of the North American Muslim experience. It must deal with “here and now”, including difficult issues like race, broken families, and the leadership crisis. Repackaging of an overseas experience will not work because the packaging will ultimately unravel. It maintains the center of religious authority overseas and prevents us from developing a sense of ownership of our faith and from applying it creatively to solve our unique challenges.

4. Empowering. We must offer Islam to our young brothers and sisters as the empowering

undergrads on the New Brunswick/
 Piscataway campus
 (00:33:48) thinker: freakish similarity
 (00:33:52) thinker: and
 (00:34:00) thinker: we have the body of tawheed and shariah already there
 (00:34:05) thinker: we're not starting from scratch
 (00:34:05) wanderer: no doubt
 (00:34:25) thinker: time to get to work, son
 (00:34:40) thinker: :-D
 (00:34:41) wanderer: our excuses are our own
 (00:34:51) wanderer: bada'al ihyaa'
 (00:34:56) thinker: :-D
 (00:35:13) wanderer: i'm saving this convo

Talal Sarwani is an alumni of Rutgers University, where he wrote numerous articles for the Islamic Society of Rutgers University's Newsletter, Nasibah. He is currently working on taking over the fashion industry, bi idhmillaha bi ta'ala.

and liberating experience that it is. We must encourage critical thinking, questioning and intellectual freedom. We should encourage our young people to embark on their journeys with and within Islam. Such journeys are inherently personal, but require guidance and wisdom. These journeys will not always lead to orthodoxy, but a vibrant, dynamic, and most important of all, true faith, can accept that risk.

5. Balanced presentation of Islam. One speaker at a Friday khutba described the Ummah as “1.5 billion zeros”. Another admonished the crowd to “pray janazah on our Imaan”. Such negative self-demeaning rhetoric does little to build a viable community. The Quran offers balance by almost invariably coupling descriptions of Punishment with Paradise, and vice versa. Young Muslims (indeed all of us) need positive reinforcement of our moral choice, Islam, as opposed to constant chastisement that dominates religious preaching. Islam is not a religion of Haram. It is a religion of Halal alternatives.

6. Integration. A youth initiative should strive to integrate our community. During the Prophet’s (S) time, there was no “youth group” in the mosque. The Prophet’s (S) community was integrated. Young and old, male and female, rich and poor where all stakeholders in the collective life of the community. Our community in North America does not mimic this wonderful example. We are compartmentalized into groups of “brothers” and “sisters”, “young” and “old” and “immigrant” and “indigenous”, let alone the racial and ethnic compartments. A visionary youth initiative can strive to offer a youth-centered and family-oriented community experience. It should never institutionalize the generation and cultural gap. It should seek to bridge it, reaching out to parents, mosque leaders and ultimately all community segments.

In conclusion, my comments are largely the results my experiences with Islam and North American Muslims. I often found the most liberating and empowering Islamic experience among young Muslims who did not rebel, but embraced the wisdom of their elders and applied their motivation and potential for genuine positive change. Our mosques can fill up with the buzz of youthful energy fused with the serenity of age-old wisdom. I know this for a fact. I am a beneficiary of such a fusion. © Idris A. Elbakri, 2006.

Idris Elbakri is the chair of the MSA National COMPASS program.

The Evolution of COMPASS MSA National's Training Program

OMAIRA ALAM

Mission: To train Muslim students to manage highly effective campus organizations and to serve their campus community with dedication and excellence.

The COMPASS training philosophy is rooted in the guiding principles of MSA National.

Assessing the Needs, Filling the Void

Since the inception of MSA National in 1963, priority has been given to training Muslim students on how to effectively manage their Muslim Student Associations (MSAs), Islamic Societies, and Muslim Student Unions. Over the past 40 years a number of publications, articles and programs have emerged, most noticeably and widely accepted, "The Training Guide for Islamic Workers" by Dr Hisham Al Talib; a mainstay of every MSA library. After a lull of about fifteen years following the formation of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), a resurgence in the early 1990s of MSA chapters throughout the US and Canada, compelled the new generation of MSA workers to, again, begin the process of leadership training, member motivating, and overall chapter management.

