

Karoun H. Bagamian: Hello and welcome to another episode of the Business of Doing Science. Today, we're going to talk about a really exciting career transition of Sazid Khan from academia to nonprofit research. I'm Karoun Bagamian and I'm joined by my co hosts, Lindsey Laytner, Heidi Bolduc, and a guest co host, Amanda Brinton.

Lindsey, take it away.

Lindsey Laytner: Awesome. Thank you very much. So welcome, Sazid. We're so happy to have you join us today to talk a little bit about your career transition.

So yeah, we'll just kick it off. So first, we do want to ask a little bit about what you do, and how you got to your role at RTI.

Sazid Khan: Absolutely. First of all, thank you all for having me. Really appreciate it. Yeah, I'm Dr. Sazid Khan. I'm a research public health analyst at a company called RTI International.

It's a non profit research institute here in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina. I work in substance use prevention. The program is called Substance Use Prevention Evaluation and Research.

I am a subject matter expert in substance use prevention work as well as a data analyst on some projects. I have the role of project liaison on some federally funded grants where we are the coordinating center, where I liaison with other research projects across the country. We work on evaluations of substance use prevention programs for youth and adolescents in different states, amongst other items that I do.

Prior to that I was the State Epidemiologist for the South Carolina Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services, which was the Cabinet Agency for Substance Use in the state of South Carolina. And I am an epidemiologist by trade, infectious diseases, spatial EPI, and substance use prevention.

Lindsey Laytner: Absolutely. That's so awesome. Yeah, because I know a little bit about your background. You and I, we did our master's together, in different tracks. It's just been amazing to watch, you know, where you've landed after all of these years. And I know that prior to taking on the position at RTI, you were the state epidemiologist and, maybe, do you want to comment a little bit on, your educational history and what kind of, led you to that?

Sazid Khan: Absolutely, yeah. So, undergrad, University of Florida. Master's, Doctor's, go Gators. You know, me and Lindsey were Gators by heart. That's where we first met, man, a decade ago.

Lindsey Laytner: I know, crazy.

Sazid Khan: Yeah, a decade ago. Got my master's there as well in public health, epidemiology. I originally was pre med. But I was not a fan of any, any of those courses. I went through all of them, was able to do them all, but just was not a fan. My advisor kind of recognized that I was like, I still like science. I love data. I love healthcare. So they were like, try the Master's in Public Health. That might be more your lane. I did anthropology undergrad, loved it.

Lindsey Laytner: Same here.

Sazid Khan: Yep. Loved it. Loved learning by humans and kind of their behaviors. Did a master's in public health. Loved EPI. Loved data. Loved analysis. Loved how we can use it to help kind of better the human condition on a larger scale.

Looked at the job market. Decided, hey, the positions I would like to be in someday required the PhD. So I decided that is the route I was going to take. I knew myself in that I would not be the first type of person who would go work and then come back to school. I knew if I left school, I would not be coming back.

So I did it all in one fell swoop.

Karoun H. Bagamian: That's a lot.

Sazid Khan: Yeah. Yep. I always joke. I spent my twenties as a student,

Karoun H. Bagamian: Still you pursued what you wanted. And I found it really interesting that you said that you started as pre-med. I think a lot of people.. . I know for me and like growing up, you know about three jobs: doctor, lawyer, engineer, or something like that.

And I remember telling my parents, like, oh, I want to do ecology and evolution. And it's always interesting because now it's a lot more common and people know public health and these things. But I know earlier on, people were like, "What is that field?" So, I empathize with that and a lot of our listeners might. You might think there's something you want to do, or there might be things, you know about, but then you find something completely different and work that to your advantage, which is great.

Sazid Khan: Absolutely, and I think kind of a running theme for my career has been being open minded. And just like what you can do. And there are so many different types of jobs and careers out there and so many ways you can go about getting to your career if you're just open minded and kind of really get creative with it.

So, you know, I did a PhD in epidemiology. My background is infectious diseases, not substance use.

Karoun H. Bagamian: That's right. Yeah, that was interesting... that was my background, too. What brought you to be more interested in substance use?

