

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

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I am Charles Ghais Younes, the Retail Sales Manager of Mercedes-Benz in Abu Dhabi working under Emirates Motor Company part of Al Fahim group. I oversee both the strategic planning and the day-to-day operations of the retail division, spanning new cars department, used cars, and digital sales.

My role is centered on creating seamless, customer-focused experience while driving performance across multiple channels in an increasingly evolving market.

I joined EMC back in 2021 coming from Lebanon to strengthen and elevate the retail function, building on an award-winning career across international automotive brands such as Mazda, Opel, and Ford.

Since joining Mercedes-Benz, I have further developed my technical expertise, earning certifications as a Mercedes-Benz Sales Manager, and AMG Product Manager. Academically, I hold a Bachelor's degree in Public Relations and Advertising from the Lebanese University, alongside a Global MBA from the University of Hull, and a CMI Level 7 Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership Practice.

Through my role and experience, I strive every day to serve the community I live in, support the company I represent, and uphold the values of the brand I belong to, ensuring every decision and action is guided by that shared sense of purpose and responsibility.



Q: When people hear "Sales Manager," they usually think targets and numbers, but what drew you to the automotive industry in the first place, and what's kept you passionate about it?

Charles: I believe I can speak for everyone in the automotive industry when I say that it's always the raw emotion that helplessly draws you to it. This unmistakable energy that takes over your mind and body when you step into a high-performance car, hear an engine come to life and connect with a machine that is designed to fuel your adrenaline is irresistible to many, and it was certainly a key factor that pulled me to join this world.

But as I immersed myself in the industry, I quickly discovered that it goes beyond the horsepower and design, and that a parallel world built on human connection, trust, and life milestones exists. I realized that buying a car is always attached to a deeper and more meaningful dimension, it could be someone's first car expressing independence, or a family upgrade that invites happy weekend trips, or a fulfillment of a lifelong dream. Being part of those moments helped me find a purpose that I hadn't initially anticipated.

Charles: What kept me passionate over the years was the opportunity to challenge and reshape the narrative around the automotive industry, and especially the sales part. On a personal basis, I find myself heavily driven by a strong sense of purpose of serving the local community, first by consciously refusing to furnish anything other than eco-friendly vehicles with the latest technological features of safety and comfort, in spirit of making our roads a safer place on one hand, and our planet greener on the other, and by that, also serving our company's purpose of actively contributing towards this community's wellbeing.

It's no secret that the industry has historically carried a reputation for aggressive tactics or lack of transparency, the same reason that I have persevered throughout my career to promote honest trading and convey to both my customers and my team that success in sales can be built on honesty, integrity, and a genuine care for the customer's needs.

Q: What does a typical day look like for you behind the scenes?

Charles: A typical day begins with alignment, as I start each morning with a focused meeting with sales teams and supervisors to set priorities, review performance, and ensure everyone is clear on the day's objectives. It's also an important moment to motivate and support the team, and reinforce the shared sense of direction and belonging.

From there, the day becomes a balance between operational oversight and strategic collaboration. A significant part of my role involves working closely with both internal stakeholders and external partners, especially Mercedes-Benz regional office.

Topics that can range between setting and aligning on the broad strategy and positioning of our brand and products in our market, to forecasts and targets, in addition to future projects and in particular, today's main topic of digitalization, and the exhaustive details of designing, executing, and implementing new solutions to continuously enhance the customer journey and stay ahead of evolving expectations.

Internally, I spend time also meeting with marketing and F&I teams, shaping offers and campaigns that are not only commercially effective but also in line with the brand's desired positioning. Regular alignment sessions with fellow managers and the General Manager are equally vital to review implementation, monitor key performances, and adjust our approach when needed.

One of the more distinctive aspects of my role is participating in the vehicle ordering meetings. This painstaking exercise extends to curating highly individualized specifications, color combinations, trims and features with a clear customer persona in mind for each of the products. This is one of the many areas that I like to leverage data within the daily operations to ensure that our products resonate with our clientele.

