Dear NAPABA members and friends,

Our 2015 Convention in New Orleans was an extraordinary success! On behalf of NAPABA, I want to extend warm thanks to our 1,600 attendees, making it the third highest attended Convention; 300+ knowledgeable panelists providing the most CLEs ever at 52; and nearly 150 supportive sponsors and exhibitors. My heartfelt thanks to Convention co-chairs, Captain Benes Aldana, Christine Changho Bruneau, and Carlina Eiselen; the NAPABA staff; and those who helped prepare 75 much-appreciated holiday care packages for local Asian Pacific American families.

Thanks to our Convention’s plenary speakers for sharing about eroding voting rights and a call to action, the ongoing fearful Asian Pacific American experience post-9/11, and advice from remarkable women leaders in public service. To deepen our partnerships, we were honored to have ABA President Paulette Brown and ABA President-Elect Linda Klein, as well as our partner affinity bar associations’ presidents and/or president-elects join us: Hispanic National Bar Association, National Native American Bar Association, National LGBT Bar Association, and South Asian Bar Association of North America.

One unparalleled highlight was our Gala keynote speaker, Senator Mazie Hirono, joining former Hawaii Attorney General David Louie for a fireside chat. We were inspired to engage and mobilize our clout to rally for political candidates of our choosing and run for office ourselves. And congratulations to all of our 2015 awardees and competition winners!

I am also very pleased to share the great work NAPABA has done post-Convention. NAPABA is well-known for our incredible Convention, but there is so much NAPABA does the other 360 days of the year! Several advocacy accomplishments to highlight, include: 1) working with CAPAC and others on the DOJ’s apparent profiling of Chinese American scientists; 2) responding to Roanoke Mayor Bowers refusal to aid Syrian refugees and invoking of the Japanese American World War II internment camps as a possible modern-day solution, by issuing a strong statement and publishing an op-ed in the Roanoke Times, stating that such rhetoric perpetuates distrust and violence; 3) speaking out against anti-Muslim hate and violence by issuing a forceful statement and organizing an NCAPA rally in Washington, D.C.; and 4) after collaborating with our hardworking committees, networks, and staff, your Board passed seven crucial policy resolutions on a variety of topics supporting voting rights reform, refugee resettlement programs, LGBTQ equality, and redistricting based on whole population. Additionally, we evaluated over 22 proposed resolutions for our CBAC leadership Lobby Day in D.C. in early March 2016. Likewise, I urge you to join NAPABA for our own rewarding Lobby Day event in D.C. from May 23-24, 2016, to champion for the Asian Pacific American community.

To execute this year’s themes of Collaboration, Inclusion, Innovation, and Advancement, we created the Corporate Governance Committee, Asian American Adoptee Network, and revived and expanded the Law School Professors and Administrators Network. With over 35 to choose from, I always recommend our members participate in at least one substantive law committee and one affinity network. They are an excellent way to stay connected with NAPABA members throughout the year, increase visibility through webinars, and share the latest legal developments in between our Regional Conferences and Convention.

One manifestation of these themes was the anticipation of a new Supreme Court Justice. Our members can be proud that NAPABA worked tirelessly to urge a White House interview with an Asian Pacific American for the Supreme Court, and we accomplished that historic first: Judge Sri Srinivasan of the D.C. Circuit was interviewed by President Obama for the vacancy and was on the “short list” of nominees, the farthest that an Asian Pacific American has advanced in the road to the Supreme Court. Although Judge Srinivasan was ultimately not nominated by the President, we — and the White House, Senate, and American public — know, in large part due to the years of NAPABA’s advocacy, that we have a very deep bench of eminently qualified Asian Pacific American judicial candidates who are more than ready to serve all levels of the federal court, including the Supreme Court, and we will keep striving to achieve that next historic first.

To stay in the know, like us on Facebook (NAPABANational), connect with us on LinkedIn, and follow us on Twitter (@NAPABA and @RealJinHwang)!

