

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dr. David Phelps

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

You're listening to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint podcast, powered by Freedom Founders with your host Dr. David Phelps, where the word retirement is banned and true freedom can be secured in three to five years or less. You'll get anti-traditional advice to maximize the value of your practice and multiply your transition options. Create safe and steady wealth building through highly curated real estate and build extraordinary freedom for what matters most to you without depending on the volatility of Wall Street. More at FreedomFounders.com.

David Phelps: Hi David here. I had the good fortune of catching up with Dr. Meghna Dassani, and had the opportunity to interview her about her latest book, *Airway is Life*. The reason I did this interview with Meghna was because she brought out the fact that having a strong reason why, in this case to publish a book, but also a reason why she published the book on the particular topic, is very, very strong and compelling. Number two, having this particular topic and this specialized service offered in her practice differentiates her from the rank and file commoditization of dentistry, which is happening in a big scale today. So, a differentiation factor in a big way.

And thirdly, this particular offering that she provides to her patients also allows her team, her staff, to get behind a mission, a mission that they can embrace. All of these things together have really brought forth a practice for Dr. Meghna Dassani and her staff, and the patients that she serves that far supersede the rank and file commoditization of dentistry. Listen to this and pick up some of the key points that you might be able to utilize in some way in your own practice. Enjoy.

Good day everyone. This is Dr. David Phelps of the Freedom Founders Mastermind Community, and the

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

Dentist Freedom Blueprint Podcast. Today we're going to talk about the story of one of our industry leaders who is doing so much in her practice. I think also for our industry in dentistry, and is really a leader who continues to lead her team and a mission for her life and her practice. There's so many things in this story today. I got to get right to it. So with me, I'm so privileged to have Dr. Meghna Dassani. Meghna, how are you doing?

Meghna Dassani: I am good. Thank you so much for having me today.

David Phelps: Such a pleasure. Well, one of the things that incited us having this conversation today is that you published a recent book. Now, you've already been a book publisher in the past. I know you've got several other books that have already been done, but the most recent one that just came out this last month is Airway is Life: Waking up to your family's sleep crisis. It's such a great book, and we'll talk about that book and why you wrote it, and who it's written for in a few minutes, but I just want to say that was the catalyst and so well done, well done on your book.

Meghna Dassani: Thank you. Thank you very much.

David Phelps: So we got to go back in time and figure out how you got to where you are today, which today, just so people know, we'll skip ahead, you're in Houston, Texas, in Dassani Dentistry. Is that the name of the practice?

Meghna Dassani: Yes.

David Phelps: Yes. Dassani Dentistry, but you didn't start in Houston. You started in fact on another continent. You want to take

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

us back a while and give us your connection, what got you connected to dentistry in the first place?

Meghna Dassani: Oh gosh, we're going to go that back.

David Phelps: Yeah come on. Lets do it.

Meghna Dassani: Let's do it. Why not? So I jokingly like to tell people I became a dentist when I was eight years old. Growing up in Mumbai, that's where I grew up. I was born and raised in Mumbai, India. We lived on the fourth floor of an apartment building, my dad still owns the building, and then but we had a dentist that practiced on the first floor. And all those years ago, there was no air conditioning, it wasn't a given. And Indian summers are a 110 degrees. And I would find myself gravitating to the dental practice downstairs, just so I could hang out in the AC when it was hot in the afternoon. And this one day I skipped downstairs, just doing what I did every afternoon during summer break, and the dentist that practiced was like, "Do you want to pull a tooth today?"

And I was like, wait, what? I'm eight years old. And I turned and our neighbor who lived on the third floor was in the chair. Now, she had a tooth that was loose, it was one periodontal ligament loose, right? That's how it was hanging on by. But she was scared, and he asked her if it was okay if he let me pull the tooth, of course, I was over the moon. He numbed her up, I got to hold a forceps, him holding my hand, and out came that tooth, and I was hooked. So just the fact that I got to do something so cool, but also at some point, the realization that we have it within our hands the power to get somebody out of pain, the discomfort, was I think what set that path for me as to this is what I want to do. And then, of course, fast-forward went to-

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

David Phelps: Wait. Yeah, one second. I got to go back. So, the lady whose tooth you pulled lived on the third floor. So obviously that wasn't your last engagement with her. So I got to know, was there some connection, more of a connection with you with her? Was she grateful? How did you feel that you actually did help her because she needed this tooth out? What's the rest of that story?