In 1997, a group of Muslim students met in Villanova, Pennsylvania and began the discussion of how to make MSAs better. This gathering was the MSA Core Training Program, otherwise known as McTiP. The Muslim students – highly active members of their local campus communities – who participated in this program were invited by MSA National to help forge the next 10 years of leadership training. The key areas of discussion were leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and chapter management. From this came the inspiration for Leadership Training Programs (LTPs). Throughout the United States and Canada, LTPs were held over the summer months for incoming MSA executive officers and active members recognized by their local chapter executive committees. These LTPs were conducted by former MSA executive members with the assistance of MSA National. The philosophy behind the LTPs was to prepare MSA executive officers with the necessary tools to

become the leaders of tomorrow.

Emerging Priorities: A New Philosophy

In early 2000, a reordering of priorities and recognition of the behind-the-scene workers transformed the Leadership Training Programs into Worker Training Programs or WTPs. This new philosophy emerged with the realization that much of the MSA chapter work was – and continues to be – done with the assistance and resolve of a core group of dedicated volunteers and workers who hold no position on their MSA executive committees. In addition to this, it was a further acknowledgement of the reality of the future whereby most students may not be leaders, but hopefully, active and engaged members of their communities: "Today's Students, Tomorrow's Community."

A New Formula, a New Mission

At that time however, WTPs, although part of the MSA National framework, lacked the cohesive element that allowed them to be a systematic management and training program that would move MSAs to the next level. In the winter of 2003, the executive committee of MSA National approved an idea, spearheaded by the then President, Br Altaf Husain (CWRU and Howard University) and Vice President (Task Forces), Sr Sarah Attia (University of Toronto), to formalize the training efforts aimed at current MSA workers (WTPs) and former MSA workers who would return as trainers (to later become the Train-the-Trainer Program or TTP). Under the leadership of Br Idris El-Bakri (University of Michigan – Ann Arbor) in 2004, the WTPs were considered as part of the training division of the Education and Training Task Force (ETTF) of MSA National. As the then Vice-Chair of ETTF, with a very talented and dedicated team, Br Idris helped formulate the new agenda for training among MSAs. None of this could have been done without the dedication and brilliance of Br Amin Venjara, a graduate of the Wharton School of Business (University of Pennsylvania), and the lead coordinator of MSA National's Strategic Planning meeting in June, 2004.

In the summer of 2005, in Toronto, the training division of the ETTF laid the groundwork for the development of a highly effective and systematic management training program; the end result was COMPASS. Moving out from under the ETTF allowed COMPASS to emerge as a key player in the development of MSA chapters across North America. Foundational to its ethos are the

My Hajj Reflection: A Love Story

MOHAMED SHILIWALA

*Labbayk Allahumma Labbayk.
Labbayka laa shareeka laka labbayk.
InnalHamdah wa Nimata laka wal Mulk.
Laa shareeka lak.*

*Here I am Oh Allah, (in response to Your call),
here I am. Here I am, You have no partner,
here I am. Verily all praise, grace and sovereignty
belong to You. You have no partner.*

So begins the refrain that I recited at the beginning of my Hajj and will continue to recite for the rest of my life. By the Grace of Allah, my wife, my brother, my Auntie, and I were invited by Allah to perform the Hajj this year along with six million other Muslims from around the world. I choose my words very carefully: truly we were invited by Allah. There were many who left their homes with the intention to perform the Hajj and never made it to the Haram for lack of a plane ticket, a Visa clearance, or some other hardship. And then there were those who rode a bike 12,000 km from Chechnya and those who found themselves on the 6th of Dhul Hijjah without a plane ticket or vacation time (more relatable to us blessed Muslim Americans) and yet still made it to Arafat by the 9th of Dhul Hijjah. Throughout the Hajj we were reminded that it was a blessing for us to be in Makkat-ul-Mukarramah, the holiest of cities. Here I am Oh Allah, here I am.