Sazid Khan: Yeah, yeah, so I worked in HIV control, HIV research, I worked at access to care. So during my PhD, I switched advisors midway through, the first one did not work out so well, I switched to a new advisor Incredible. Still friends with her today. You know, we're still super close and she was the best decision I've ever made.

Pushed back, yeah, pushed back my PhD a little bit by like half a semester. Had to end up TA ing and GA ing and finding other funding opportunities. But it really was needed and so glad that I did because I would not have finished without her

Karoun H. Bagamian: I have friends that had to do the same. it can take a lot, especially when you're in it, you're worried about adding more years, but honestly, as it sounds like in your situation, it definitely did work out for the best. And actually almost anyone that I know that had the guts to do that -- it did benefit them to make those transitions.

Sazid Khan: So, I ended up switching advisors. You know, I was a teaching assistant. I loved teaching undergrads, but this opportunity came up where a colleague of mine, was looking for a graduate assistant in the state government, in the Substance Use Division. I knew them personally. They said, "Hey, come work with me for a semester. It'll give you good experience."

Going into my PhD, I never really had academia in mind . It was always government, non profit, private, and then academia second, given I wasn't super into. You know, I can write, but I'm not a great writer.

Peer reviewed articles was never really my jam. The publish or perish mentality was never my thing. So I went into state government thinking, "All right, you know, this could be interesting." And I saw when I made the transition from being a TA and an RA to working for state government as a GA, it was interesting that it was very direct. Like what you did, you know, I worked on something my first week there and it went to the state house for them to look at.

Lindsey Laytner: Wow.

Sazid Khan: So, so it was like right away, like the work you were doing was direct, it was impacting people right away. And it was, it was interesting, it was fascinating. And it wasn't like articles, it was like, you know, one pagers, talking

points, et cetera. Things that were like that different groups of people were able to understand.

So that's kind of how I'm in my transition. I was a graduate assistant, and then as I was nearing the end of my PhD, looking for jobs, and they said, "Hey, keep thinking of us, you know. If you want a full time position, you got one here." And that's kind of how I ended up in that area.

Karoun H. Bagamian: That's really great. It is often a thing that I hear... people who are having academic careers, and sometimes even enjoying certain aspects of that, but then feeling sometimes frustrated because they want to see the difference that their work is making immediately, which is not commonly the case in some of these other situations. I'm really glad that you went into that in your answer.

So, which of the skills that you acquired on your journey do you think was most useful in your current role?

Sazid Khan: In terms of my current role, I think being in state government was super helpful in that I dealt with many different audiences from the public to legislators to law enforcement, to health care providers, to doctors, etc.

And I learned on the job health communication. How to communicate hard data or complex ideas to different groups of people and how to best get it to them, right? So that was the biggest one for sure.

Karoun H. Bagamian: For sure, that's a very important skill and actually something that, you know, we've seen this especially during the pandemic and other things, like the importance of being able to communicate with different audiences and being able to engage them.

So yeah, and as we know, sometimes we're not taught that. There's more of a focus on that these days, but it's a very important skill.

What does your typical work day look like? Like, what do you do in a day?

Sazid Khan: A lot of meetings.

Lindsey Laytner: I knew you were going to say that!

Sazid Khan: Being in a PhD position in my company, you kind of expect to take on more admin roles or leadership roles if you have a PhD.

So a lot of meetings. Mentorship. Depends on the project for sure.

Karoun H. Bagamian: So that's interesting.

You said that, since you have a PhD, they expect you to have more administrative and leadership, responsibilities. So where did you learn that? Did you know that before you came to the job? Did you learn it along the way? Or did you learn more on. Still learning? Okay.

Can you talk to us a little bit about that? I know this is something that a lot of people that went to graduate school and then are put into management positions talk about how sometimes they weren't prepared for that.

Sazid Khan: I had some training with the state government. But the business development at RTI is next level. So that has been the biggest thing I have learned. We have courses that you can take. We have a whole training system you can take.

Heidi Bolduc: Oh, wow.

Sazid Khan: Yeah. So it is next level. Learning how to identify grants, learning contracts, learning how to make yourself marketable to clients, identifying how to write a grant, working with other folks to be collaborative and capturing information before a grant potentially comes out or intelligence. It's definitely a very different world.