Meghna Dassani: Honestly, so she's one that knew me, held me since I was born, fed me, was my second mother for lack of a better word. And it almost felt like, well, obviously I got to help her. She was grateful because she's now out of pain.

David Phelps: Yes.

Meghna Dassani: I, and I say this in air quotes, "didn't hurt her." And I guess it was just things coming full circle to where somebody she's literally raised all eight years of my life, was able to help her. So it just how things fell into place and connected, I guess, made that connection for me as to this is what I want to do. This is how I want to help people.

David Phelps: So, I just got to think as you said eight years old, and you've been now empowered as an eight year old who has done something that you wouldn't think that anybody less than an adult, the dentist who was there was an adult not in his teens, he's adult, and you got to step in and you were empowered. So I'm just going to think as a young person, those experiences we all have in our lives, something that influenced us, inspired us to take a certain path, it's always interesting to go back and see what was that. And that's a great story. So thanks for letting me just hanging on that for a minute, because I thought that was great. And I did not know that about you till we talked

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

today. So, all right. All right. Now I'll let you skip ahead. Okay.

Meghna Dassani: So I did what I needed to do, got into dental school in Mumbai, graduated, and I actually had a startup there. I practiced dentistry there for about six years. It was a general bread and butter practice, did everything that a general dentist would do, perfectly happy there until a boy happened.

David Phelps: A what? A what happened?

Meghna Dassani: A boy.

David Phelps: A boy? Oh my gosh. All right. Here's another detour in the well-laid path of Meghna, right? Okay. All right. Stay tuned.

Meghna Dassani: Always. So that's when I met my husband and he was actually in Pittsburgh. He studied at Ohio State and was working in Pittsburgh and we connected. So that led to me having to shut down that practice and move here to the United States when we got married. At the time that we got married he ended up being transferred to Houston. So I have always lived in Houston except for the two years that I went to dental school. And that is, moving to Houston is what literally, now that I look back and we've been talking about this earlier, is what set the trajectory for what was going to happen now that I look back. As a foreign trained dentist, I had to go back to dental school for what they call the advanced standing program, which was, I was able to do it in two years, but we had to give our national boards prior to being accepted to dental school.

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

So here I was studying to be able to get into school. And I distinctly remember this. Now this was, we've been married 20 years now. So once upon a time, when we didn't have WhatsApp or FaceTime, or text messaging the way we do now, phone calls home were on set days and at set times, and you remember this, if the phone rang when it wasn't supposed to, when you lived away from home, it typically meant it was either amazingly good news, or news that you did not want to hear. And that was what happened. One morning, 5:00 AM, my husband had just left for work and the phone rang and it was my mother telling me we needed to head back home. And we find out that we had lost my father-in-law. He was in his early fifties. So not old by any stretch of the imagination, relatively healthy, didn't take any medications, he wasn't overweight, walked three kilometers every day, did everything right?

And we got on the flight, we're headed home. And I remember this, I was a hot mess. I was in tears, crying, upset, of course, I'd lost a father. Right? And my husband was just this, he was just sitting next to me on that flight as strong as he could be. And I turned to him and I said, you got to show some emotion. This is not healthy. You got to let it out. And he turned towards me and he shrugged his shoulders, and he said, "All the men in my family have died at 54."

David Phelps: Wow.

Meghna Dassani: Well, turns out his grandfather had died at that age. He'd had an uncle that had passed at that age. And now my father-in-law. And the story that they'd been handed all these years was it's genetic. You can't do anything

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

about it. And I guess they accepted that. And when he told me, and I didn't argue with him then-

David Phelps: Sure.

Meghna Dassani: ... no frame of mind to even go any further. And I said, okay, we'll figure this out. Let's get home. We'll figure this out.

David Phelps: Because you want to figure this out for your husband's benefit.

Meghna Dassani: Absolutely.

David Phelps: Yeah. Yeah.

Meghna Dassani: Absolutely. Absolutely. So we got home and in the Indian culture our mourning rituals are 13 days long. So while the rest of the family did what they needed to do, I gathered up all of his records. And I went from doctor to doctor, every doctor that he had visited and I'm, what are we missing? What did we miss here? What could we have done so that this never happens again? And consistently the answer that came back with sleep apnea. Now, I don't know now if he had a CPAP, or that he'd been offered it, I know for sure appliance therapy was not an option back home at that point. I just didn't know.