Like everyone else, I rush home after a long day to spend time with my wife and two boys, then I try to end most weekdays with a game of Padel against random opponents. I see it as a great way to unwind, stay fit, and exercise my healthy sense of competitiveness in an aim to evolve both on a physical and mental levels.



Q: You're balancing both showroom and digital sales - how do you switch between the two worlds throughout the day?

Charles: Balancing showroom and digital sales today isn't about switching between two separate worlds anymore, it's about integrating them into one seamless journey. Digitalization is no longer an option or a luxury, it is a necessity. The shift was already underway until COVID19 pandemic took place and accelerated both the adoption and the audience acceptance, making customers more comfortable, exploring, engaging, and even purchasing remotely. My approach always places customers in the middle of any process we create, even when interactions keep shifting between online and offline, the goal is to always maintain consistency, trust, and a high level of personalization.

I can proudly say with great poise that EMC has managed to create one of the most advanced automotive retail ecosystems in the world.

In March 2023, we had the elements of this ecosystem dissected during an event held at our premises that aimed to recognize and showcase the best-practice to all the Mercedes-Benz General Distributors in the world, to aspire from and take back to their markets for implementation. On a personal level, one of the main challenges that I faced during this transitional period was the resistance to change and the push back from my team, particularly around the perception revolving around the digital tools and AI and the notorious idea that they will eventually replace human interaction and take over jobs

This experience has evolved me as a leader, and helped me hone many skills to successfully guide the team throughout this global disruption, first by creating clarity, building confidence and then by making sure that everyone feels included in the change rather than threatened by it.



Q: You lead a team of 40+ people from different backgrounds - how do you keep everyone aligned while still adapting to different personalities and working styles?

Charles: When I first joined back in 2021 it was surely a challenge, but it soon became a second nature for me to communicate effectively with my extremely diverse team, especially when I learned how to develop and leverage my CQ (Cultural Intelligence). In a market like Abu Dhabi, understanding different perspectives, communication styles, and motivations remains vital.

In today's world, the romanticized image of a leader being the most powerful, charismatic, or technically gifted person in the room is no longer valid. I am personally a true believer and a practitioner of democratic leadership, and I think that the successful leader today is the one who exercises empathy, listens to other team members, and rallies them behind a clear vision.

I honestly believe that my duty as a Retail Sales Manager goes beyond managing the sales business, it extends to developing each and every team member in order to generate the maximum of their potential, and prepare them to take my place one day, achieving a healthy succession plan.

To achieve that, I often find myself leaning towards coaching methods as opposed to traditional trainings, in which guiding individuals to think, adapt, and grow is key, rather than simply instructing them. This helped me establish credibility with my team, and helped build an environment of ownership and long-term capability.

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast”!

Peter Drucker

Q: Is there a moment in your typical day where things can shift quickly, and you have to make a call on the spot? What does that look like for you?

Charles: We are all witnessing an era of constant and rapid change, whether technological, economic, or social, and it is those who can be agile enough to adapt to these changes who can survive and sustain.

I think of that every day, and especially in automotive retail where even the most well-structured day can shift within minutes, and it's in those moments that composure is needed from me to assess facts quickly, and act in a way that protects both the customer experience and the brand's integrity.

Taking for example the recent supply chain upheaval affecting hundreds of deliveries, and while this is an external factor, it is our duty to be transparent with customers, manage expectations, and offer alternative solutions that still meet their needs.

Similarly, when it comes to negotiation, there's often a point where you need to make a call on the spot. It's a balance between understanding the customer's position, the value of the product, and the business's profitability.

I personally approach it as a problem solving exercise rather than a transaction, finding common ground where both sides feel they've achieved something meaningful.

In conversation with Charles...

Q: A lot of your work sits behind the scenes - like stock planning and strategy - how do those decisions show up in the customer experience?