So, learning on the fly. They give you the time to learn, but it's learning on the job, learning while doing, for sure.

Karoun H. Bagamian: How do you feel about that? Do you like that aspect of it?

Sazid Khan: It may not be for everybody, but you know... it's, it's definitely something that I'm getting, I'm learning more and more. I knew coming to a job it would involve this. You learn it right away that hey, you know, if you're coming for this job and especially this level, you're gonna need to lead proposals, lead projects.

But you have mentors to help you along the way. They help you at the beginning, they walk you through it. You can take training courses, during onboarding and throughout. So it's definitely a very supportive network. It's just, it is quite a bit, a lot to learn, for sure. Always learning, always be learning. Yeah.

Amanda Brinton: Did you have experience with grant writing before you entered into this job?

Sazid Khan: I did with the state government. But it was more so like from an epidemiology standpoint, in terms of writing like disparity statements, writing the needs assessment, things like that.

With this job, you learn about the budget, you learn how to like do a budget, identify staffing. Identifying what staff should be on the project, identifying whether or not you're suitable for this grant, and then, you know, so there's more facets to it.

Now here you also have, editors and financial folks and things like that that you don't have to take care of, but you need to learn and understand what's going on for sure. So there's more support.

Lindsey Laytner: Yeah, a lot of project management.

Karoun H. Bagamian: How long do you work a day? Like how about your hours? Yeah.

Sazid Khan: Days I'm working from home, usually 9 to 5. Days I'm in the office 10 to 6, so I beat rush hour.

Karoun H. Bagamian: So like, yeah, standard work hours. That's great.

Sazid Khan: Yeah. Folks who have kids will work like 7 to 3 a lot of the times.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Oh, really? So it sounds very flexible.

Sazid Khan: Yeah. Yeah. As long as you make your meetings and make your deadlines and you let your managers know ahead of time, "Hey, this is going to be my schedule." They're typically good about it.

Karoun H. Bagamian: What are some personality traits or other characteristics that would make somebody a good fit for what you're doing?

Sazid Khan: Yeah. So I will say that even though I may not be super into an academic mindset, there are folks here who are peer reviewed publishing, who are working on grants, who are working with universities. So, even though that may not be what I'm doing, there are other folks here who do it. So really, honestly, we take all types, like all types of folks can excel at this type of a company and organization.

Because I think a lot of non profit research institutes like RTI, we have folks who understand contract work. We also have folks who understand grant work, who understand the academia world, who understand the value of peer reviewed articles, who understand the value of a good PowerPoint or data visualization of key talking points.

So really, it just depends on what you're looking to do. A lot of folks here, they are a methodology person. I like to kind of spread around, so it really depends. For my specific role, I think, like I mentioned, health communication, being able

to take information and to break it down to a way that different groups of audiences can understand it has been key.

I think I mentioned being an open minded person, identifying different ways to go about different strategies or how you go about something.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Because this is a larger company, and there's a lot of different roles. So, a lot of different personality types and skill types can find a place for themselves. That's kind of what you're talking about.

Sazid Khan: I would say being a hard worker is key because it's like you will work a lot of hours. You will definitely work and they will definitely work you hard. It'll be very rewarding work, but you will be working those 40 hours.

Yeah, you will be working. But it'll be interesting work along the way.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Do you think aspects of your graduate training helped you in some of these kind of situations?

Sazid Khan: During my dissertation, my advisor and I created deadlines, like mini deadlines to fulfill. And I think keeping that really made it work if I want to get this done, I got to follow this timeline and this plan. I think that has been very helpful because in this current job, you have to hit your deadlines for when things are due to your clients.

Whereas a grant is kind of up to you, right? You know, like, when you get this paper out, when you're done with this. For contract work, it's when is it due to the client, right? Making sure that it's to their satisfaction, getting their feedback and being comfortable with their feedback.

With PhD, obviously, I know Lindsey can tell you, getting feedback from your advisors and from other folks, you've got to be... you gotta swallow the ego a little bit, right? I came to them for feedback, and I can't get angry at them if they give it to me, right?