Very truly yours,

Jin Y. Hwang
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ON THE COVER
THE LOUISIANA SUPREME COURT LOCATED IN NEW ORLEANS — HOME OF THE
2015 NAPABA CONVENTION
There is nothing like seeing young adults exceed their own expectations.

In my 20 years of coaching San Francisco high school mock trials, I have had the privilege of watching my high school students skillfully debate a constitutional issue, conduct a killer cross-examination, and perform a riveting five-minute closing argument in front of a courtroom full of judges, lawyers, and impressed family members. I will forever remember some of their defining lines — “He got caught red-handed;” “This is a case about betrayal;” “This is a case about gaps: gaps in memory, gaps in the investigation;” and “No motive, no malice, no murder” — and seeing the pride in their eyes (and in their parents’ eyes) after hard-fought competitions.

This year’s competition involves a case of second degree murder, where a college student is accused of killing a security guard who was allegedly choking another student. As part of their research for the case, students are taught exceptions to the hearsay rule, Supreme Court case laws on involuntary confessions, and the elements of voluntary manslaughter.

I have learned a tremendous amount over my 20 years coaching mock trials. When I began coaching, I was a first-year associate, nervously standing in front of 20 restless high school students. As I tried teaching them how to conduct a trial and saw their eyes start to glaze over, I decided to keep things as simple as possible and to energize them with my own enthusiasm. The students soon became more engaged and curious, and they eventually barraged me with questions, both simple (“What do we call the judge?”) and complicated (“How can I defend someone who I think is guilty?”). I was swiftly hooked on the challenge of coaching these students, drawn to their dedication, passion, and ultimately, excited about the prospect of building relationships that would last for years.

After 22 years and over 400 students later, I still coach mock trials and love every minute of it for myriad reasons.
Coaching has had the unique effect of enhancing my overall skills as a lawyer because to coach mock trials, I had to learn how to handle a trial myself — something I had yet to do as a practicing litigator. Fortunately, coaching requires us to teach an extended trial advocacy workshop. Through this, I learned — and then taught — how to help students develop a persuasive and consistent theme, addressing the bad facts in a case upfront and presenting a powerful summation based on the evidence presented during the trial. Since the students must make appropriate objections during trial, they are also taught how to be adept at asserting and addressing objections. And of course, working with the students playing the witnesses — to make their testimony more credible, compelling, and understandable — meant we had repeated opportunities to prepare witnesses.

Coaching the students has also afforded me wonderful opportunities to watch students blossom. At the beginning of one particular year, a painfully shy student could barely speak in front of a crowd. She kept pushing herself and by the end of the year, she presented a four-minute pre-trial argument on Fourth Amendment issues that required her to field sophisticated questions from a real judge.

Some parents even see their children in a brand new light. One Asian immigrant parent cried at the end of a trial, saying that she had never imagined that when moving to the United States, she would see her child in a suit skillfully arguing in a real courtroom before actual lawyers and judges. To this parent, watching her child master complex arguments in a real world setting made the legal system seem much less foreign and intimidating.

Beyond doubt, the best part of coaching has been the students and witnessing how much they enjoy the experience. It is a pleasure watching them grow and improve as the program progresses, as both individuals and as a team. They gain poise, confidence (most notably in their public speaking abilities), and lifelong friendships. Freshmen bond with seniors, team members coordinate trial outfits and cheers (and sometimes team raps), and at the city finals, they all hold hands anxiously awaiting the results. There are even coordinated reunions every year where former teammates catch up about colleges, job-searches, and life’s many challenges.

I, along with the other coaches, treasure the relationships we have established with our students. They have been kind enough to invite us to their high school art performances, their graduations, and even their weddings (wow, am I old!). Some of them are even practicing lawyers now, including one who is a public defender. I am so proud of all of them!

I never thought I would have much interest coaching or working with high school students coming out of law school. Yet, I remain quite surprised by just how much I love coaching and consider myself both fortunate and grateful to have been able to get involved with mock trials. It has made me a better lawyer and given me something priceless: an extended family of more than 400 current and former students.

