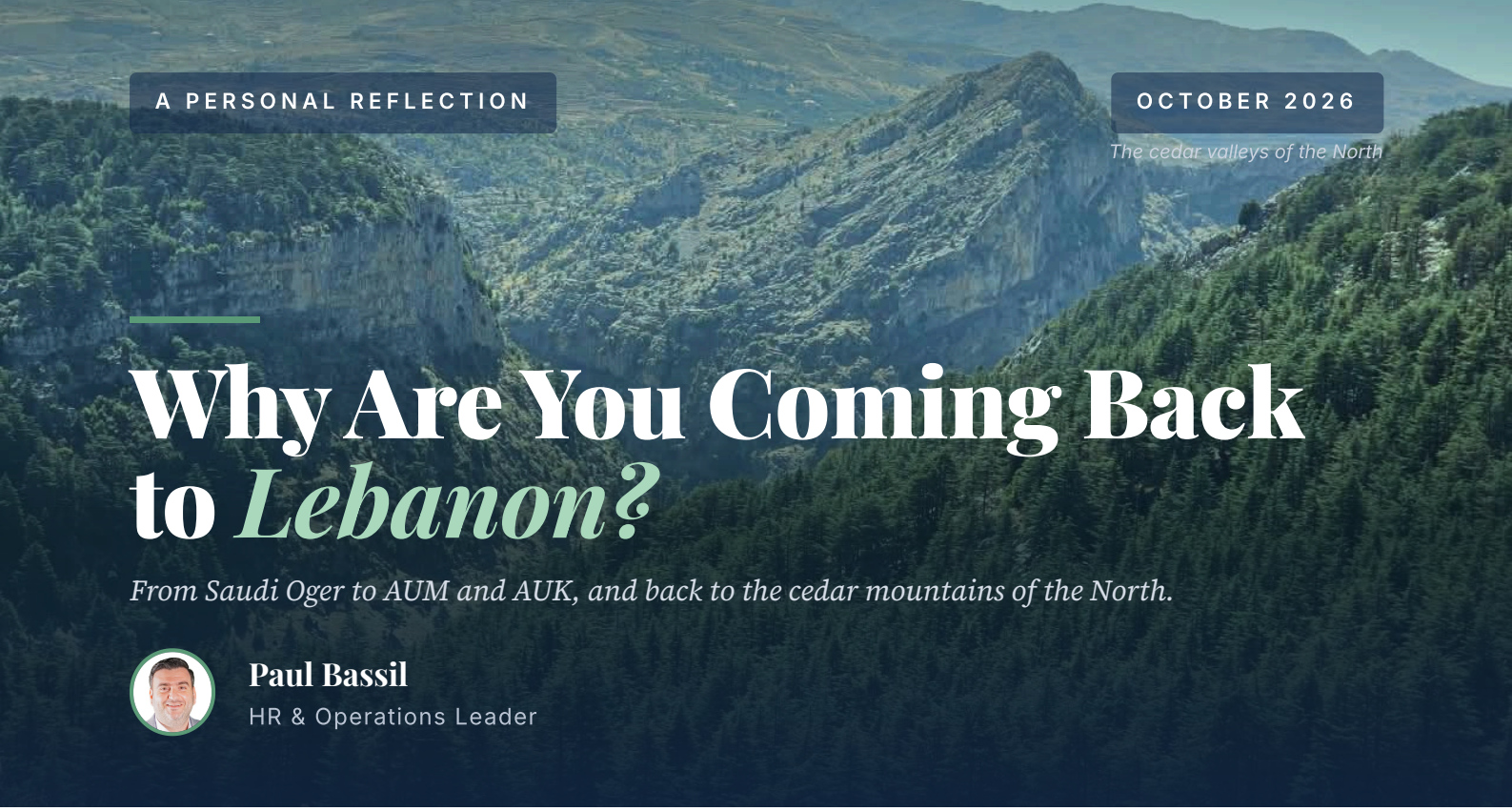


A PERSONAL REFLECTION

OCTOBER 2026

The cedar valleys of the North

Why Are You Coming Back to *Lebanon?*

From Saudi Oger to AUM and AUK, and back to the cedar mountains of the North.

Paul Bassil
HR & Operations Leader

Over the past few months, I have been asked one question more than any other. It came from colleagues in Kuwait, from friends in Riyadh and Dubai, from recruiters, and, with a slightly raised eyebrow, from people here at home.

> ***Why are you coming back to Lebanon?***

Sometimes it was asked with admiration, sometimes with concern, and often with genuine curiosity. As I begin a new chapter back home, I want to try to answer it honestly.

THE JOURNEY SO FAR

Saudi Oger	KAUST	AUM	AUK	Home
SAUDI ARABIA	SAUDI ARABIA	KUWAIT	KUWAIT	NORTH LEBANON
Where it began	*Built from the ground up*	*Pace and discipline*	*Eight years*	*Back to the roots*

WHERE I GREW UP PROFESSIONALLY

01 The GCC years

I left Lebanon like many of my generation did: with ambition, a suitcase, and the quiet assumption that "abroad" was where careers were built.

My GCC journey began at **Saudi Oger** in Saudi Arabia, where I first saw what large-scale operations demand, and how completely they depend on the people behind them.

The GCC gave me far more than a career. At **KAUST** in Saudi Arabia, I saw what an institution looks like when it is built from the ground up with world-class ambition, and I learned that systems, policies, and people have to grow together, or none of them work. At the **American University of the Middle East**, I learned the pace and discipline of a fast-growing institution, where HR is not a support function but part of the engine.