By the Grace of Allah, before the Hajj we visited the Prophet (salAllahu alaihi wassallam) in Medinat-ul-Munawwarrah in preparation for the Hajj. Each day we spent in Medinah leading up to our departure for the Hajj, I felt spiritually stronger and more focused for meeting my Lord at His House. The benefits of this visit are beyond the space allotted to me in this essay; I beg that you ask me to recount the experience next time we meet if only so that I may relive that time through my narration.

Yet nothing truly prepares you for the first time you let your eyes gaze upon the Kabah – a House blessed like no other – where millions have circumambulated for centuries before and perhaps centuries to come, the visitor prays to receive an iota of the blessing

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bestowed upon that house. Seeing the land where Hagar (alaihi salaam) ran searching for water, where Ibrahim (alaihi salaam) built the Kabah, where our beloved Prophet Muhammad (salAllahu alaihi wassallam) began Allah's mission, destroyed the idols and defeated idol worship, your eyes command your heart and soul to make dua'a to Allah Most High. As I made my Tawaaf, I felt connected to humanity, to the universe in a unique, indescribable way. Even though, I was surrounded by millions of people making dua'a, I felt a peaceful solitude in communicating with my Sustainer. Here I am, You have no partner, here I am.

After performing the 'umrah, we went to Mina where we rested for a night before the Day of Arafah. "Hajj is Arafah." The beloved Prophet's (salAllahu alaihi wassallam) emphasis on this rite of the Hajj cannot be lost. It was on the Day of Arafah that Allah revealed the following ayah was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (salAllahu alaihi wassallam): "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion..." (Al Ma'idah 5:4) [Sahih al Bukhari, Fath al Bari, 8/108]. On this day, we spent the afternoon in dhikr and dua'a with brothers and sisters that we have grown to love over the past few days. Standing on that plain begging for the forgiveness of our sins and begging Allah to aid us in following the actions of the messenger of Allah (salAllahu alaihi wassallam) binds our group forever. And, as our beloved Imam Mohamed Haggagid Ali (may Allah be pleased with him and his efforts to guide our group on the Hajj) reminded us, when the sun sets on the Day of Arafah, so too does the sun set on our sins and we are reborn. Dusk has never been and will never be more beautiful to me than on that day. Verily all praise, grace and sovereignty belong to You.

For me this Pilgrimage was made even more special because it was also my honeymoon. Last May, Allah blessed me with a companion that loves and cares deeply for me and my imaan (may Allah continue to increase our love of Allah Most High, Prophet Muhammad (salAllahu alaihi wassallam) and each other). Imagine telling your newlywed wife (who had already faced the hardships of the previous Hajj with her family) that you wanted to go to a place where it would take you unfathomable periods of time to travel short distances (ex.

seven and one-half hours to cover six kilometers), where you will most likely fall sick at least twice in a three week span, where you will probably be shoved and pushed by strangers, where you will spend nights on the floor in tents apart from each other for your honeymoon. A place where, as Imam Magid put it, there is no reason anyone would want to come except for Allah. With a smile on her face and tears in her eyes she threw her arms around me and proclaimed how blessed she was to have married me. Little does she know, it's the other way around. You have no partner.

Here I am, Oh Lord, Here I am...

Mohamed Shiliwala is a happily married 3L student at Seton Hall Law, a graduate of University of Pennsylvania '03, a director on the Board of Directors of Association of Muslim American Lawyers, and a co-President of Seton Hall Law MSA. He currently serves as a COMPASS Trainer and will begin working at Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Preston Gates Ellis - Newark Office in September.

2007 Zonal Conferences

CZ USA
Dearborn, Michigan
March 30-April 1, 2007

EZ USA
Orlando, Florida
April 6-8, 2007

WZ USA
Berkeley, California
April 13th-15th

For More Info Please Visit
<http://www.msa-national.org/conferences/zonal.html>

concepts of organization, management, excellence, experience, direction, and most importantly, training.