Update: On March 12, Clifford’s team found out on late notice that it qualified for the state competition as a wild card. With three less weeks to prepare than the other teams, Clifford’s team placed 13th out of 34 teams, with one of his students winning the award for Best Prosecution Expert Witness.

Clifford Yin is a partner with the San Francisco law firm of Coblentz Patch Duffy & Bass LLP, and the chair of the firm’s litigation group. He has over 20 years of experience litigating and trying high-stakes business, real estate, and employment disputes, including first-chair jury trial victories. Cliff received a 2015 Unity Award from the Minority Bar Coalition for his work in advancing diversity in the legal profession. He graduated from Harvard Law School in 1994 and Brown University in 1991.
NAPABA held its 2015 Convention, “NAPABA Rising,” in New Orleans from Nov. 5-8, 2015.

More than 1,600 Asian Pacific American (APA) attorneys, judges, law students, legal scholars, and elected officials from around the country gathered at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside Hotel. The Convention featured 52 panels and plenaries on a wide range of issues affecting the legal and APA communities.
On Saturday, Nov. 7, the 27th Anniversary Gala featured a conversation with the Honorable Mazie K. Hirono, U.S. Senator from Hawaii, facilitated by the Honorable David Louie, former Hawaii Attorney General. The evening also included the official induction of 2015-16 NAPABA President Jin Y. Hwang, and the NAPABA Board of Governors.
For me, one of the highlights of watching the Olympic Games are the opening ceremonies, especially the procession of athletes representing each participating nation. The pageantry, choreography, and festive spirit have become both an art form and an expression of national pride and identity, and the competitions themselves offer equal parts inspiration, drama, exhilaration, and heartbreak. (The 2012 summer) games did not disappoint. Like millions of others, my family and I marveled at the opening ceremonies in London and cheered for the achievements of swimmers Michael Phelps and Missy Franklin, gymnast Gabby Douglas, and the American women’s soccer team, among many others.

But the real reason I enjoy the parade of nations during the opening ceremonies is that it reminds me of the diversity of the United States and the strength that comes from that diversity. Unlike most of the teams of other countries, the U.S. athletes stand out for being a portrait of the different racial and ethnic backgrounds that comprise our nation. And this year, for the first time, the U.S. team had more women than men. That diversity reminds me that what unites us, unlike many other countries, is not ethnic background or lineage, but a shared belief in core American values, principles, and dreams. Although we have much work to do before we live up to the promises of justice, liberty, and equal opportunity for all, our differences can — and I believe do — make us a stronger nation.

Another reason the Olympic Games are so fascinating is that they blend individual effort and effective teamwork. Years of physical training, mental preparation, and shared sacrifice to achieve a common goal culminate in performance under pressure. Every organization requires a blend of individual effort and effective teamwork, so when new lawyers ask me about career advancement or success in the workplace, I sometimes answer, “Be an MVP.” But what does being an MVP mean? It does not mean simply being the person who contributes the most to the success of the team, though that obviously helps. Instead, “MVP” provides a way for me to share three basic tips for being more effective in any work environment.

First, “M” stands for mentoring.
Seek out mentors, and be a mentor to others. Many others in these pages have written at great length about the importance of mentoring. Suffice it to say that I would not be where I am today without the assistance of many mentors along the way. From the time I was in high school, through college and law school, and in each of the jobs I have had, I have benefited from the advice and assistance of others. They have pointed me in the right direction, given me encouragement and critical feedback, shown me by example how to be a good lawyer and how never to compromise my integrity, and taught me the unwritten rules that exist in every organization.