Lindsey Laytner: Totally. Is it similar in your role now? Or is it a completely different type of feedback that you get from clients compared to academia?

Sazid Khan: It depends. Because the client themselves has their funders that they got to satisfy that they've got their roles to fulfill, right?

And then how are they going to present it? So there's a lot of pre-conversation before you get started to ensure that you're understanding what it is that they need and what they're looking for. So a lot of

Lindsey Laytner: strategizing, it sounds like, yeah.

Karoun H. Bagamian: And a lot of preparation that you're aware of what you're expected to do and work together. So, collaboration and prep with your clients.

Sazid Khan: A lot of communication. A lot of constant communication to understand. And that's also a learning process. It's like, I understand, okay, you know. It's not necessarily what you want to do. You give them the ideas, but ultimately, it is up to them to decide.

Lindsey Laytner: Got it. And I assume you're probably working with a team of people. The majority of our listeners are going to be individuals with PhDs or about to get their PhD in grad school. They're used to having to, you know, they're a one man ship... I'm assuming that that's not the case in your role on your projects, like you're not having to do all of those things.

Sazid Khan: Yeah, a big part of that is you are on a team. You have your role. So on some roles, I'm a subject matter expert, some roles I'm a data analyst, some I'm the associate project director, just depends on the project and where you're slotted in.

But you're always on a team, which is great because you get the support, but also means that you can't work in a silo. You've always got to work together and understand how to collaborate and work with folks with different mindsets... also how to utilize everyone's skills and what they can bring to their tables, particularly if you have a PhD and you're in that type of a leadership role, identifying, you know, oh, because a mentorship is a big part of this role in terms of like mentoring junior staff, folks who have bachelors and master's degrees to also help them in their career as well, right?

So while you, of course, have to get the job done for your client or for the grant in terms of what you said you're going to do for the grant, you also have a role for mentorship and to help those, you know, junior to you, succeed, right? So, it could be more like, it could be a task that you could do much quicker, but it'd be worth it to teach them how to do it. It might take you longer to teach them than if you do it yourself, but it'll be worth it in the end because mentorship is key, and helping them grow is just as if not more important, right, to build a stronger team and to see them succeed, right, because you want to see your colleagues succeed.

So, there's definitely that fostering of, you know, we want each other to succeed, to grow, because the stronger your teammates are, the stronger you are, right? So, that's a big part of it. I think that I've really enjoyed my current job is everyone likes to support each other.

Heidi Bolduc: Are you able to give us an example of how your research has already had an impact?

Sazid Khan: Sure, so annually we do statewide evaluations for youth and adolescent substance use programs in the state of Georgia. And every year we give them an evaluation report on how they can better their programs and better administer them. And we just finished a five year contract with them. We just started a new five year contract and their new program has taken account some of the evaluation work recommendations we provided. And they were able to utilize it in their programs and how they instructed their organization to receive their subgrants to conduct the implementations of the Substance Abuse Prevention Program that you're utilizing our recommendations and how they're better collecting their data, getting local evaluators involved, working with other sectors, not just schools, but other areas that youth and adolescents could potentially be in and using substances, getting other folks involved to really spread or spreading the network. So that's one example of how what we do works right away.

Another one is we do substance use modeling for the state of New Jersey, where we brought predictive modeling based on substance use amongst youth and adolescents.

It's kind of like a bang for your buck, like where, if you invest more resources and funding into this specific field of prevention, so like media versus education. What is the estimate in terms of substance use, you know, usage amongst alcohol and marijuana amongst adolescents in the state or by county?

So, they're utilizing those models to identify, okay, this is what we should fund, this is what we should fund in our county. So it's used for their budgets and for things like that for immediate use. And each county kind of go in and mess with their own specific county, specific model. All right, so in our county, if we want to be able to affect substance use amongst youth and adolescents as much as possible, or for like the most we can, potentially, we should invest in this specific resource or this specific area prevention strategy compared to another one.

Lindsey Laytner: So, if you could go back to Sazid back when he was in his master's program and talk to him then to say, you know, okay, this is where you're headed, what should you learn right now? What should you be holding onto right now and really appreciating right now? What would you tell that person or anybody that's in that particular situation where they're thinking, okay, well, what courses should I take? What should I focus on? Like, I don't know what's going to happen to me. You know, that sort of thing.

