

## One Connection Is All You Need to Find Your Way Into a Job



*“Being proactive and confident was the most important thing. It helped me to build new connections and create new pathways.”*

**- Issam Bahlawan**

***Few know what it's like to be forced to leave their country, their home, and everyone they know.***

***Issam Bahlawan knows very well what it's like, twice over.***

In 2012, Issam and his family were forced out of their home in war-torn Syria. Having spent much of his early childhood in Dubai, Issam fled with this family to the UAE. There, he hoped to find safety and employment.

At first, it looked like Dubai would be a safe haven for Issam and his family. But then things took a turn for the worse when, in 2014, the UAE started rejecting visa renewals and changes for Syrians. With deportation at stake, Issam knew that returning to Syria would put him and his family at great risk and decided to apply for asylum in the US. He and his family lived in the States for two years before making a final move, settling in Canada.

After arriving safely in Canada, Issam and his family had to start rebuilding their lives once again. As a two-time refugee, Issam knew that finding a good job was the first step.

Like many refugees, Issam first went to a Newcomer Centre in search of opportunity. There they helped him with his resume, highlighting his extensive banking and management experience, and tried to connect him with a job. But nothing relevant to his experience came to pass.

Needing a new way to search for jobs, Issam started to focus on networking. “I had to be proactive and search for different paths to

## Building New Connections with Confidence

succeed. I couldn't wait for someone to hand me a job. I needed to build my own connections.”

Through emails, phone calls, and in-person encounters, Issam asked everyone he met to have coffee with him. These casual, brief meetings allowed him to have meaningful conversations with contacts and grow a valuable, professional network.

One of Issam's coffee contacts suggested he talk to Bassel Ramli, the founder of the Refugee Career Jumpstart Project and Canadian partner to LinkedIn's Welcome Talent initiative.

Introducing himself to Bassel proved to be the tipping point. Impressed by his finance background and tenacity, Bassel paired Issam with a mentor—Ryan from Scotiabank.

It was after getting to know Issam and seeing his expertise that Ryan saw an opportunity come up through his bank. Believing Issam would be a great fit, he made the introduction to the recruiter and things took off from there.

Issam is now a financial advisor at Scotiabank, using his past management and finance skills to rebuild his career.

“If I stayed idle in looking for work, I might still be searching. Being proactive and confident was the most important thing. It helped me to build new connections and create new pathways,” Issam says.

You can help newcomers like Issam in your own community by offering career coaching or becoming a mentor. Visit [LinkedIn Volunteer Marketplace](#) to find a volunteer opportunity in your area.