LOOK SMART, LIVE SMARTER

EMIRATES MAN

Jan Gerber – Founder and CEO of Paracelsus Recovery

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REST, RECOVER AND REBUILD

JAN GERBER, THE DISCREET FORCE BEHIND PARACELSUS RECOVERY, OPENS UP ON REDEFINING HEALING FOR THE WORLD'S ELITE, ONE CLIENT AT A TIME

WORDS: SARAH JOSEPH

When your days are spent navigating some of the world's most complex minds, how do you start your own morning? I wake at 6am and try not to reach for my phone; sometimes I succeed. First, I greet Balu, our Golden Retriever, then make a coffee and take it outside. Our home looks over meadows and forests, sometimes with horses grazing across the creek. That quiet moment, coffee in hand, centres me before the day begins. Some mornings I'll meditate or do breathwork, other days a run with Balu. For the first hour, my world is simple (the opposite of what's ahead).

Paracelsus Recovery is now a byword for the world's most private rehab. How did it all begin? In 2009, in my mother's spare bedroom. She and my then stepfather were helping a high-profile friend of a friend through addiction. He couldn't risk the exposure of a traditional centre, so we created a programme at home and brought in a yoga teacher, chef, and therapist. It was transformative. Without realising it, we'd built something new: one-client-at-a-time care built on trust, privacy and compassion. That intimacy became our DNA.

How has Paracelsus Recovery evolved since then? We began with one penthouse and five specialists per client. Now we have three residences, over 25 experts per person, and a far broader scope; from addiction to mental health, eating disorders and chronic illness. The view is better (lakefront with the Alps beyond) and our clinical capacity sharper, but the heart remains the same. We still only treat a maximum of three to four clients at a time, very privately. We still know how they take their coffee and remember their life stories long after they have returned home.

What do people get wrong about the mental health of the ultra-wealthy? That wealth brings lasting happiness. Extreme wealth creates a gilded cage, where struggles are trivialised and seeking help can feel dangerous. For those in the public eye, privacy is almost impossible; families can operate more like corporations than homes. We collectively gaslight these individuals, expecting gratitude instead of recognising pain. Beneath the status, they experience the same struggles as anyone else, often with even fewer safe spaces.

You've seen some unusual requests. Which stands out? A head of state once needed an entire rooftop covered in satellite dishes. A Middle Eastern client wanted a Bedouin tent and open fire on the terrace – which meant city permits. Another had every wall repainted in different colours. If it helps them feel safe enough to focus on recovery, we'll make it happen (so long as it is humanly possible).

What is the one rule even a head of state must follow here? The same confidentiality boundaries as everyone else. No entourages in therapy sessions, no exceptions. Safety always comes before status.

When have you said no? If a request risks safety or dilutes evidence-based care, the answer is no. Ethics are not for sale.

Have you treated family members or business partners? Yes, with firewalls: separate teams, separate records, separate timelines. Integrity depends on it. We once treated two brothers from a very high profile family within the same year, both not knowing about each other's stay with us.

What makes your 'one client at a time' model so powerful? For many clients, group treatment isn't an option. Our model makes recovery possible where it otherwise wouldn't be. Unlike clinics with one therapist for many patients, we build a full team around one person. They live in our residences with a live-in therapist, present for midnight conversations as much as scheduled sessions. For high achievers who live in guarded, transactional worlds, that level of trust can accelerate change dramatically.

What is the most unusual item a client insisted on bringing? I'll leave it to the imagination, but will say that familiar anchors matter. When a client feels grounded by something personal, trust builds faster.

What gap were you trying to fill? We saw there was no safe, stigma-free space for people who couldn't enter traditional rehab without risking exposure. Our answer was deeply personal, culturally fluent, and entirely private care. The environment feels familiar, never institutional, with every detail shaped around the individual. We meet clients where they truly are, not where society imagines them to be.

What is the most complex cultural accommodation you have made? Adapting food, prayer schedules, and reshaping spaces to honour identity while keeping clinical goals intact. Respect without losing therapeutic structure.

What is the last thought you have before you meet a new client? Leave every assumption at the door.

What's the first thing you do when a new client arrives? We meet them at the airport. At the clinic, there's no check-in desk, no forms in the lobby. Just a quiet welcome, coffee or tea, and a walk through their new space. They've often arrived carrying stress, fear and shame. The first hour is about letting their shoulders drop.

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Have you ever staged decoy arrivals or departures? Yes, when necessary. We separate routes, cars and timings. The goal is quiet, not dramatic.

