



PASSION + PRAGMATISM MAKES THE MAN

“Don’t Clap, Emulate” — AZAM JAMIL Rock Star Refuses To Retire!

He is 67 years young, 6 feet 2 and a half inches tall, and a 100 kg which is 20 more kilos than his fighting weight of many years ago when he terrorized the Pakistan tennis circuit in the doubles format as the national champion, and led the high life as a jet-setting hotel executive, a life-long career to which he was introduced by his doubles tennis partner at the Sind Club, Air Marshal Nur Khan.

As chairman PIA and Pakistan Services Limited, the owning company of the Intercontinental Hotels in Pakistan, the legendary former Air Chief saw in Azam Jamil a gem whose induction into the hospitality industry would help remove from it the social stigma that it suffered from which kept away bright sparks from good families from joining it.

Schooled in Aitchison College (Lahore) and Burn Hall (Abbottabad), Azam acquired a Bachelor’s degree from the University of Karachi and came up to speed with the hospitality industry at the Cornell University in Ithaca (New York) sponsored by the Intercontinental Hotels.

Fine Work-Life Balance

Married to Sharmeen with three kids, daughters Mahnam and Anique, and son Mekaal, and two grandkids from Mahnam (daughter Arya and son Azmair), Azam Jamil has spent an illustrious career spanning over 3 decades in the hospitality trade in various positions that have spanned both ends of the spectrum from the 5 Star intercontinental Hotels in Pakistan to running a 40 rooms self-owned motel with his young bride in the ski resort of Steamboat Springs, Colorado (USA), to a notable stint with the Serena Hotels (South & Central Asia) as Corporate Head of Sales & Marketing during which the 5 Star Deluxe Islamabad property was opened.

In between he worked for the multinational Berger Paints heading up their sales and marketing effort as well as a few years with his family’s textile business. Before joining his father-in-law Azam worked for Sadruddin Hashwani as director marketing for the two Marriott hotels which at the time were Holiday Inns.

His last two formal appointments were as the Chief Operating Officer of the Hashoo Education Division and head of the Hashoo School of Hospitality Management from which he retired on the 20th of August 2020 because the projects he was

directly looking after got delayed by a year or so due to COVID-19. The day he tweeted his exit from the Hashoo Group after 3 wonderful years, the phone started ringing and wouldn’t stop!”

As vigorous as ever!

When one door closes another opens, he says. “Despite me being on the wrong side of 67 in an environment where people would rather talk to a young 35 years old than a baba like me, Allah has been very kind. The chairman of TEVTA (Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority) called and wanted to see me about upgrading the organization.”

Azam appears very far from hanging up his boots. He is as vigorous as ever, Mashallah, following his open heart bypass surgery of a few years ago that seems to have ignited his afterburners in no uncertain manner, and he is to be found tearing up the golf fairways on a regular basis and engaging in the climbing of mountains, a passion that he shares with his son Meekal.

OCTARA.Com caught up with Azam Jamil in Islamabad over WhatsApp, and did a fairly thorough job debriefing him on the many wisdoms and learning he has picked up along the way during a life well lived indeed.

Leveling the playing field with TEVTA

Octara.com: TEVTA appears at the top of your To Do list post-retirement. What is it that you’re getting into?

AZAM JAMIL: TEVTA has 400 technical colleges and institutes that are doing a truly wonderful job with an enrolment of 200,000 girls and boys. These are kids from less-privileged backgrounds learning engineering with a fees structure starting

“If you can’t convince a rich person from Sialkot to go to Moenjodaro then why will someone from Berlin come?”

from 4500 rupees per year which includes pickup and drop. Girls enroll in fashion design as well.

My first job is to include a series of soft skills into the TEVTA curriculum. Obtaining a technical diploma is not enough. The students must know how to dress, eat, speak and communicate. Secondly, I have to introduce Hospitality programs of varying durations into the curricula of TEVTA given its urgent need nowadays. Thirdly, TEVTA has a facility in Murree that the Prime Minister wants to convert into a Center of Excellence, a bit like the Rausing Center at LUMS.