Sazid Khan: First, I think a lot of folks when they think about, like, epidemiology, public health, they have a very narrow mindset in terms of like what jobs are available, right? That there's only like these type of jobs, this specific role and category.

And there are so many different types of jobs out there that utilize our skill sets. There's so many different types of jobs in so many different types of fields, so many different categories that that was, I think the first thing that I wish I would have known earlier was be creative.

Just like, you know, there is endless possibilities of what you can do, right. With that skillset that you are learning. So, I think that that was a big one for me. I really, really found out while I was job hunting was Like, you know, like data analyst or data advisor.

Or like this. So there's like a different, every company has a different term for it.

Lindsey Laytner: Yeah. It's so annoying. .

Sazid Khan: Yeah. But it shows you that like, you know, there are so many different ways people are looking at what you're doing and may not necessarily be the specific box that you're fitting into, but you have lived experiences and your academic skill set as well, that your clinical training skill set, like it fills a lot of different areas.

So I think that's one. Another one is, I think I mentioned lived experiences. So really, when I did my PhD, I tried all of it. I did graduate assistant work, I did research assistant work. I worked for a professor in academia. I was a teaching assistant. Like I said, I worked for state government. So getting many different experiences and seeing for yourself what you like and what you don't like.

So you won't know until you try, right? You may think you may not like it, but until you try it and give it a fair shot, that's one of the things like giving it a true fair shot. I think that was another thing that was very helpful to me to identify. Because I was like, I'm in academia, I'm not sure about this, but I will give it a fair shot. I'll try it. Gave it a shot, didn't end up liking it as much, you know, but I gave it a shot, right. So, you have to give it a fair shot before you rule it out.

And you never know! There could be traits, something that you like. Like I enjoy teaching, so I might become an adjunct someday. Yeah, that's because I enjoy the teaching aspect of it.

Lindsey Laytner: That's awesome. You'd be great at that. Yeah.

Sazid Khan: Thank you. Yeah, so, so that, you know, so you never know. Right? So I think that those are some things that I learned along the way..

Amanda Brinton: What was your job hunting experience like and how did you kind of develop? I don't know how long it was, but you know, how did you

develop along the way through your job hunt?

Sazid Khan: Oh, I, tough skin. You gotta develop tough skin. Oh my goodness. Everyone, and they give the same advice. I mean, it's really true. You got to just keep applying for every hundred applications you put out there, you'll get one or two responses. I was getting nothing for a while, but I eventually understood how to fill out the application, like on USA Jobs and all of where, you know, it's the algorithms. Even with companies like RTI and places like that, it is, understanding, you know, what they're looking for.

Because they're all looking through millions of applications. So, your resume needs to be in line with their job description. Otherwise, they're not going to look at you, because they need folks who are going to fulfill their job description. They tailor the job description to what they need, right? It took me a while to learn that, because applying for jobs is a job in itself. It's a perseverance, tough skin, and also something that folks have said to me, like my mentors have said to me, when it came to jobs was, if you get an interview, take it. Even if you're thinking, okay, maybe I'm not going to actually take this job, take the interview, get the practice, and because if anything else, you get the practice and you get face time with them for down the road.

When you do get interviewed, you're interviewing them as much as they're interviewing you.

Lindsey Laytner: It's a great point.

Sazid Khan: Am I a good fit for this job?

Karoun H. Bagamian: Very good advice.

Lindsey Laytner: Great advice.

Karoun H. Bagamian: I know Lindsey did that on her job searches. I remember hearing about it, too. It is very important to protect who you are, you know, even though you really want a job, you want to make sure that, and you know, sometimes things might evolve in a way you don't expect, but it's good to be careful about that up front.

Sazid Khan: Absolutely. And identifying what's important to you, what's key to you.

So, when I left state government, it was when and where I could work. You know, like the flexibility where I can work, if I need to switch from telework or in person, when in the day I can work, things like that. I think a lot of folks don't depend on the kind of rethought what was important to them, right?