How do you handle security and confidentiality? Many high-profile clients arrive with security teams, sometimes large ones. All but high-level politicians usually send them home or to a nearby hotel after a few days as Switzerland breathes safety and discretion. Beyond that, confidentiality is sacred. Switzerland already has some of the strictest medical secrecy laws in the world, and we add our own layers: addresses of residence are never published, license plates of limousines are removed from public registries, every staff member signs strict NDAs, and in all electronic records we use only initials, rounded birthdays, and encrypted communication.

What is the most difficult arrival you have managed? A private jet was diverted to Zurich only hours before landing. The client called wanting to check in immediately and arrived with an entourage of ten, all making requests and moving furniture the minute they stepped in. Our medical and scheduling teams worked through the night to build a treatment plan; housekeeping reset the residence; our chef prepared dinner for ten after the shops had closed. By morning, it looked seamless.

What happens when a client wants to leave on day three? Well, they are free to do whatever they wish. However, we try to make staying feel safer than leaving by addressing their fears, rather than trying to keep them by force.

Have you ever had to calm an entourage rather than a client? Yes. Sometimes the team around a client is more anxious than the client themselves. They want control, they want reassurance. Our role is to bring calm into the room because typically if the entourage settles, the client can too.

Your own journey into this field wasn't straightforward. Indeed it was not. In my twenties, I was working 100-hour weeks in finance and then building my own companies. By the time I was running clinics, I thought I was in control, until I wasn't. During COVID, borders closed, the business was on the brink, I was being defrauded by a business partner, my marriage was collapsing. It spiralled into anxiety, apathy, and deep depression. Weeks in an inpatient clinic began my recovery. It made me even more empathetic to the pains of our clients and other fellow humans, and truly helped me grasp just how much status makes pain lonelier. Pain is pain and it deserves compassion, regardless of your name or bank balance.

Can you give us a glimpse into a client's day? No two are alike. One morning might be yoga followed by deep therapy; another could begin with a health assessment and end with a walk in the Alps. Meals are shared with their therapist. The day blends medical work, emotional exploration and moments of joy: music, art, even tennis. The stillness of the lake or the mountain air can be as healing as any session.

You're known for blending Swiss hospitality with clinical precision. How do you balance luxury and medicine? We aim for comfort, not opulence. But for our clients, discreetly luxurious surroundings are familiar and safe, which is the only backdrop where recovery can unfold. Swiss hospitality, with its precision and discretion, shapes everything we do. The highest standard of care means honouring both clinical integrity and the client's world. The lake, mountains and forests do the rest.

What's a small sign someone is starting to heal? When they start taking responsibility for their recovery. It might be a genuine laugh, a night's sleep without medication, or making plans for life after the clinic. Sometimes it's setting a boundary or putting the phone away. These moments mark the point where healing becomes their choice.

Has working so closely with clients changed how you see wealth and mental health? Completely. Wealth can amplify isolation, and privilege doesn't protect you from pain. But when resources are used well, they can create the space for deep healing.

Have you felt the ripple effect of one client on an entire sector? Absolutely. When a founder heals, thousands feel it. The wellbeing (or not-wellbeing) of many of our clients impacts whole ecosystems. That is why this work matters.

What happens after a client leaves? Recovery doesn't end at the door. We stay connected with aftercare programmes, discreet home visits, and check-ins with their team. The goal is to help them carry new habits back into their world, not return to old patterns.

Do you ever turn clients away? Yes. If someone's goals don't align with our model, or if their needs are better met in a different type of programme, we guide them elsewhere. Saying no is sometimes the most ethical care we can give.

Looking ahead, what's your vision for Paracelsus Recovery? We hope to keep redefining what success and wellbeing mean. Our focus remains on world-leading, bespoke mental health care, guided by our 360-degree model and informed by the insight of a Nobel Laureate on our team. Through our Wealth and Health Paradox framework and Paracelsus Stories film series, we're showing the hidden emotional toll of achievement, challenging stigma and building resilience in the next generation. We work with only a few dozen clients each year, many of whom shape entire industries, making their wellbeing a powerful lever for change. More than a clinic, we aim to be a movement where health, not status, is the ultimate measure of success.

What is the one story you cannot tell but wish you could? I cannot. But I can say this: if you heard it, you'd be reminded that all power is human up close.

What would you tell your younger self? Success won't save you. Face the parts of yourself you'd rather avoid. Be kinder when things fall apart. And know that vulnerability isn't weakness; it's the most powerful connection you have.

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