I visited the TEVTA facilities in Jhang and Sargoda that left me truly impressed with their state of the art premises. In Faisalabad there were 5000 disciplined kids in uniform in one college spread over 43 acres. In Sargoda the college is spread over 37 acres. TEVTA does a diploma program with Matric a requirement and also has a graduate program in association with the University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore. It’s truly leveling the playing field.

Knowing one’s limitations

Octara.com: As a notable Pakistani tennis star of your times what would you say limited your progression into the international rankings?

AZAM JAMIL: Economics. Tennis could not sustain me in any form. I had to work. I have always been very honest with myself. I knew I was good, but I also knew that I was not that good. I was doing well in a Pakistani context. I knew my limitations. The last national championship I won was in 1984

which was 10 years after I started working.

Octara.com: Were you ever motivated to try your hand at coaching and producing the next Wimbledon Champion, perhaps?

AZAM JAMIL: I’ve managed Pakistan’s Davis Cup team. Coaching is a skill I don’t possess. TV channels tend to call anybody who can cook a chef. Being a chef requires a degree. My grandmother used to cook but was not a chef. Coaching is a very responsible function. If you say something wrong to an 11 years old you could actually be destroying his career, and I didn’t want to risk that. I was a very good tennis player and Pakistan’s doubles champion and I played internationally. But today when Hameed ul Haq asks me to give tips to the kids, I am very wary. My son is a good tennis player and once a week or so father and son go to the courts and hit a few balls. That remains my connection with tennis.

Changing horses

My prime sport these days is golf, and I play to a good 8 and bad 6 handicap. Strangely enough, my golf improved after my bypass heart surgery two and a half years ago. My life physically improved. The stereotype of not climbing stairs and restricting movement didn’t apply and I was climbing mountains. My son climbs up the Margala Hills to Monal often and I try to keep up.

I started golf in the USA once we shifted to Colorado after marriage in 1984-85. We had invested in a motel and our house was on the fairway of the Robert Trent Jones PGA golf course. Our back garden merged with the fairway and sometimes I had to tell the players that there ball was out-of-bounds. I had the good fortune once of walking behind Payne Stewart and Fred Couples on their practice round a couple of days before a major championship.

Azam Jamil ‘s association with renowned bodies of Pakistan



PAKISTAN
TENNIS FEDERATION



SERENA HOTELS
SAFARI LODGES AND CAMPS
HOTELS • RESORTS

IHG® InterContinental
Hotels Group

Brush with self-employment

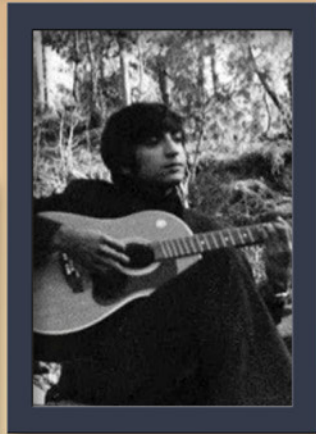
Octara.com: It’s quite intriguing, this shift from 5 Star Hotels to Mom & Pop Motel. How come?

AZAM JAMIL: I got married into a business family and my father-in-law suggested I invest in a motel in the USA that required just 10% down payment. When I got married I was already working for Intercontinental Hotels which I had joined in the mid-1970s, a time when people from good families didn’t work in the hotel industry. It wasn’t the done thing as opposed to now when it’s the flavor of the day. So, my father-in-law figured that I should work for myself.

COLORFUL MEMORIES OF AZAM JAMIL



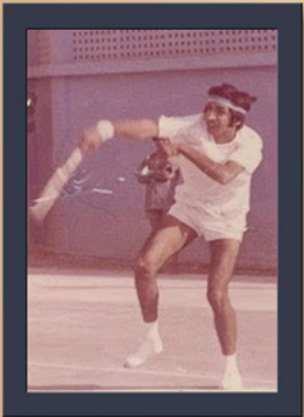
With PTV's veteran actor Late Shafi Mohammad Shah