Saudi Oger



American University of the Middle East





American University of Kuwait

Then came **eight years at the American University of Kuwait**. That role grew well beyond Human Capital to include Facilities Management, Security, and Government Relations. I learned to navigate labor law and social insurance regulation, to sit across the table from ministries and vendors, to revamp policies, to implement HRMS, ATS and e-learning platforms and the infrastructure behind them, and, more than anything, to understand that every policy eventually lands on a real person with a family, a story, and a reason to care about their work.

I am deeply grateful to the GCC. It trusted me with responsibility, exposed me to international standards, and introduced me to colleagues from dozens of nationalities who became friends. I do not see my return as leaving the GCC behind. I carry it with me.

LESSONS THAT CAME FROM PEOPLE, NOT POLICIES

02 What the people taught me

The lessons that stayed with me did not come from policies or organization charts. They came from people.

I think of a **security guard** who, after his shifts, taught himself Excel. He asked for small tasks, then bigger ones, until he was building reports others relied on. Today he is a coordinator. He did the hard work; we only had to notice it and open the door.

I think of a **shy employee** who barely spoke in meetings. With coaching, patience, and a real chance to try, they became one of our most confident frontline faces: polished, composed, and proud of the role they grew into.

I think of our **annual dinners**, and the faces of children watching their mother or father walk up to be recognized. That pride in a child's eyes is worth more than any certificate we handed out.

I think of the **messages of thanks** from employees we stood beside during the pandemic and in times of war and uncertainty. Keeping salaries flowing, checking on families, and simply calling to ask "are you okay?" meant more than any benefit written on paper.

I think of something as simple as a **raffle draw**, and the genuine joy it brought to a room. Recognition does not always need a big budget. Sometimes it only needs a moment where people feel seen and celebrated together.

And how can I forget **the manager who believed in me**? He supported me, polished me, and in everything he did he was the leading example. He accepted my mistakes as part of learning and never once made me feel blamed. Much of the leader I try to be today, I learned by watching him.

How can I forget, too, **the difficult manager** who taught me just as much, by showing me exactly what kind of leader I never wanted to become. Sometimes the clearest lessons come from the examples we choose not to follow.

And how can I forget **my colleagues**: the friendships that grew out of long days, the people who covered for each other, celebrated each other, and carried each other through hard seasons. I also learned, sometimes the hard way, that not every relationship

at work is what it seems. Some colleagues are **not always genuine**, saying one thing in the room and another outside it, and some are willing to bend ethics when it suits them. Those moments taught me to value integrity over charm, and to build teams where trust is earned, protected, and never taken for granted.

I also learned from the harder moments. Once, we introduced a policy that made perfect sense on paper, but we had not explained the why. The reaction was strong, and the heat we took was deserved. That experience **changed my leadership style**.

> ***A policy people do not understand is a policy they will not trust.***

Explaining, listening, and inviting questions are part of the policy itself, not an afterthought.





AUK annual dinners: evenings that celebrate our people and their families

And I learned how fragile a workplace atmosphere can be. **Gossip and negative talk** spread faster than any memo, quietly draining trust and energy from a team. Protecting a healthy, respectful ambiance, through openness, clear communication, and leading by example, is one of the most important things an HR leader can do.

NOT ONE REASON, BUT SEVERAL POINTING THE SAME WAY

03 So, why come back?

The honest answer is that it was not one reason. It was several, and they all pointed in the same direction.



Because roots matter

No matter how long you are away, part of you keeps an address in the place you came from. For me, that place is the North, its mountains, its villages, its people. Roots are where our parents are, where home is, and where we feel truly secure. At a certain point in life, you stop asking where you can go next and start asking where you want to belong.

The door of our family home

02
Because experience is meant to be shared

Lebanon has given the region some of its finest professionals. Many of us built our expertise abroad. I believe there is real value, maybe even a responsibility, in bringing some of that experience back home, where institutions are working hard, often in difficult conditions, to keep moving forward.

03
Because Lebanon still believes in itself

People abroad often see Lebanon through headlines. Living here, you see something else: resilience that is not a slogan but a daily habit. Teachers who keep teaching. Staff who keep showing up. Institutions that refuse to shrink their ambitions. I wanted to be part of that, not to watch it from a distance.

04
Because the timing felt right

Careers have seasons. After years of building and running operations across the GCC, I felt ready for a role where I could contribute what I have learned and help shape something for the long term.

IN THIS NEW CHAPTER

04 What I am looking for

I am not coming back to replicate the GCC in Lebanon. Every context has its own realities, and good HR starts by listening. What I hope to build, together with my colleagues, is simple to describe and meaningful to achieve:

Clarity

Clear roles, clear expectations, and clear paths for growth, so people know where they stand and where they can go.

Fairness

Structures and policies that are consistent, transparent, and that people can trust.

Recognition

A culture where good work is seen, measured fairly, and appreciated.

Development

Investing in people so that talent can grow here, rather than feeling it has to leave to grow.

Partnership

An HR function that sits beside leadership and staff as a partner, not behind a desk as a gatekeeper.

That point on development matters to me personally. Many of us left because we felt we had to. If, in some small way, I can help build a workplace where the next generation feels they can stay and still thrive, then this return will have been worth it.

05 The answer, in one line

So when someone asks me, "Why are you coming back to Lebanon?", my answer is now simple:

WHY ARE YOU COMING BACK TO LEBANON?

Because I always carried Lebanon with me, and now it is time to bring everything I learned back home.

To my colleagues and friends across the GCC: thank you for shaping me. To everyone who has welcomed me back home: thank you for the warm embrace. I am looking forward to the journey ahead, together.



Paul Bassil
HR & Operations Leader

#Lebanon #HumanResources #Leadership #HigherEducation #ComingHome #CareerJourney