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Life and Lessons as a Hair Surgeon

I am honored to recount my biography in the field of hair restoration surgery and I am honored to be selected for your roll of honor for lifetime achievement award. I began my work in hair restoration 22 years ago during my fellowship in facial plastic surgery during which time I underwent hair surgery training. The hair transplant coordinator for my fellowship director told me that when I return to Dallas, where I am from, that I must definitely meet with a woman by the name of Emina Karamanovski who was part of PAI and had performed his hair transplant procedure. She is a physician by background but worked as an assistant for PAI having already retired by the time I met her. When I returned to Dallas, when I met her, she told me how she performed hair surgery. Instantly, I realized the method that she used was far more advanced than what I had learned, and I began my journey to start relearning the art of hair surgery. After performing one procedure with me, she loved the rapport we shared and the vision I had to grow a business and she decided to return to the field of hair surgery with me. She taught me how to perform hair the way she learned it. Every night I labored and performed recipient site creation on melons and on rubber slipper shoes. She critiqued my work and gave me feedback. That continued for more than a year, as I developed my skills. We worked together as an amazing team for 20 years until she formally retired about two years ago even though she does return on occasion to help us when we need it.

I was asked to be part of a faculty at St. Louis University by my dear friend and colleague Mike Nayak who was starting a facial plastic surgery course there. After a few years, he said he was thinking about running a hair course. Being a diligent and aggressively hungry young man, I said that I had experience in hair and that I would love to be a fellow course director with him. On the shuttle ride back from the facility to our hotel, which was about 20 minutes, I had already formulated and shaped an initial draft for the first course. He said that his co-director Nick Brandy would be honored if I joined to lead that course. Within a few months, they both dropped out and I decided to partner with Emina to run this course, which is now in its 15th year.

Mike Nayak also asked me to write a chapter for a textbook he was going to publish on facial rejuvenation with a company out of India, Jaypee Brothers, and I reached out to them if they would be interested in publishing a hair book, and they said absolutely yes. That is what led to 7 textbooks on hair surgery with them, with the latest book being a double-volume textbook on FUE that came out in 2022. My goal with the book series was to create something no one ever had done and I was able to raise the bar on publishing in hair surgery. My book series had the first major book dedicated for assistants. I created the largest encyclopedic textbook ever (Volume 3) that included firsts of business training and development, which have become standard elements in hair textbooks today. This book series became the only book series dedicated to hair surgery at the time. I also saw a need to write a comprehensive textbook on FUE, which I published with worldwide authors in 2016. With the advent of hybrid punch technology in 2017, my book became quickly outdated. I began work on a second edition that

was published in 2022 as a double-volume book with over 60 chapters and has become the most comprehensive textbook on FUE in the world.

Within a month of the release of the massive multi-year project on FUE, I attempted to get Quality Medical Publishing (QMP) to help promote my book in Miami at a course I was lecturing at. They are the pinnacle of quality in plastic surgery books with only printing 1-3 books a year from highly selective authors. Even though I was exhausted from the prior FUE book, I knew that the market needed an updated textbook for beginners, especially in my field of facial plastic surgery where the “black market” is prevalent. I knew that a single author voice would be critical. I was always impressed with how amazing Jaypee Brothers was to work with allowing me a carte blanche on design and execution, as I was the principal designer of every book I have ever written, and I have written or edited 12 textbooks. Nevertheless, QMP was at a different level with an in-house, award-winning illustrator who made the most gorgeous drawings that I have ever seen and with the editor, publisher, and printing all done in the United States. I am the proudest of this book, *Hair Transplant 101*, not only because it was printed by QMP but because I am confident that it will reshape how the beginner learns, as I have innovated many new ways of teaching in this textbook including hairline design, recipient site creation, FUE and strip harvesting, etc.

I would like to share with you 10 lessons that I have learned over the years. The first lesson is to partner with people who can help fill in your blind spots and serve as an amazing complement to your work. Emina was and is just that. She is a highly intelligent, meticulous, and innovative thinker; whereas I am a very right-brained creative visionary. We complement each other so well and heavily critique and push each other to new heights. She has always thanked me for giving her a “garden in which she could grow.” So, do not think you can do it by yourself. You can’t or if you can you won’t do it that well. A team is so much more powerful than a single person. Accordingly, treat your team well.

