

# Taxis, Beds and Abayas – An Swinnen Shares a Glimpse of Her Working Week



## Sunday

5:30 am – I hate getting up! The fact that I was born at 10:15 am must have had a serious impact because that is about the time my brain reaches its “wake-up” point. Unfortunately my Jazeera

plane to Abu Dhabi will not wait for my brain to get into gear so I crawl out of my very comfortable Crowne Plaza bed.

Sunday is Sales and Marketing day and today I am spending it in Abu Dhabi. One of my LinkedIn contacts has tipped me off that her employer is looking for a Train the Trainer course. I also need to follow up on the Business Writing Techniques and Communication skills proposals I sent to a large Abu Dhabi group last week and a local bank needs Call Centre training so I will pay them a visit as well.

First stop: the bank! After a successful meeting and the promise of a tailor-made proposal this week, I hail a taxi and only need to wait for 30 seconds. Happy days! I jump in and give my taxi driver the name of a well-known company, the address and a map full of landmarks. The first reaction is a nodding of the head which is always a good sign. Off we go! After a few minutes it becomes very clear that Husain only speaks five words of English, has only driven a taxi for two days and does not know Abu Dhabi at all. He has no idea where we are going.

What can I do? Shall I get out of the taxi or get swept away by Husain’s learning experience? I decide I am too nice to let him down. Husain uses up his call credit and most of mine while gesturing wildly. We make several stops to ask wise, old men with long beards for directions. We make a lot of U-turns and consult

other drivers while we are all completely stuck in front of the never-changing traffic lights.

The meter is ticking away while we try to figure out which direction to go for. We finally get to my destination in time for my meeting and I give Husain a tip. I am pleased that both of us now know Abu Dhabi a lot better.

## Monday

6:00 am – I hate getting up! After answering the Crowne Plaza wake-up call, switching off my UK mobile phone alarm and the hotel room’s alarm clock, I get out of bed.

Today I am starting the four-day Leadership and Team Building course at KPC’s Petroleum Training Centre in Ahmadi. I enjoy delivering training and helping others to improve their skills. This week we have nine students; all men, middle management and most of them engineers. They are a really nice bunch and soon we are engrossed in discussions, quizzes and Alan Sugar’s the Apprentice.

When we first started in the Gulf, I was concerned that men might have a problem being taught by a young(ish) woman. My fears were completely unfounded. I am given a lot of respect, co-operation and friendship from my students. Kuwait is a great place to be!

## Tuesday

6:00 am – where does the Crowne Plaza get their beds from? They are very difficult to get out of in the morning. I am going to find out so I can ship one to my bedroom in Paignton. You know the old saying: “Invest in a good bed and good shoes because you will always be in one or the other.”

My nine KPC guys all turn up on time. Result! We start our internet projects, watch the Office and play the Apprentice game (incorporating the ever so important Ferrero Rocher as currency!). We role-play charring meetings and discuss how we deal with difficult behaviour, bonuses and absenteeism.

I phone my very good friend Reem Al-Sabah who has her graduation ceremony at the Arab Open University this evening. She will officially receive her Masters degree in Business Administration dressed in the black gown and hood. I am so proud of her. Reem is



a wonderful friend who listens to my frustrations and wipes away the tears if needed. She is happy when I do well and is always ready to feed me. She is a fantastic cook. Her 18 month-old son Abdulla is my little angel who always brings a smile to my face. I give Abdulla bosas (kisses) and in return he gives me remote controls, mobile phones and anything else he

can get his hands on. He is a real business man in the making.

**Wednesday**

Today is my company's 6th birthday. At the Petroleum Training Centre we have a lot of fun with paper, tape, straws and spaghetti. Our debates get very lively and we look at some great leaders in history. We finish the internet projects ready for tomorrow's sessions.

Back at the hotel, I get behind my computer and work until 1 am. I reflect that there was no birthday song, cake nor presents; only a lot of hard work. No one said it was easy.

**Thursday**

The last day of our Leadership and Team Building training. One of my students asked me if I could put my abaya on the last day so they could see what I look like Kuwaiti style. I am only too pleased because I love wearing my beautiful black and gold abaya which I had made in Farwaniya. I walked around it in it for a whole week in Saudi Arabia and felt like a queen. Abayas are beautiful but deadly. Luckily though it didn't kill me while navigating steps, escalators and lifts.

I receive thank you presents and we take a picture which I promise to email them. I am sad to see them go and we linger around for quite a while. Next week: Organization skills and a new group.

I reflect on my life here in the Gulf. My life is filled with five-star hotels, receptions, balls, travel, sheikhs, ambassadors and rich business men. It is also filled with deadlines, pressure and hard work. But in the end it is the friendship and love I receive from people here in the Gulf that makes my life fabulous.

*An Swinnen is the owner of BECS, a British training company that has been established in the Gulf for five years. BECS specialises in Business Skills training, Management training and Train the Trainer.*  
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