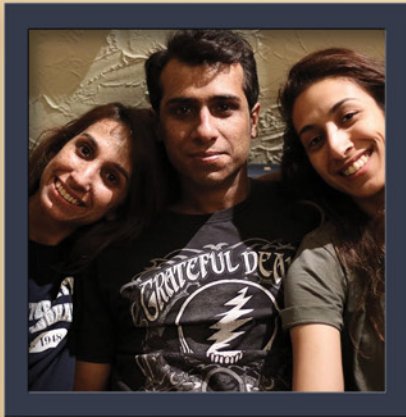
John Lennon Days "Imagine there's no Heaven"



Performing at New Year's Eve in 1982 at the Intercontinental Hotels Group, Rawalpindi



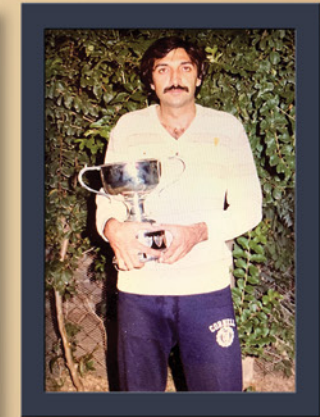
#MeAt20 National Championships Karachi



My Kids Anique, Meekal and Mahnam



Daughter Mahnam with the Champion Ali, a close friend of my Father-in-Law



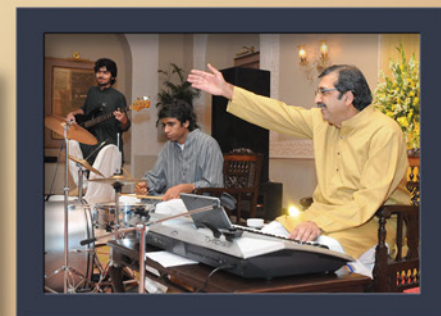
Cornell Tennis Team in 1976



Manager of the Pakistan Davis Cup Team, Colombo



Receiving the Virgin Airlines Award in London for the Serena Shigar Fort



Performing at my daughter's dholki event with son Meekal on the drums

Steamboat Springs, Colorado was the 4th largest skiing resort in the world in the 1980s and home of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, and we spent a wonderful six years of our lives there, between 1983-89. It was a profitable business but Mom & Pop operations had 60 years as the average age of operator, and we were in our 20s. We were in the wrong business at the wrong

part of our lives, and needed to do this once we had retired. 25 years old don't run such motels, but we said what the heck! We were living very comfortably. I had a Ford Mustang V8 and flying for Air Search & Rescue. I was the County tennis champion and won the State doubles championship. We travelled back and forth to Pakistan twice a year, but didn't save any money.

“Teaching is one profession where the older you are the more respect you get!”

Volunteerism

Octara.com: While in the USA you received “Pilot of the Year Award” from the State of Colorado for search & rescue work. How come?

AZAM JAMIL: In the USA I got a Commercial Pilot’s License with Instrument Rating. In Colorado we were in a small village and its rule was that every permanent resident had to put in 150 hours of community service per year. The chief of police assigned me flying for search and rescue because I was the only one with a flying license, and while everyone else got a new assignment every year I got stuck with flying!

Tiring of the American Dream

Octara.com: – So, what brought you two back to Pakistan?

AZAM JAMIL: Being genetic desis we got too homesick, and couldn’t imagine ourselves living amongst strangers for the rest of our lives. Returning to Pakistan the multinational Berger Paints hired me to head their sales and marketing with 400 people in the field, and I became the youngest in the industry in that senior position, reporting to an English boss with budget meetings in London. 6 months later Vijay Maliya bought Berger Worldwide and since the regional headquarters of Berger shifted to Calcutta I had to go there often.

From Berger I moved to the Holiday Inn (now Marriott) as Director Sales & Marketing, and had been there for 5 months when my father-in-law asked me to join him in his textiles business.

Serena beckons

After 3 years in 1998 I was approached by Serena Hotels and was overjoyed with the opportunity to return to hospitality. Although Serena was not doing well at the time I said yes in no time, and it was one of the best decisions that I have taken in my life. I was subsequently part of a team involved in opening many new Serena properties.