Charles: It is no secret that strategy and planning are core factors in any company's sustainability. Before taking any decision in that regard we usually step back and take a broader look on how that affects the customer experience first. Colour combinations for example, and especially in a market like Abu Dhabi where a true mosaic of cultures, preferences, and lifestyles exists, there is definitely no single "standard" taste. Ensuring that we cater to the wide spectrum of needs from bold and expressive to understated elegance, means that our showrooms should always feel relevant, personal, and aligned with the diversity of the community we serve.

Specifications on the other hand also play a critical role, not only in product appeal but also in pricing and positioning. The more equipped a vehicle is, the higher the value becomes, which naturally affects how each model sits within our wide portfolio, and within the market. These decisions require an adequate sense of balance to manage demand and brand positioning in order to ensure competitive advantage.

Sitting behind the scenes, I strive on a personal level to ensure that what we bring to the market is not just desirable cars, but also well-equipped, safe, and appropriately positioned for the people we serve. I consider that a daily opportunity for me to work towards my purpose and contribute towards a more transparent and balanced way to do business.



Q: In such a target-driven environment, how do you keep your team motivated in a way that goes beyond just hitting numbers?

Charles: A.I strongly believe that no matter how strong the strategy is, it will only work if the culture behind it supports it. I find the following words of Peter Drucker very relevant when it comes to motivating a team when he said, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast"!

For me, keeping a team motivated is not about making isolated decisions to push individuals left and right depending on the situation. It is about consistently building and reinforcing a culture that motivates people from within, especially that motivation is not one-dimensional.

It's never about bean bags and nice offices, not even about pay and rewards alone, as different people are often driven by different things. Some are motivated financially, and others by career progression and growth, and others by giving back to a family-owned company that has supported and invested in them throughout the years in the thick and thin.

Recognizing and reflecting on those different purposes is key to leading effectively.

What helps me most in bringing all of this together is ensuring that the team is aligned around a shared value set, and genuinely dedicated to the mission and vision we're working toward. When people believe in what we are doing and feel part of something bigger than themselves, motivation becomes natural rather than enforced.

My role is to nurture that belief, inculcate that culture and ensure it remains consistent even in highly-performance-driven environments.

Q: What's something in your daily routine that people would never expect, but actually makes a big difference in how you perform?

Charles: Before the calls, meetings, and the daily rush begins, I take a short window - usually early in the morning - to observe the showroom before it "comes alive".

Just a few minutes of walking through the space, cherishing the polished cars aesthetic, and enjoying the fresh smell of new cars does it for me. It helps me stay grounded in the product, and not treat it as a unit or a number, but almost like a living thing!

Another part of my routine that I value is the informal "water cooler conversations" taking place throughout the day. Taking a few minutes to speak with the team about anything other than work creates a very human connection, and helps me understand what's going on with them personally, and at the same time give them and myself a mental reset from the intensity of targets and operations.

Those small moments remind us that we are not just colleagues chasing numbers, but a team working in harmony.



For anyone reading who's seeking to grow into a leadership role- what's one piece of advice you'd want them to take away from your journey?

One saying that has always resonated with me throughout my entire career is: "We have too much to gain from the present to think about the future". It reflects the adverse mindset I've often seen in large corporate environments, where people get stuck in the status-quo and sometimes attempt to over-protect it, instead of feeling the imminent urge to innovate and fully engage with what's coming. For anyone aiming to grow into leadership, my advice is to focus on continuous reinvention. The environment, the tools, and the expectations are in constant evolution, so your ability to adapt is what defines your long-term success.

At the same time, reinvention should always be balanced with empathy. Understanding customers, colleagues, and teams is what keeps you grounded and effective, and building a culture that encourages calculated risk taking and accepts mistakes is a necessity for innovation and reinvention. Mistakes will happen, decision will not always land perfectly, but each one is an opportunity to learn, improve, and eventually build the much-needed resilience to navigate today's disruptions.

Thank you Charles for your time.

