Mohammed Attawili, Program Manager at the General Telecommunication Institute Cisco Academy in Yemen, has taken it upon himself to personally recruit as many female students as possible to the General Telecommunication Institute's Cisco Networking Program. Although this is only his first year as an Academy program manager, Attawili has already proven to be very tenacious in his pursuit of at least a 30% female enrollment rate.

In autumn Attawili uses the start of another academic year at GTI to facilitate the recruitment of more female students to the newly founded Cisco Academy. He organizes lectures for students at the high school and college level about the internet and IT technology, specifically seeking out female students who are interested in the IT field. "I explain the Cisco program to them and I even encourage their parents to help them with the challenge of enrolling in this course," declares Attawili. In preparation for the opening of the Academy in March 2003, Attawili produced several short television advertisements to promote the networking program and to inspire female students to join the course.

At present, the Academy enrolls 55 male students and 10 female students, yielding an 18% female enrollment rate for the Academy. Attawili is working hard to increase this number because he believes that the country would manage itself better if more females were involved in telecommunications and IT positions. Attawili describes his personal experience working alongside female employees at his previous job, "The women were more active and creative in their career positions than the men - this impressed me. The women score very high on tests, they are more focused and concentrated on success, and I think this is why the future of Yemen rests on their shoulders."

In the classroom, Attawili gives confidence to those female students who might think that they do not have enough time or resources to take the course. He is exploring ways to make the course more accessible to female students who are facing economic, social and religious constraints. The course fee is already discounted for women: $40/semester for females and $50/semester for males; however this is only a nominal fee. If the student cannot meet the $40 fee, Attawili will accept her anyway despite the fee if her English is good enough to manage the course. Moreover, Attawili intends to employ a female instructor at the Academy to help teach the course. He hopes that the new instructor, Aida Alsamawi, will give support to those female students who are timid when asking questions to the male instructors. "I always tell the girls: don't be shy-just ask!" says Attawili. The female students are very resourceful in their pursuit of studies. Some of the girls come to the Academy with their brothers and male neighbors so that they do not have travel to the city suburbs alone at night. Attawili also occasionally drives students home in his car if the parents cannot make the drive - he helps out in any way that he can so that the female students feel comfortable and safe at the Academy center. "I would take all 65 students in my car if I could!" he says, laughing. "Or maybe if I had a ship!"

Not surprisingly, Attawili is also involved in various education development groups and computer engineering circles outside of the Academy. He writes an article in Yemen's official political party newspaper every Wednesday. The political party, called Althawrah, means Revolution. Attawili spends time writing about the ways in which computer science, IT technology and education can improve Yemeni society.

Attawili is personally encouraged about the direction of the nation's IT development. The Yemeni Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications currently has 8 female professionals in its department, and national corporations are now employing more females than in previous years. Females want to know for themselves how to configure and operate the networking equipment. Attawili adds, "The female students are not satisfied with the economy right now and they want to change the industry gender divide. I encourage them to ignore these obstacles and look to the future."