The Serena had properties in Faisalabad, Quetta, Gilgit and Swat. The Gilgit and Swat hotels belonged to PIA that were acquired by Serena while Faisalabad and Quetta His Highness built himself. The question of further investment didn’t arise since the company was in such a bad way. We weren’t in a single primary city and I made my case for opening in Islamabad. Several shuttles to Paris later the go ahead was received but for a 3 to 4 star property. Somewhere during the construction process the decision was taken to make the Islamabad Serena the best in Pakistan. So from 3 or 4 star we went to 5 Star deluxe.

Prioritize domestic tourism

Octara.com: Pakistan is said to be the world’s best kept tourism secret, and when one looks at the contribution of the tourism sector to the GDP one is inclined to believe that assertion. Why has our fabled oriental hospitality failed to find a foothold in the international market?

AZAM JAMIL: Our problem is that we always talk about the demand side whereas tourism is about supply. From Balakot to Naran is a driving nightmare due to the condition of the road. There are potholes that will eat up a Suzuki Mehran. That’s where tourism starts. Get your supply-side working. We have a 5000 years old civilization. What is the biggest asset of our civilization? Our stories! Start selling stories! Stop selling infrastructure. The guide at the Lahore Fort will point out the Diwan-e-Aam and the Diwan-e-Khas, and that’s it. That Fort has more than 3 million stories attached to it. Look at Egypt and the Pyramids. It’s no more than a graveyard and not aesthetically beautiful. All they do is sell their stories and a whole lot of merchandise associated with them. We need to stop selling infrastructure and start selling stories. So fixing the supply side of tourism should become a priority.

The other thing is that we need to prioritize domestic tourism and not hanker after international tourists. We have 230 million people. If you can’t convince a rich person from Sialkot to go to Moenjodaro then why will someone from Berlin come? The Taj Mahal attracts 800,000 foreigners every year. What people don’t realize is that 3 million Indians visit the Taj Mahal during the same period. That’s the cake. International tourism is the cherry on the cake. We have forgotten about the cake and focused solely on the cherry. Tourism is a domestic activity. Once we have done this then we can go looking for the cherry, and preferably the high-end cherry.

“Parathas” and Netflix!

Octara.com: Your YouTube Channel’s tagline “Developing People” is a natural outcome of the 30 years you have spent as a corporate trainer. During this lengthy journey what have you found to be the strengths and weaknesses of Pakistan’s human resource?

AZAM JAMIL: The mistake we make is that we connect learning with our current employment. Customer service people do not see the relevance of finance and other functions in their work. This is the biggest obstacle to learning and corporate growth.

The old interview question of “tell me a little bit about yourself” is passé and replaced with “what did you do during COVID?” Try telling them your life revolved around “Parathas” and Netflix! In these 5 months how much time did you invest in your self-improvement? Did you read books or do online research in your profession?

Companies ask me how I monitor outcome. But that’s their job! I make the interventions and they have to tell me how successful I have been. The line manager is the one who can tell me if the attendee’s training has had any effect. Training has become a profession whereas I have always treated training as a service to society.

Octara.com: How are you involved with FranklinCovey Pakistan?

AZAM JAMIL: FranklinCovey Pakistan is a direct franchisee of FranklinCovey USA which is amongst the top 10 providers of management training in the world. The delivery channel needed