So I think that's part of why a lot of folks shifted from one job to another, why they look for situations that was most important to them. So, that was key in my job hunt was having those non-negotiables in mind, right? Because often there are things you can negotiate and work on and be flexible, you have to be flexible for sure.

No job is going to be a hundred percent.

Lindsey Laytner: For our listeners who want to be in a role like yours what are your top two to three tips that you would give them, you know, definitely have these prior to applying or interviewing.

Sazid Khan: I think the main one that helped me was, it was my experiences beforehand.

So, not necessarily just like my jobs, but like my volunteer opportunities, practicums, my lived experiences. Because everyone will have the academics, everyone will have the coursework and things like that.

But I think what really helped separate me out was my lived experiences, not just the paid roles I had before, but the volunteer opportunities I had. The practicums, the other roles I did that showed that I'm capable of doing the work in the field, that I have a knowledge base in the field, that I have different experiences working with different types of people. I think that was very key to me, was like those lived experiences and those roles.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Can I ask about the volunteer opportunities-- were they along the same lines of what you're working in, or were they just in general? You know what I mean? I'm just curious.

Sazid Khan: So, in undergrad, it was all over the place. I worked for an agricultural lab. I worked for a rehab lab. And by that I meant post stroke and heart attack rehab, those types of labs, those types of clinics.

I also did volunteer work in infectious diseases, where I was a volunteer researcher. I was an unpaid intern in... Lindsey knows the name of the place, the Emerging Pathogens Institute.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah,

Lindsey Laytner: Yeah. Tuberculosis Center, right?

Sazid Khan: I was an intern there. Then they hired me because of my dedication.

And then from there, I did my master's practicum with them. And then I got a

summer position with them. After the first year of my PhD, during the summer I returned home.

So I started that as a volunteer. My hard work and dedication showing up, doing the work led me to getting more and more opportunities with them and that really helped. They draw on recommendation letters and et cetera, but just like have those experiences.

Karoun H. Bagamian: And I think that's a really, really good point just trying different things. It's something that resonates with me. I definitely agree with that-- to really just see what's out there because you never know what's going to fit and having a breadth of experiences seems to really help that.

Heidi Bolduc: Yeah, and to be honest, I also feel, I don't know if you felt this way as well, Sazid, that I've had interviews before where, like you said, volunteer opportunities or maybe something I was doing in a club in school came up and it ended up just being an amazing talking point for the interview.

The interviewers were asking me like, Oh, wow, you did that? How did you get involved in that? And that's such a cool experience. And then they started asking me questions that weren't even related to the job. It was more like, Oh, tell us more about that time you volunteered at Give Kids the World...

Sazid Khan: Yes, absolutely. I think this is just different entry points, right? For them to get into conversation with you. Exactly. The more points you can give them the better.

Another one that I knew was being part of professional societies has been super helpful even for networking and just as a support system. And as another way of getting different types of training and if you're an early career professional that they offer, right? So I'm in the American College of Epidemiology. They provide different types of early career trainings. They help you create a resume. It's a way of showing, hey, I have a support systems network. I understand the current up and ups in this field.

So, things like that. I think having a well-rounded resume across the board is always very helpful.

Amanda Brinton: I was just going to ask how did you investigate the culture of the organization? I feel like sometimes, you know, organizations that are so competitive may have I don't want to say an unbalanced, like, culture within the organization, but they kind of justify the payment for how they're working or how the hierarchy works out. How did you know that if that's a place you really want to be, like, a balanced work environment you wanted to live in each day?

Sazid Khan: So LinkedIn. LinkedIn became a very, you know, important thing for

me in terms of seeing if there's anybody you're networking with who's at that place of work. So I have a good friend who worked at RTI who was able to tell me about the culture, tell me about everything on the inside. And other organizations that I applied for, other governments I applied for, it was also, do I know someone in that network, or know somebody... to really just like identify what I could find out about them, online, reviews, things like that, right? Also, reviews are hit or miss, it could only be a disgruntled employee, you know, saying, you know.

Lindsey Laytner: So, when you reached out to individuals on LinkedIn, I know you said that you reached out to people that you already knew. Have you ever reached out to people that you didn't potentially know, just to say, "Hey, can I like borrow you for five minutes and just ask you about your role and the company prior to applying."