And I'm the first to admit, I was selfish. I did not want my family to have to go through this again. And I made my husband that promise, I made myself that promise. We're going to figure this out. In this day and age, and this was 20 years ago, this day and age there's no reason for this to have happened with all the advances that we have in medicine. So everything that I did from that point onwards was with that goal in mind, we got to figure this out. If we

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

can avoid this, we want to make sure we're doing everything we can. And that's what led me down that rabbit hole of treating sleep apnea.

David Phelps: So Meghna, you were how many years in your practice in Houston when this unfortunate event occurred with your father-in-law? How many years had you been?

Meghna Dassani: I was headed to dental school.

David Phelps: Oh, that's where you were heading to dental school. You weren't even in practice yet.

Meghna Dassani: Right.

David Phelps: So, what was your awareness at that point in, you'd already been trained as a dentist, practice as a dentist. Now, going back to school for the advanced training in Boston, what was your understanding, or your, yeah, your awareness of sleep apnea? How much did you have at that point?

Meghna Dassani: Nothing.

David Phelps: Nothing. Okay.

Meghna Dassani: I'll be honest with you. I didn't know anything. I knew the term. I knew what it meant, and that's pretty much it. And I didn't have much of an education on any treatment, understanding anything, not back home, not even when I went to BU. So everything that I had to learn had to come from me making a very conscious choice to finding, researching, and exploring what it is that I needed to do next.

David Phelps: So the point here, which I think everybody can certainly feel from your reliving this tragic story, is we're taking this

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

event and ensuring to the best of your ability, number one, for your husband's protection, but then beyond that, you're now as a dentist going to be in a position, as we know, in front of the line to help diagnose, and again, expand the awareness and treatment, potential treatment opportunities to more people. So, this became a real mission, a real cause for you. And so while you were in school, I'm sure you kept digging in and kept researching, and then you graduated from school, and then you went to Houston where you opened your practice. So when you opened your practice, was it a scratch startup, or did you acquire a practice, or how'd you start that?

Meghna Dassani: So, when I moved back to Houston, I was an associate for a few years. Again, kept pursuing what I needed to do, how I needed to do. In 2010 I purchased my practice from a dentist that was retiring. And again, it's the same thing. The rabbit holes that you go down, because, yes, I wanted to do this to have my family, but the number of patients, once you start to have these conversations, your team members, their families, and even though I say, I wanted this for my family, well, they all become our family, do they not? Our team, our patients, everything we do expands into helping all of them.

David Phelps: So in this case, I'm taking a broader look for those of our colleagues that are listening to us discuss this today. And there's a lot, unfortunately, and this is in all industries, Meghna, it's not just dentistry, but there's a point where people seem to get to a burnout stage because whatever we're trained to do, what are we going to do? The career, the profession, it can become routine if we're not challenged for some reason, whether it's internal, or an external event like you had, or both, to grow. And

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

oftentimes, unfortunately people will feel like they hit the pinnacle of their education by getting whatever degree, advanced degrees, GPR, licensure, credentialed, whatever that may be. And that becomes, I'm done. I'm done. And then I get to go live my life and-

Meghna Dassani: Cruise control.

David Phelps: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. And yet that just, for anybody, I don't care what... It gets to be routine and old. And so my point is, is you had a great reason to do what you do. And I know you do a lot of other things in dentistry, so this isn't just your one area of special subspecialization. But one thing is, is don't you, and you have a lot of our colleagues also look at the opportunities they have with sleep. So you're helping, but doesn't this reinvigorate if there's someone who's a little bit like, I'm just getting burned out on dentistry, invigorates, not only themselves, but also as you said, your team members, because it's so relevant. And now you've just created a, I would think a culture that's very mission-based now. Yes, you can still do lots of routine dentistry, which we all would do, but you've got a cause, a mission that's greater than filling teeth, for example. Right?

Meghna Dassani: Absolutely. No, I agree. And I, 100% agree with what you said about the team too, with my team, it's almost like this is their legacy too, as to how and what they can do to impact the patients, the education, helping them, because these are amazing days when you get to go to the office and actually get to hear the stories of somebody that's gotten the best sleep they ever had. A wife that is able to sleep because she's no longer worried her husband's going to stop breathing, or moms that

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

finally know they have the answers as to why whatever's happening with their kid is happening.

