

# Subahat Awan

After graduation Subahat worked for Natwest for 3 years. She then worked for a building society for a further year.

After moving back to the Midlands, having always worked in the banking sector, she wanted to try something out on her own.

Throughout the UK people are really accepting Islam and looking for abaya's. (long dress worn by women covering head to toe.) Especially young girls who are coming into it new, as well as reverts. They want something jazzy. I looked into the service they were getting. People were selling from stands or from book shops manned by men. They were not getting the privacy they needed or expected which is important for muslim women.

Away from the main high street where the door will be locked and no men in sight, I decided to provide a personal shopper service. Sisters Clothing provides a large sitting room and thirty different models to choose from.

Sometimes customers will come and try two and buy the two, whereas others will try fifteen but will only buy one. I have had a really, really good response. I know I'm not on the high street but people don't mind travelling, they will ring me and say can you direct us to where you are.

I have so many people who will email me saying, I visited you today and you were like a personal shopper, many thanks.

Up until quite recently women who wanted to dress Islamically wore

Sisters  
Clothing

a black abaya. A couple of weeks ago I had a bride visit the boutique who was looking for something to wear on her big day. I cater for a wide range of customer needs.

All my Abaya's are from Jordon, Al-Karam make. (Al-Karam design house created their first abaya over 80 years ago in Palestine. Their attention to detail in fabric, design, detail, cut, style, embroidery and hand finish has rightfully earned the brand respect across the world.) I've been to Jordon to visit the factory to see what they can offer me. I've discussed embroidery and colours with them.

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"If I keep positive I know it will work out"

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## >> Business Experience

My father has his own business. I helped him to run the business for a year. It was just the two of us. He concentrates on the wholesale side of what I do, whereas I wanted to specifically offer abaya's for ladies. I helped him in marketing, to get his customer base in the first year.

## >> External Business Support

My dad was and is my greatest support. I picked up a lot from working with him. I didn't access any external business support. Having a business degree myself, that was a help.

## >> Doing Business Abroad

My father went with me, when I first visited the factory in Jordon. I was very nervous visiting a factory that was selling world wide but they were so good. They bought out all this material with embroidery for me to look at.

I was quite happy agreeing with them that everything was nice, but they insisted that I needed to be honest with them in terms of my market.

They told me not to be afraid of saying what I thought, they wouldn't be offended. They wanted to provide me something that I was able to sell. One of the key issues was that in England we needed warmer material so they managed to provide this.

### ➤ Greatest Challenge

Getting the marketing done, making people aware of where I was and what I was offering. It was extremely hard but I didn't want to let myself down.

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“If you have an idea, work through it and hope for the best ”

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There are days when I get at least two customers but there also days that I don't get anybody but I am not going to close up at the end of the day with long sad face because no one came. I know with time it will pick up. If I keep positive I know it will work out.

I could shut the door and go home today and say forget it, it's not worth it. I have near enough four years banking experience and it's not hard getting back into it, but I think no, it may take a year but during Ramadan and Eid people will be shopping.

Sometimes when I get home and I've had a bad day, my dad will say, 'Don't worry, tomorrow is another day'. You do need that kind of encouragement every so often. I don't let bad points put me off. I don't expect it to be plain sailing at all and I know there will be times when I have to deal with an unhappy customer.

I may have a fantastic month during Eid but then it may die down but I'm not going to lock up and go away. I said to myself I'm going to give it at least a year and a half to two years to see where I am. After a year I will see whether I'm making the money. I have to pay bills and be able to pay for the stock.

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“Don't get put off if in the first month you have more costs than profit ”

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### ➤ Work - Life Balance

I come in at 11 o'clock, which gives me the morning to do what I need to do. I'm home for 6.30, which gives me the evening for myself.

### ➤ Working From Home V External Premises

I wanted to show women that there was

somewhere they could go and try out the clothing in a female only environment.

I didn't feel working from home was personal enough. Women would not feel comfortable coming into someone's home. I know I wouldn't!

When people ring they will ask, is it a shop? I like to think it's a small boutique. It's a safe environment here. I got affordable premises from Birmingham City Council and they were flexible in what I did with it.

### ➤ Plans For The Next Year

I want to make this grow. I am going to keep on advertising. In the first few months I did aggressive advertising in the form of leafleting. I keep an eye out for Islamic fairs. I believe that you have to keep advertising. In the beginning when I did leaflet distribution i.e. handing out leaflets to passers by on Coventry road etc, I went back the next day to the same area as they are different people on that road everyday.

Sometimes I get people coming with leaflets that they've had for months and that makes me feel that all that advertising hasn't been for nothing. Marketing is a long term thing.

### ➤ Words Of Wisdom

Don't sit there and think I've got this great idea and it's going to work and make me a millionaire in a year. It's going to be a lot of hard work. You will have to put in a lot of hard work.

As I said before I used to close on Fridays but when I first started, it wasn't my day off, I was visiting mosques and distributing flyers.

Don't get put off, if in the first month you have more costs than profit. It will take couple of months to make a bit of profit.

If you have an idea, work through it and start up and hope for the best. When I first came up with my business idea I was very sceptical about it. My father has been a great role model.

People expect you to be millionaires because you are working for yourself, but that is not the reality.

Working for someone else, I was going in every day and was being told what to do and getting a salary at the end of the month. Here I am my own boss and enjoy what I do.