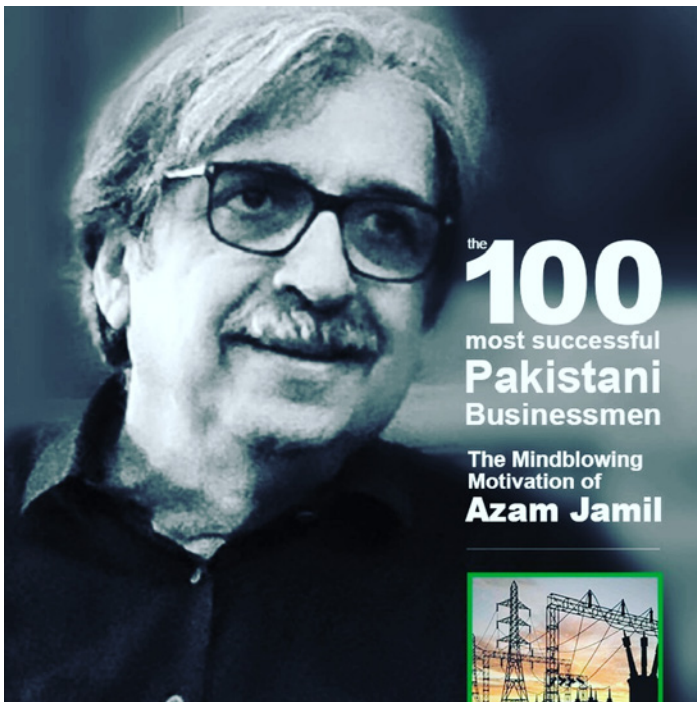
strengthening to deliver a fairly complex program to senior management. Eight years ago while working for Serena and with its approval I had delivered FranklinCovey programs to a few corporates so they knew me.

I am now FranklinCovey's senior consultant engaged by them on a need basis to deliver all FranklinCovey programs on their menu starting with Jaffer Brothers in Karachi to deliver the world famous 7 Habits. It's a 2 days program with 3 habits done on day 1 and 4 habits on day 2.

I am also engaging with Artistic Milliner with whom I have a contract for 2 trainings per month for 1 year, along with Hush Puppies. Other than these contracts there is room for random training. I deliver training to AKUH and Shaukat Khanum on a volunteer basis.

Training was never part of my job description and only became so when 4 years ago I was asked to set up a training division within the Serena chain. Training was always a passion and I did it because I liked doing it. I have worked in operations, sales and marketing as part of my job. Training was always something on the side like my tennis and music. I enjoyed doing it so much that I became very good at it. Ironically, had I not become a trainer in my spare time I would have no job today. Teaching is one profession where the older you are the more respect you get!

You walk into MIT and the average age of the professor is 80.



Whither intellectual content?

Octara.com: You did more than try your hand at acting during the early days of PTV. Share with us some recollections of those days rubbing shoulders with and learning from legends.

AZAM JAMIL: My acting days were very fruitful because a lot of nice people were in the field of arts like Yawar Hayat, Ashfaq Ahmed and Aslam Azhar. They were not just good technicians but were good people, and one learnt a lot from them. Rahat Kazmi and I did a two-man series with him playing Aristotle and I playing Plato, with the make-up people spending an hour to turn us into these Greek philosophers. My own father didn't recognize me! We just sat in one room, two people talking to each other. This was Rahat's idea and when he presented it to the big wigs they actually approved it even though it had no

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commercial value with no songs, sex, drama or violence. It was just intellectual content over 5 episodes. Now it's all about commercialism with the advertiser deciding.

In the 1960s and 70s there was a lot of contribution to art. Ashfaq sahib and Bano Qudsiya exchanged pleasantries and taught you humanity, not acting. Having daal-roti with Amanat Ali Khan was a rare learning experience in itself. Also there was no other channel except PTV which everyone was connected with. We were rookies.

Rahat Kazmi and Shahzadi introduced me to television. Once you were there then it was a very small community, and offers started coming once they saw you perform. But, once again, I was working and had to be at the Intercontinental Hotel at 9am and my involvement with PTV had to be very limited.

Octara.com: Do you ever get the feeling that you missed your vocation as a musician given your passion for it and the presence of huge talent in your immediate family like nephews Rohail Hayat, Ali Noor and Ali Hamza?

AZAM JAMIL: The good news is that I've played music at a very high level but haven't commercialized it. I continue to do so to unwind. Tina Sani and Adeel Hashmi are good friends. It's like tennis and flying which I have done as hobbies and as a volunteer.

Two Thumbs Up!

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Azam Jamil has proved to be a man for all seasons, an all-rounder who has lived life to the hilt and yet succeeded in his role as an enlightened family man who has empowered his wife and two daughters in no uncertain manner, and allowed his son to chart his own route in life which he has done in admirable fashion. Bravo! ■

Thank you, Mr. Azam Jamil.

Interview conducted by Adil Ahmad (Correspondent, OCTARA.COM)