David Phelps: Yeah.

Meghna Dassani: It's these things that, and I'm fond with telling my team this, it's like, "Okay, I'm done. Can I go for the day?" Because it can't get any better than this when you hear these stories. So, absolutely. I agree with you. These are legacies that my team gets to create for themselves.

David Phelps: A lot of what we hear about our profession today is that it's being commoditized, insurance dictates what patients will, treatment they'll accept, or corporate is taking over and they're on every corner, and blah, blah, blah. But when you're mission-based, and particularly when you and your team get to actually feel the emotions that of the patients of the parents, the family members that are, their lives are saved, enhanced in so many ways. That's what resonates. That's what, to me see, that's what keeps us going. It's a transformation in other people's lives. And some people would say, well, yeah, routine dentistry. Oh yeah, we help people. But you know what? It doesn't seem like they don't want to come see us. And we're trying to be preventative, but when you're doing this kind of work, then those stories resonate so well. And I know that we talk about marketing to de-commoditize what we do today.

Well, these there are the stories that de-commoditize, and enhance, and that connection, again, the emotional connection, even if someone doesn't have an airway issue, just to know that you have a team, a culture that's based on, well, we change lives. Well, I don't have an airway problem, but gosh, what if they could change my

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

life in some other way, with some other dental situation I've got, right? It just piggybacks on each other, right?

Meghna Dassani: It does. And I think it brings in the human element of, that we are human and we understand what they're going through as well, because they see that we are seeing this every day, we're living this everyday with our patients and the empathy. That's what people are looking for. Like you said, every things become so mainstream for lack of a better word, it has to fit into a certain frame. And this almost lets us color outside the lines to be human in our interactions with patients because people want to be seen, people want to be heard.

David Phelps: Yes.

Meghna Dassani: And I find it, it definitely changes things for them.

David Phelps: And with your team being excited because of, again, the connection that changing of lives that they get to experience firsthand, that's got to make a big difference for you as the owner in having a team that you don't have to so much "manage", because I think if we took a general survey of our industry, the thing that most of our dental colleagues as owners dislike the most is they, Oh, I have to manage the staff.

Well, we know that leadership and developing a culture is both an art and a skill that can be learned that we don't typically learn in school. And it's a progression that we never end. We're always trying. If we want to grow, we're always working on that part of our world is the people that we serve, how we communicate and how we... We're not motivating them, because I don't think you can motivate people, but we're creating an environment that is self motivating. And so speak to that about your team. How

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

difficult is that for you in line with everything else that you deal with in your busy life? Is that a regular situation you've got to deal with, or is it rare and few and far between for you?

Meghna Dassani: Currently, now it is, my team manages me, let's put it that way. It didn't always used to be that way. I have made every mistake there is in running a business, managing a team, being a leader. I have been, most of us type of personalities are that, right? Micromanagers. Nobody can do it as well as I can do it. And the day that flipped for me was super cliched, but it is the absolute truth. When I have the courage to take one big step back and look at myself, look at the mirror. What is it that I am lacking? And the minute I understood that, things started to change. With my team I think it's super obvious how much my team dotes on me, and how proud I am of them. They truly are an extension of my family. They are my home away from home because this are families back home, and I've come to realize it comes down to actually trusting people to do their job that you hired them to do.

If I hire my, I don't know, assistant to do what she needs to do, I cannot micromanage her. Being respectful is one of the most common things people forget to do with their teams. We look forward to finding faults in our team members, pointing fingers is so much easier that we forget to give them the benefit of doubt, we forget to allow them to make mistakes. The day we give our team permission to make mistakes is the day things flip because now they know they don't have to live in fear of, doc finding out, doc getting upset, and all I ask of them is as long as you're learning from this and it doesn't happen again, or doesn't happen too often, we're good. We joke

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

about it. It's like, are we paying for CE this week when there's a mistake? It's a learning opportunity.

David Phelps: Exactly.

Meghna Dassani: It is a learning opportunity. So they know it. I'll have a team member come and say, doc, you just paid for CEOs. How much did it cost me? Let's go. But at least they know that creating a safe place is all I say, we do that for our children at home. Well, there are my kids at the office.

David Phelps: Yes.

Meghna Dassani: Let's give them that space to grow because if they're taken care of, guess who's taken care of?