Sazid Khan: So, I hadn't, but I've had folks reach out to me since I've taken this position in that same vein of like, "Hey, I see you were in the same network. You went to University of South Carolina, I went to University of South Carolina, I'm looking at this job at the company you're at, can we talk?"

So, I didn't have to, because the place I applied for, I pretty much knew at least one person who was in a network of somebody, you know, from my conference or from something where I knew them. But I've had folks reach out to me in that way of, they may not have known me, but we're in similar networks, went to the same university, we had the same background or something, and they would reach out to me about it. So, I've had it happen a couple of times, yeah.

Lindsey Laytner: And so you've been open to just having a quick phone call and I think that's really useful for people to know-- don't be afraid to go on LinkedIn and reach out to people because sometimes that might be the only way you really get to find out information.

Karoun H. Bagamian: The worst case scenario is they don't respond, which is you lose nothing by doing that... I've never heard of somebody reaching out and getting a negative, you know, like, if anything, it's... Most people often do respond, or they don't, and that's okay. Yeah, because I have people reach out to me, and I usually always respond, because, I always think it's important. You also were talking about that we're all talking about that, like giving back and trying to help other people get, you know, the information they need, because sometimes it's not just readily available.

Sazid Khan: You will find where you're supposed to be in the end. You just gotta keep trying.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah, I think that's great advice. And I know something that's hard is not to take some of these things personally. Because sometimes

things don't work out, and sometimes jobs have already identified who they're going to hire, but they're still interviewing, or there's all these funny things that happen that we're not aware of.

Being strong, being comfortable in your skin and, you know, learn from what you come across and know that everything is a learning experience. That's what I think you've been telling us. That's like one of your biggest messages and what you've been telling us during this interview.

Lindsey Laytner: What do you want to do that you haven't been able to do yet? Or, you know, what's kind of like your next steps along your five year plan?

Sazid Khan: Yeah, sure. So, I think while I've been an associate project director, a couple of projects, I think becoming the actual project director, like, the main PI was definitely the next step, the next goal, and that's something that I'm training towards and like gaining more experience and I think that is the next step for sure. To gain that project directorship and just grow more and more, as well as, you know, also strengthen my scientific stature, in terms of going to conferences, networking, building that network out, building out that knowledge base in my field, reading up on the seminal literature that's out there, and just getting stronger in the field, I think, and getting more educated day in day out It's important to be strengthening my own mentorship abilities, right, as well as getting mentoring myself, right, because you, you can never stop, you never stop needing a mentor, right? I think that's, that's something that like I've been told by some senior colleagues. They still get mentored by folks-- no matter how long you've been in your position, you can always have a mentor. You always have somebody who you can turn to, to learn from and to talk to.

Karoun H. Bagamian: So, I'd like to ask my fun question that I like to ask people, which is... So, in the history, current living, alive, dead, three people that you would like to have a beer, a coffee, a beverage, whatever your choice, who would they be?

Sazid Khan: Muhammad Ali would be one.

Lindsey Laytner: Very cool.

Sazid Khan: Gotta be an incredible because he, he was the gift of gab, right? That was him.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah. Yeah.

Sazid Khan: I think MLK, MLK Jr. would be another fascinating one. Super fascinating.

Heidi Bolduc: That is a good answer. I don't think we've had anyone say that,

right?

Lindsey Laytner: No.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah. Yeah.

Sazid Khan: Well, it would be Obama. Like, that's always going to be one of the best ones to get just to talk to, just because.

Karoun H. Bagamian: I'd have to agree with that one. That would be pretty cool. Or Michelle.

Lindsey Laytner: You'd have to talk to both of them. Yeah. Michelle and Barack. Yeah. The Obamas. I feel like them together would be like, have a glass of wine with them. Oh my god.

Sazid Khan: Absolutely. Yeah. So, I mean, those are, that's a pretty solid threesome, I think.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Well, that's great. Thank you so much for spending this time with us. I know that we covered a lot of topics that is definitely of interest to our listeners and, yeah, that's about it. Thank you.