A Critical Mass

COMPASS recognized the need for continued growth of MSA chapters with respect to training and development. In addition to this, there was an acknowledgement that excellent MSA workers could be excellent members of any student organization. Therefore, the focus of COMPASS would not be only MSAs, but individual Muslim students who could contribute in a larger capacity to their greater campus community. Finally, there was a realization that a critical mass of MSA workers must come forward who can then pass on the knowledge of previous executive members and workers. The concept of TTPs or Train-the-Trainer Programs formally emerged.

These MSA workers would have distinguished themselves as dedicated individuals both on and off campus, in their larger communities, as part of the MSA National framework, and finally, as MSA Alumni who are able to dedicate the time and have the desire to pass on the knowledge and experience that they are blessed to have. Who better to train incoming MSA executives and workers than former MSA executives and workers? In March 2006, COMPASS graduated its first class of trainers with the assistance of faculty member, Dr. Hatem Bazian (University of California - Berkeley). This spring COMPASS will have its second TTP, inshaAllah.

Excellence, Dedication and Continued Service

Designed to address the continued demand for management training programs for campus organizations, COMPASS hopes to offer Muslim students a full range of the skills, the tools, and the resources they need to best serve their communities. This will be done under the precepts of informed and connected perspectives, experienced and knowledgeable trainers, and applicable concepts and ideas under the banner of MSA National.

Omaira Alam graduated from the University of Toronto and completed her masters in Special Education at the George Washington University. She previously served as VP-Canada and Ex-Officio for MSA National, and currently serves as the chair of the Board of Advisors. She is a staff member of COMPASS.

How To Give A Good Compliment

There's nothing like a warm, sincere compliment to make your day. Instead of waiting for one, why not give one out? Take it from me, the more you give, the more you find you'll receive.

1) Make your compliment specific.

"That necklace looks really good on you" makes a bigger impact compared to "you look really good today". The more specific the better, it makes the person feel like you notice them.

2) Back up your compliment.

Don't just stop at "that necklace looks really good on you". Your compliment becomes stronger when you say why you think so; "that necklace looks really good on you because it matches your eyes".

3) Ask a question with your compliment.

And if you want to use it as a conversational starter, ask a question about the subject of your compliment; "that necklace looks really good on you because it matches your eyes. Where did you find it?".

Why Giving Compliments Raises Your Self-Esteem

It takes confidence and self-esteem to notice good things about others and to make the first caring move to tell them about it. :)

When I first started giving compliments I was awkward and shy about it. I kept wondering if I'd offend them in some way or make people suspicious about what I wanted from them.

I've since discovered that a sincere compliment is always a welcome boost to someone's day. There will be those that reject it or will even argue with you, but that's usually their problem and not yours. A compliment is like a gift, if someone doesn't want your gift you'll still end up owning it. The best way to accept one is also like a gift, just say 'thank you'.

You'll also find when you start noticing good things about people, you'll notice more good things about you too! And the more you do, the more your own self-esteem will grow.

Written by Alvin Soon on February 13th, 2007 under Communication.
<http://lifecoachesblog.com/2007/02/13/how-to-give-a-good-compliment/>

What is COMPASS?

COMPASS is MSA-National's newly formed training program. Designed to address the growing demand for management training programs from campus organizations, COMPASS strives to offer Muslim students the skills, tools, and resources they need to best serve their communities.

The Mission of COMPASS is to train Muslim students to manage highly effective campus organizations and to serve their campus community with dedication and excellence.

The COMPASS training philosophy is rooted in the guiding principles of MSA National.

Our guiding principles are:

Sincerity is the foundation of our existence.

Knowledge precedes our actions.

Humility guides our conduct.

Truthfulness is the mark of our speech.

Moderation is the compass of our journey.

Tolerance is the banner of our outreach.

Forgiveness precedes our reconciliatory efforts.

Patience is the hallmark of our planning.

Gratitude binds our hearts together.

COMPASS provides training workshops on topics such as:

Communication Skills

Conflict Resolution

Gender Interactions

Financial management and fundraising

Project management

Strategic planning

Succession planning

Time management

Website (www.msacompass.org)

To contact COMPASS (chair@msacompass.org)

To request a COMPASS program, contact your MSA National Zonal Representative (www.msanational.org)