



CEO Insights: Dr Gabi Hanna, Lamassu Biotech, Cleveland

Interviewed by Dr George Marano

Doctor Gabi Hanna's journey from Qamishli, in north-west Syria, to leading *Lamassu Biotech*, a cutting-edge biopharmaceutical company in the United States, is a study in purpose, reinvention, and strategic clarity.

Growing up with limited professional pathways, he chose medicine as a way to impact and serve others, later moving to the United States and spending 15-years in academic medicine before transitioning into leadership roles within the biotech industry. Today, he combines his clinical background with a practical, principle-driven approach, bringing together science, strategy, and ethics in one of the world's most demanding sectors.

In this *CEO Insights* interview, Dr. Hanna offers a grounded and compelling perspective on strategy, culture, and decision-making. Across these themes, he spoke candidly about the realities of biotech — the unrelenting pressures of time, cost, and quality — while elevating the discussion to the principles and convictions that sustain leaders through complexity. What emerges is a portrait of a leader who is both pragmatic and idealistic: deeply committed to execution, anchored in values that transcend commercial outcomes, and convinced that leadership is ultimately measured not by intention, but by the ability to turn vision into reality.

Dr. Hanna's formative years were shaped by an environment where meaningful career paths were few and far between. In that context, medicine was not simply a profession — it was one of the few avenues through which an individual could make an impact, earn respect, and transcend structural limitations.

"In Syria, opportunities were limited and very few careers allowed you to contribute in a meaningful way. Medicine stood out as a path where you could help people, build purpose, and elevate your standing in a society that didn't always value individual potential. Those early constraints shaped my ambition and taught me to commit fully to the path that allowed me to make the greatest impact."

Though he began with a clear sense of purpose, Dr. Hanna's professional direction evolved continuously as he moved countries, confronted new realities, and re-evaluated what he wanted his life to stand for. Reinvention became an ongoing discipline.

"My career didn't follow a predetermined design. Each major step came from responding to the circumstances in front of me — migration, changing environments, and shifting priorities. What I imagined for myself as a young doctor was very different from where I eventually landed. The journey kept reshaping itself, and I learned to adapt, recalibrate, and let the next opportunity reveal itself."

A 15-year academic foundation at Duke University, including time as the executive director of the Preclinical Translational Research Unit, allowed Dr. Hanna to enter the biotech sector not as an outsider but as a leader capable of securing assets, attracting investors, and partnering with some of the world's most respected institutions.

"Years of clinical work and research gave me the credibility and competence to step into biotech with confidence. Licensing our first drug and building three assets came from that foundation. What still feels surreal is partnering with institutions I once hoped simply to train at, like the Mayo Clinic. It reminded me that biotech advances only when science, partnerships, and disciplined execution move in harmony."

For Dr. Hanna, strategy is not an abstract theory. It is the practical act of knowing exactly where you stand, defining where you intend to go, and deliberately connecting those points through relationships, capabilities, and disciplined action.

"Strategy begins with being brutally honest about your current reality. You can't build a plan based on wishful thinking. And if the destination isn't clear, the strategy will always be vague. The line that connects the two comes from your resources, networks, and capabilities — these are the tools that turn vision into movement."

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To Dr. Hanna, leadership is not a conceptual exercise—it is the lived ability to transform vision into tangible progress. At its highest level, leadership elevates people, strengthens communities, and creates value far beyond organisational boundaries.

“Leadership is the ability to turn a vision into reality. It’s not enough to articulate direction—you must execute it and improve the world around you. I believe leadership extends beyond organisational success; it should make people better and contribute to society. I’m still in the stage of actively translating my own vision, but that responsibility guides every decision I make.”

In early-stage biotech, the competitive environment is unforgiving. Every strategic decision must be viewed inside a persistent triangle of quality, speed, and cost — a tension magnified by limited resources and the presence of highly capitalised global players.

“Biotech start-ups live within a constant tension between quality, speed, and cost. If your quality isn’t exceptional or your execution isn’t faster, you become irrelevant very quickly, especially next to large pharmaceutical companies. These trade-offs shape nearly every operational decision, and failing on any one of the three dimensions can jeopardise the entire venture.”

Biotech companies are not simply competing for capital or scientific breakthroughs; they are competing against time itself. Patent life, regulatory pace, and market readiness create hard, non-negotiable constraints that can determine the fate of a therapy.

“In biotech, you are always racing against the clock. Patent life starts on day one, and every delay reduces your chances of success. Market windows open and close quickly, and when you miss them, the opportunity disappears, regardless of the quality of your science. Time isn’t a preference to optimise — it is a decisive constraint that shapes everything we do.”

In oncology, where patients face the most vulnerable moments of their lives, ethics is not theoretical. Principles guide judgment, protect integrity, and enable teams to operate with clarity even when decisions are complex or emotionally heavy.

“My upbringing instilled strong principles that anchor me when decisions become difficult. When working to treat cancer, ethical standards cannot be compromised — these patients deserve complete honesty, respect, and integrity. Regulations can be debated, but ethics sit above them. A culture built on transparency and moral clarity strengthens both performance and trust.”



In a scientific environment where contribution, judgment, and innovation can often matter more than process compliance, micromanagement suffocates capability. Empowerment, trust, and role clarity become essential to performance.

“Micromanagement weakens effectiveness in a high-value scientific environment. My job is to set principles, equip the team with resources, and mentor them — not control every detail. In a small, mission-driven organisation, every person carries a significant load. The goal is to grow their capability and independence, not their dependence on oversight.”

And finally, sustainable performance requires a culture that treats mistakes as learning opportunities rather than grounds for punishment. When organisations embrace forgiveness and eliminate blame, trust compounds and people grow faster.

“When someone makes a sincere mistake and learns from it, the correct response is forgiveness. Blame stalls progress, but learning accelerates it. Over time, trust deepens when people know they will be supported even after missteps. That type of culture not only improves capability — it strengthens the entire organisation.”

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