

LOOK SMART, LIVE SMARTER

# EMIRATES MAN



Dr Michael Apa – Founder Apa Aesthetic

# The Rule Breaker

Dr Apa does things differently.  
We discuss work ethic, scaling and the drive it  
takes to perpetually innovate

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**“DETERMINATION DEFINES ME. I AM RELENTLESSLY COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE, AND I CONSTANTLY CHASE TRUE MEANING IN MY WORK. CREATING SOMETHING THAT LEAVES A LEGACY AND BETTERS THE NEXT GENERATION IS MORE IMPORTANT TO ME THAN MY OWN INDIVIDUAL HAPPINESS.”**

In college, I started to hit my stride, but I didn't have the discipline that I have now. I was young and the stakes were much lower, so I could be more of a wild man, without the concern of real responsibility, routine or sleep. That was the time to experiment and it's a blessing that I was able to see and live and learn. That time shaped me into what I am now and helped me get focused. When else have you had to be fearless in life and how did this materialise? Being fearless for me has always been a risk/reward ratio that I can map out in my head very quickly. The risk, or my worst-case scenario, with my dental degree was always having to go back home to upstate New York and practice there. It's a risk I'm willing to accept and that allows me to take chances without fear. Whether it was buying Larry's practice or opening an office in another country, I've always been able to move forward with confidence, because what's the worst that can happen? I go back home.

People keep putting dentistry in a box and I refuse to settle for that. Doubt is one of those things that really lights a fire under me. As soon as people doubt me, I become relentless in going after what I want and know to be possible. Apa Aesthetic is changing how the general public experiences dentistry. What is your biggest strength to date both personally and in business? I never settle for good enough. When I achieve a goal, I push on to the next goal. I am constantly reinventing who I am and what it is that I am doing. I'm also able to compartmentalize and get things done. I don't let problems turn into a pile on. I tackle issues one at a time, so that I don't lose focus on the big picture. How do you approach living life fearlessly and where have you had to break the rules of traditional dentistry? When I'm doing dentistry, there's no fear. I know how to design teeth and make them look right in someone's mouth. I'm never sitting in the chair stressed. I can get stressed about other things, but not smile design. It's my creative outlet and when I'm most at ease. For

me, that confidence translates into fearlessness and allows me to drown out the noise.

I break the rules of traditional dentistry every day. Apa Aesthetic is the anti-DSO model. Big business is killing dentistry and doing patients a disservice. I am offering something different, something special – and not just within the walls of Apa Aesthetic. I am so proud of my partnerships with CUNY SPH and NYUCD that are changing the game not only for dentistry but the larger oral care space. Real change must happen at the education level. While I do what I do best in the chair, I am using my resources to pave the way for the next generation of providers with thoughtful programming and partnerships that tackle major education gaps.

What you do is an art form – how do you balance creativity and commerce? The key for me is being able to compartmentalize. I can shuffle through many different things in my head very quickly and that helps me navigate the demands of being both a dentist and a business owner. It's essential to have good people in place – people that are energized by the mission, inspired by their individual work and not afraid to push past comfortable. They need to believe they can make a difference and they need access to me – my time and my energy. I have great people and great systems in place, on both the clinical side and the business side.

The company's growth has been steady and gradual, so I've had time to adjust and recalibrate along the way. I wasn't running three offices, with a fourth on the way, overnight. As we continue to grow, I'm constantly reestablishing that balance and making sure it all gets done. What has been the biggest challenge to date and how did you overcome it? There have been many challenges along the way, but nothing great comes easy. In September 2021, my New York office had a lab fire that absolutely devastated the space. At the time, I was boarding a plane from Dubai to New York. The news was shocking, and the pictures and videos were a bad combination

of depressing and anxiety-producing. This fire was a curveball that changed me, and it wasn't all bad. It brought a renewed feeling of strength and the deepest appreciation for my team, the dental community, and our patients. Just two days later, we were up and running at a temporary location, where we remained for 6 months. I don't know if I will ever fully wrap my head around the sequence of events. The timing was especially crazy; we were about to begin construction on a newly acquired floor in our New York Flagship. I was so excited about the expansion and the opportunity to deliver something one-of-a-kind to patients. We still got it done, but the timeline took a hit. What values are most important to you? Determination defines me. I am relentlessly committed to excellence, and I constantly chase true meaning in my work. Creating something that leaves a legacy and betters the next generation is more important to me than my own individual happiness. What level of drive and resilience does it take to maintain such a fast pace for so long, while also consistently innovating and what lifestyle/mindset hacks support you to do this? I am constantly pushing. I never let off the gas because I can see what it looks like to be excellent in this industry. Habits help. Routine is important. The more you can automate certain pieces, the more you can free up time and space for innovation. Have you had any mentors in life and if so, what knowledge did they impart? I've looked up to different people at different points in my life and career. Certainly, one of my most important mentors was Larry. I was probably 16, when my local dentist told me about Larry Rosenthal – the guy doing cosmetic dentistry in NYC. I knew I had to go to NYU College of Dentistry, so that I could meet him, learn from him, and convince him to hire me. He was my introduction into what's possible and has been by my side for some major moments. What is a kindness you've received or a lesson you've learned that you'd like to pay forward? You know what's funny; I received

kindness in the dental chair as a patient, and, recently, it became clear to me that that's largely why I became a dentist. While people around me complained about going to the dentist, I loved it! I never had braces, never had a cavity. I was told how wonderful my teeth are. I thought my dentist had the best job! I am trying to give that experience and that feeling to other people. I am trying to pay that forward. What piece of advice would you give to your younger self? We just announced a big partnership with my alma mater NYUCD and leading up to the announcement, I looked back at my yearbook from 2002, where I gave my younger self some advice. I wrote “make the most out of what you've worked so hard to obtain”. A lot of things can change in 20 years, but my principles have stayed the same. I think it goes without saying that if I went back in time, I would tell myself the very same thing. What does being fearless mean to you and what would you advise someone wanting to make the leap themselves? Don't place limits on your own potential. Enjoy the now and embrace the journey. There's never going to be one great time; there are going to be cycles of ups and downs. Learn from your wins as much as you do your losses.

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