Every job has two components. First, there is the “what” of the job — the content of what you are expected to do, and the results you are paid to deliver every day. Equally important, however, and sometimes overlooked, is the second component: the “how” of your job. Those are ways in which work is done in the organization — how information is shared or not shared; whom you must consult or inform to get buy-in from decision-makers; and what the hidden protocols are that constitute the culture of a workplace. Mentors can help you navigate these tacit conventions, avoiding big mistakes and easing the path forward for you when facing a difficult situation. Mentoring can help everyone in an organization at all levels, but it is particularly helpful for those not part of the dominant group, because the
members of the dominant group (or groups) typically establish, without even thinking about it, the culture of the organization. Recognizing and learning the shared assumptions and practices of the dominant group is an essential survival skill if you are in a non-dominant group. At every step of my career, I have had help — the teachers who taught me the value of good writing; the college professor who encouraged me to consider applying to law school; the law school professors who taught me how to think rigorously and analytically. I... could go on and on. And I don’t just mean the mentors who may be assigned to you as part of a formal mentoring program, though those can be important and helpful. I also include the informal relationships that are created when you really admire and respect someone and seek their advice. Having those relationships has been immeasurably beneficial to me, particularly early in my career.

For those of you later in your careers, mentoring can also help you become a better leader, supervisor, or rainmaker. Don’t stop looking for ways to learn from others. Many workplaces are starting to offer opportunities for partners or senior executives to receive executive coaching — one-on-one sessions with an expert coach over a period of time (typically a year or more) to provide targeted feedback and concrete advice on how to improve leadership, supervisory, or other abilities. If you think you don’t need or could not benefit from a coach, just think: if the best athletes in the world can have a coach (as they all do), so can you. More importantly, be a mentor to others. Pay it forward.

How do you find a mentor? That leads me to my next two points.

The “V” in MVP stands for volunteering.

This comes in two forms. In your day-to-day work, look for opportunities to take on the tough but important assignments. Every organization has them — sometimes they are high-profile and glamorous, but most of the time they are not. They are not hard to find, because most of your co-workers will run from them. When you hear of one, check your workload, and if you are not totally overloaded, volunteer to be part of a team, or better yet to lead a team, to help tackle that problem. You should develop a reputation for doing excellent work and delivering on your commitments. In volunteering for the most challenging assignments, you will not only learn new substantive areas and hone your leadership skills, you will also become known as the go-to person in your organization for solving difficult problems.

Don’t stop there. Look for ways to give back to your local, professional, and other communities. These opportunities may take the form of serving on committees in your firm, company, or government agency; engaging in bar activities to improve the legal profession; teaching or writing articles; performing pro bono legal work; and other forms of community involvement. Regardless of what you choose, I have found my volunteer work to have been personally rewarding, intellectually challenging, and filled with opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills. As a side benefit, you will meet other interesting people, and you will develop relationships that may turn into chances for being mentored or being a mentor.

A useful frame of reference is to think of spending 80 percent of your time doing 100 percent of your work, and 20 percent of your time working on your stretch assignments, helping to make your workplace better, or contributing to your larger community. Your day job is important, but it is equally important to go beyond your day job if you can.

Finally, the “P” in MVP stands for being a people-person.

As I’ve gained confidence over the years, I have found it helps to be a people-person. Some people naturally relate well to others; for others, it takes a conscious effort. For me, it did not happen overnight. Rather, I’ve discovered over time that I have a natural and genuine interest in learning about and learning from other people. Being a people-person is not about forcing yourself to be someone you’re not or being a glad-hander. It’s about being truly curious and interested in other people — who they are, what challenges they face, and what makes them tick. Every interaction with someone else is an opportunity to learn something new.

Some call such conscious efforts networking. I prefer to think of it as being a connector among people you know. The keys to successful networking are to be authentic, to seek common interests, and to learn to put people at ease. It may not come naturally to you to go up to a stranger at a cocktail party, introduce yourself, and strike up a conversation. But like anything else, the more you do it, the easier it gets. Broadening your network means more than just greeting people at a reception. It also means following up on topics of mutual interest; keeping in touch; and sending opportunities their way. Volunteering and widening your network have inherent value, but they also help give you visibility and exposure to job and career opportunities that may well change your life.

