



## Lebanon's foremost mountaineer, Maxime Chaya, shares lessons from his adventures climbing the world's peaks

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Maxime Chaya, the first Lebanese to climb Mount Everest as well as several other peaks in the world, shared lessons learned during his adventures with members of the AUB Medical Center Women's Auxiliary.

"There's an Everest for everyone," Chaya told about 100 women attending the event in Bathish Auditorium on November 11, after being introduced by Nadia Alameddine, the program chairperson. In other words, Chaya explained, there is a challenge or a goal that each one is seeking to achieve.

And Chaya has certainly achieved loads: He has scaled the seven highest peaks in all continents. He has explored both poles. He graduated with honors from London School of Economics. He has been honored by the Lebanese republic. He just published a book entitled *Steep Dreams, My Journey to the Top...*

And he is not planning to stop here.

"I am just preparing for the next 'summit' I will climb," he said, eliciting murmurs of admiration from the audience.

Although Chaya's continuous ascent to new heights might seem too fast for many, all was not smooth-sailing at the beginning.

In fact, the now experienced and super-fit mountaineer risked resigning himself to being a retired bicycle racer. Before setting his sights on the highest peaks, Chaya was a sports enthusiast and would often participate in bicycle races. But on one occasion, while racing in Kenya, he dislocated his collarbone and was forced to withdraw from the race, even though he had been in the lead. While being treated in hospital, Chaya started to question the purpose of his life and decided to retrain and go back to Kenya. Not only did he win the race the second time round, but he also became good friends with the organizer of a mountain climbing expedition to Kilimanjaro.

His life would never be the same.

Peak after peak, the mixture of overcoming fears and obstacles along with viewing the world from the top was exhilarating.

Several summits later, Chaya now says: "The top is only half the journey."

Learning how to maneuver the downhill trek is a feat, he told the AUB audience, adding: "Life is a series of summits and achievements. Every time we reach one, we have to come back safely from it."

Chaya's adventures have also taught him how to find solutions for problems, even if he is stuck in the middle of a "white ice desert, far away from civilization."

"When the binding on my skis broke, in the South Pole, I had one of two choices: either I would break down and get mad, or I would try to fix it," he said.

Needless to say, he opted for the second choice.

It is this determination along with a high level of fitness that propelled Chaya to the top. And he was forever changed.

"It's a fact that no one who stands on top comes back the same," he said. "May 15, 2006 (the day he climbed Mount Everest) is my new birth date."