My mentor, Ed Williams, taught me the second lesson, which is never get angry. Do not lose your cool. He said to me that “if you cannot control yourself, you will never control others.” The captain of the ship must always lead with integrity, calm, and inspiration. If you have not read John Maxwell’s book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, I would encourage you to do so. Ed always also said, “You cannot motivate people; you can only inspire them.” There are some people who will hear this message and not move forward and that’s ok. But those who hear these words and become inspired, then I have done my job in delivering them to you.

The third lesson that I will give you today is to follow your passion. If you hate what you are doing, you will not achieve anything worthwhile. I believe that if you can find something you love to do, then you will naturally grow and develop in ways you could not have imagined. If you hate what you do, it will become a chore and you will not develop and grow your skills. I truly love helping patients but I also love refining and improving my craft on a daily basis. I encourage you to dig deep and find that passion within you.

The fourth lesson that I will give you is to carve your own path and carve your own niche. Be confident that what you are doing is good despite what naysayers may relay to you. I have found a passion to teach beginners at my course, and I believe the best way to learn, as I have said countless times, is not listening to lectures and not watching live surgeries, but to have your work observed and critiqued in a hands-on course. I have a student that will read my book and listen to my lecture, then when given a pencil to draw a hairline violates all the rules taught. Why? Because this craft takes years to master. I had a student this past year who said she was in practice 5 years but was scared to draw hairlines because of my critique of her work. I explained that she needs to work on her hairlines over and over during the two-day intensive training and constantly get feedback. I have found despite the short time that students get so much out of that short time because they are actually doing the work and getting instant feedback on that work, which they can correct over and over again. You cannot beat that. I welcome you to St. Louis in July if you can make it to the course. Most attendees have told me how lifechanging it is.

The fifth lesson I have for you is to work hard. I have always worked hard for my dreams and to make a difference in life. You simply cannot achieve much no matter how gifted you are without hard work. You must apply yourself daily to whatever you do to succeed. Along those lines whatever breaks life gives you, take them. I believe that God gives us those breaks and when we refuse them we are snubbing those opportunities rather than embracing them. Good breaks in life, as I have explained in my own life, are only so good as what you do with them. If you do not apply hard work, those breaks do not go anywhere.

The sixth lesson is do not work so hard that you do not have a balanced life. For me, I started later in my life to raise a family and I always say better late than never. In one of my books that I worked on as an editor, I remember very clearly the dedication in the book from the one of the editors who said something like "To my family I never see, thank you for allowing me to publish 35 books in my career." What importance is there that he wrote 35 books if he never saw his family? Another life-turning event occurred when I was at a faculty dinner and was sitting next to a wife of a colleague, and I asked her where she had vacationed recently. She said in the past 40 years she had never taken a vacation. Her husband and she only went to meetings and conferences and may bookend a day or two to see the city that they visited. I vowed I would never do that.

The seventh lesson is to try to be as healthy as you can. When I moved back to Dallas from New York where I did my training, I ballooned 35 pounds because I ate like a Texan. That was 20 years ago and I have not gained back that fat because I made a conscious decision to live as healthy a life as possible. That does not mean that you will have a flawless diet and exercise 7 days a week. But it means making healthy choices to the best of your ability in your mental wellness/calm, food, recovery, exercise, sleep, and other choices in life.

The eighth lesson is to be motivated not by material gain or fame but by how your innovations can help others, that is, how to make a difference in this world for the betterment of others. You will most likely naturally achieve wealth and/or fame if you follow the first tenet. The most

important thing in my opinion is to make a difference in the life of others in this world before you leave it.

The ninth lesson is not to forget recovery time. We need time to smell the roses. For me that means painting. I paint every single day 7 days a week unless I am traveling. I love art and creativity and I make it a time to visit museums and to enjoy art. That is what I love. Find your avocation and what makes you happy and pursue it as hard as your work.

The tenth lesson is to have a deep gratitude for everything in life. My wife and I pray every night a prayer that ends with gratitude. If you are sitting here and have food in your belly, you should have gratitude. In my faith, John 15:5 says "I am the vine, you are the branches, you can do nothing apart from me..." What that basically means is that whatever talent you have, God gave it to you. You should not think of yourself as anything that special because that leads to a selfish conceit when you have in fact been given talents from above. Also, if you are honest with yourself, you also have limitations. Be grateful for your talents, gifts, and your lot in life and partner with others to fill in the gaps.

I hope one day to meet each and every one of you, and again I am filled with deep gratitude for the recognition you are according my work. I am hoping that my work has touched your lives in small or big ways and that these lessons will help inspire the next generation of hair surgeons.