So, there you have it: find a few good mentors and be a mentor to others; volunteer; and be a people-person. These are just three simple career tips of many, but follow them with practice and commitment, and you too can be an MVP.

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Ivan K. Fong is senior vice president, Legal Affairs and General Counsel, of the 3M Company. In this role, he oversees all legal, legal policy, compliance, and government affairs matters. Prior to joining 3M in October 2012, Ivan served for over three years as general counsel of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
Do you want to get involved with NAPABA? Are you interested in how current board members, committee chairs, and affiliate leaders got involved? Do you want to know how NAPABA members became national leaders? You can learn about NAPABA's leaders in the Leadership Corner. This quarter, we get to know Vivia Chen of The Careerist.

By Jonathan Widjaja

Vivia Chen is a senior columnist and chief blogger for American Lawyer where her legal blog, The Careerist, was recognized as “One of the 15 Most Influential Legal Blogs” by Business Insider in 2012. In 2013, the ABA Journal inducted Ms. Chen into its Hall of Fame, describing her work as “graceful prose without dancing around the issues near and dear to her readers.”

After graduating from New York University (NYU) School of Law, Ms. Chen practiced corporate law in New York City for five years. However, she soon began to realize that practicing law was not her passion. An English major at Williams College, Ms. Chen began exploring opportunities as a journalist. She started accepting freelance writing projects and soon found herself back at her alma mater writing and editing for the NYU Law Magazine. Two years later, she was offered a writing position with American Lawyer, a place she has now called home for over 10 years.

It can be risky to roll the dice on yourself, especially when wandering down an unknown path. “Sometimes I worried that it was only a phase and that I would want to change careers again,” Ms. Chen admits. “I was lucky with the way everything worked out because there were times when I was unsure of my decisions. Making up your mind is only half of the battle. Actually going through with the plan is another challenge.”

Ms. Chen credits her husband and daughter with her success for “understanding and supporting her in pursuing a writing career.” In a modern-day world where women struggle to find a balance between succeeding at work and parenting at home, Ms. Chen says, “I don’t think that in order for women to succeed, husbands must start bearing the burden at home. But husbands have to take their wives’ careers seriously and sharing in family responsibilities would certainly be helpful.”

Reflecting on her time as an attorney, she recalls, “In a law firm, there was transparency as to how much partners make; however, writers are kept in the dark as to what colleagues are being paid.” She adds, “Transparency does not solve the problem because female partners still only make about 80 percent of what male partners make. There is currently no clear solution, (only) that men and women should push for equality.”

However, Ms. Chen is optimistic about Asian American women in the workforce and feels they will succeed in the long-term. “I believe that Asian American women are not keeping quiet and (instead), becoming increasingly outspoken about the issues (they face) as more of them attain positions of power in the workforce.”

In The Careerist, Ms. Chen primarily writes on matters about women professionals, such as work-life balance, wage gap issues, and how to overcome various problems. In one recent article, she highlighted a research study which discovered that certain negative thinking can actually be a good thing: “Worriers have higher highs when things turn out well, and are more resilient when the news is bad.”

In most, if not all, of Ms. Chen’s articles, she writes from her own perspective with a touch of personal experience. For instance, in the previously mentioned article, she commented on how she was so sure she failed the bar exam, she was racking her head on how to break the news to her bosses. “When I found out that I had passed,” she excitedly recalls, “I practically stopped strangers on the street (to tell them the good news)!”

Although the path that led to Ms. Chen’s successful journalism career was circuitous, she is grateful for the life experiences that it gave her. For others who are looking to experiment with career changes, she opines, “Establish a timeline for trying something new — whether it be three months or a full year. By the end of that time period, decide whether the change is practical for the long-term.”

Ms. Chen’s story shows that not everyone finds their ideal career path the first time around and that it is never too late to try something new. With the right support and mindset, anyone can find happiness and success in their careers.
We are proud to partner with the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association to promote excellence in the legal profession.
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