David Phelps: That's right.

Meghna Dassani: My patients.

David Phelps: That's right.

Meghna Dassani: That's all we all want.

David Phelps: Yes. Yeah, no, that's so powerful. I was thinking, as you were talking about your staff, when they're coming to you and saying, Hey, we just did CE this week, who's paying for CE? Could you actually formalize it on a board and actually call it what it is, and check the box and even your certificate. I had an extra fun with it, but I love, that's the absolute, such great attitude. And it is hard for us who have been trained to be as near perfectionist as possible, which is impossible, but that's how we're trained to control it all. Nobody can do it better than we can. And then the stress and strains of dentistry, which is physically and mentally exhausting, can be, can be. And it's a lot to

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

overcome, but I think your statement about stepping back, that's very powerful in itself. Stepping back, looking at yourself and saying, what can I change about my demeanor, about my behavior, about my actions, my communication, that could empower and allow these people around me, my team, to feel safe?

Because you're right, in environment where we feel afraid, or fearful, we're not empowered to do anything, or just tell me what to do. Give me the checklist and I'll just do that, that's all I'm going to do, because I'm afraid if I do anything more than that, I'm going to be held accountable for something that... And I don't want that, I don't want that. Right?

Meghna Dassani: Right. I hear docs say, I want my team to take ownership. Let's give them the tools.

David Phelps: Yes.

Meghna Dassani: Let's allow them to actually take ownership.

David Phelps: Yes. All right. Last thing that I want to ask you is writing, publishing a book. Again, this is not your first one, you've done several, but obviously you did it because you want to communicate a message, and you decided to write, in this case, not for your colleagues, which you could do that because you teach courses on Airway to dentists, but you want to write this for your patients. So you decide to make a turn when you were in the middle of writing the book at some point and said, let me focus on my patients, the consumers. So I understand why you did it, but what else did you gain out of writing the book? What else did it do for you, or your team? What are the adjunct benefits that you found in doing this?

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

Meghna Dassani: So, you're right. I did start off this book with wanting to write it for the dentists, the dental community. And at one point I was like, no, I need to reach a wider. So allowing myself, giving myself permission to change direction as to what I wanted to do and where I want it to go, actually had such... And I'm a person that just, if I have decided something I will make it happen no matter what. So just giving myself permission to do that, it's okay if you started this, but having realized that I'm doing my actual mission was to educate others, was huge for me. By way of what did I learn and how did it impact me, and my family, and my team? Honestly, and I was talking to a very dear friend of mine probably last week. It's brought me to my knees. It has humbled me in ways that I have not known.

Yes, the sheer amount of hard work, but we're all used to putting in the hours and the research, and there's always so much to learn even as I was pulling articles and papers, and there's stuff I was like, Oh, this is new. So, that was good. But just realizing how much support I had from people I did not even know that they, I didn't think they knew I existed, let's put it that way. And it's been humbling to see how our community has actually come to support me. It has been huge. My team, of course, is super proud. They're mama ducks, mama hens there just strutting around with, Doc wrote book and it's an Amazon best seller, but it's been a journey for sure. And lots of lessons learned on humility. It's been a journey for sure.

David Phelps: Well, that's really fantastic. I really appreciate you sharing today from your heart your story, your evolution from an eight year old now to a mother, a wife, a community leader, obviously an outstanding influencer in our profession. The book is Airway is Life. This is Dr. Meghna

Ep #324: Meghna Dassani - Airway is Life

Dassani. And Meghna, for our colleagues who would like to connect with you, obviously they can find the book on Amazon, but they might want to even go furthering with connection. What's the best way for those to reach out to you?

Meghna Dassani: Through the website, MeghnaDassani.com. We have a contact us form. I am always on Facebook. So feel free to reach out on social media as well. But yep, email through the website is best way to make sure it gets answered.

David Phelps: Fantastic. Thank you so much, Meghna, loved having you today.

Meghna Dassani: Thank you for having me.

You've been listening to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint podcast. If you're tired of trading time for dollars and you're uncertain that Wall Street has your best interest at heart, then take the next step to more cashflow, security and ultimately more freedom. Text the word newsletter to 972-203-6960 to receive David's monthly online newsletter for free or text the word book to receive your new free copy of David's book From High Income to High Net Worth delivered right to your home. Text 972-203-6960.
More@freedomfounders.com.