



# Respect, vision and a global mindset

Efficiency, quality and reliability are the watchwords for Abdülvahit Şimşek, Chairman of AVS Global Ship Supply. He spoke to Felicity Landon about 40 years of growth in the ship supply and services sector.

**S**uccess stories generally have small beginnings – and there's surely no better example than Turkey's AVS Group, which has its roots in a modest family grocery shop in the small town of Aliaga and has grown to encompass global ship supply, catering, management, logistics and procurement services.

Now based in Istanbul, AVS has a vast network spanning more than 1,500 ports in 126 countries. It has offices strategically located in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Greece, China, Morocco and the Netherlands and plans to open offices in the United States, the Middle East and either Japan or Korea. As Vahit says: "From the commercial point of view, there are still good business opportunities. One way or the other, politicians change, politics change, but vessels will always be there. Goods have to be transported no matter

who is running a country – without maritime transport, we cannot talk about the sustainability of the world."

This year, he can reflect on four decades since he was first involved in the family grocery shop and took a life-changing decision to move to the UK to learn English.

"I had started to work with my brothers; our grocery shop was serving hotels and restaurants and then we started supplying vessels which were visiting the port. When we realised the level of business going on – tankers, dry bulk carriers and others coming in – we realised this was an interesting business with people buying a lot of products," he says. "I realised it was time to go and learn English. While in the UK, I also did some computer and business courses. After I came back, we reorganised the business, recognising that we needed a different view and ambitions. I said – OK,



we will do this ship supply business more professionally, and we can be regional ship suppliers, not just local.”

Vahit returned from the UK in 1991 and in 1992 the business moved to Izmir, setting up its first warehouse to serve vessels in the freezone. By 2000, the company had expanded from regional to national supplier and moved to Istanbul. A year later, with Turkey facing difficult times, the AVS response was to go international – and expansion was rapid from that point.

“As we served more and more vessels in international waters, I realised we needed to create new products,” he says. “Catering was one of them, and we soon expanded that to include the offshore industry as well as commercial vessels.”

AVS Offshore Catering was established to provide housekeeping and laundry services to offshore platforms, and AVS Ship Catering was set up to provide onboard cooks and stewards to vessels.

“We then realised we needed extra tools to ensure the quality of our services, so we bought a training centre in Turkey to educate our cooks and stewards on board as well as other seafarers.”

Today, AVS employs nearly 600 cooks and stewards to serve on commercial/offshore vessels; the training centre is approved by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Turkish transport and education ministries, and training courses include catering, cooking, hygiene, housekeeping, waste handling and other subjects. The centre is particularly important bearing in mind the multinational crews on board ships today, says Vahit. “Our cooks must be able to serve all seafarers, so they need to have a wide knowledge of food and menu preferences.”

AVS concentrates on efficiency, quality and reliability, he says. “My clients are not going to change because my business is 1% more than a competitor, because the whole food cost is only about 3% in terms of vessel costs. Clients are outsourcing to us so that we can manage it well. That doesn’t mean always the cheapest option but it does mean being on time and delivering quality and reliability.”

An interesting new area is that the training centre now delivers mental healthcare training and support for seafarers. “I am proud of this. Anyone can supply vessels, but cooking on board, serving food the way they expect, doing housekeeping on board and also giving seafarers mental health support sets us aside from our competitors. We must

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Sustainability is already important, and the focus can only increase. “We are trying to reduce plastics on board, offering filtered water systems to clients and providing water containers for seafarers.”

Vahit is focusing on the future of the company and the next generation. “We are a very young, motivated company; the average age of our staff is 26-27. We have a team called Young AVS which is going to lead the company forward with a new vision in the coming years. We will ensure that the digitalisation of the company is settled and then we need to give space to young people who are strong in digitalisation, technology and AI. That is my sustainability project.”

He never put pressure on his own children to join the business. “I told my son and daughter they must do what they would like to do but if they chose to work for the company, they would always be welcome. I love what I am doing and am proud of what we have achieved, but I didn’t have that choice – I had to do what I had available at that time.”

As it turns out, both are working at AVS right now. His son, Doğukan, is now gradually taking over some of his responsibilities, to institutionalise and restructure AVS with a renewed corporate identity and vision—while following the path that has already been laid.

As for his daughter, Elif, having studied molecular biology and genetics, she has joined the company to gain commercial experience before pursuing her passion—establishing her own brand, a goal she has long been committed to.

Ship supply and services offer a great career opportunity, says Vahit. “I would tell young people coming into the industry that they must have a global mindset and, no matter what colour, religion or culture, must approach everyone equally with respect. The more you travel, the more you meet others, the wider vision you have. We educate our people that this is not only about making money or doing business but about recognising the value of mankind.”



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