

# INSPIRATION

For our Next Generation Leaders

*In Honor of*  
Asian Pacific American  
Heritage Month



TOYOTA





TRACEY DOI

Chief Financial Officer

Toyota

Asian roots: Japan



Dear Toyota TAASiA Team,

May 2020

In honor of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, I wanted to share some reflections and inspirations that may be helpful to you on your professional journey. I just celebrated my 20<sup>th</sup> year with Toyota. Time has certainly flown by! I've been fortunate to be part of the company as we have grown in sales volume, market share and manufacturing footprint in North America. We've overcome major hurdles: the financial crisis in 2008, the massive recall crisis, and the Great East Japan earthquake. As we face this current pandemic crisis, I am confident that we will emerge a stronger, transformed Toyota.

We have made great strides after coming together as One Toyota, operating much more seamlessly as we leverage talent and strengths across the organization. I'm proud that with the wonderful engagement of TAASiA, WIIT, TODOS, AAC, Spectrum, TVA, YP and many other business partnering groups, that we have a much more inclusive culture that celebrates the diverse thinking and experiences of our 47,000 team members.

As you progress through your career, my advice is to **surround yourself with talent**. Seek opportunities where you can learn from engaged leaders that care about your development. In turn, **nurture your team** and invest in a succession plan. The deeper the bench, the easier for you to make a new move. You will naturally grow and flourish through trusted relationships that you build through work, business partnering groups, professional organizations, and volunteering in the community, school and church. Several valued advisors may make up your **personal board of directors** and provide a sounding board with unfiltered advice.

I reached out to dear friends that I deeply respect and admire. I asked them to share advice that they wished they had heard earlier in their career. It's always helpful to gain insight from many different perspectives.



These Asian American leaders are functional experts in marketing, government affairs, public relations, finance, investment banking, medicine, technology, procurement, social innovation, education, law, architecture and more.

They hold senior leadership roles in a broad array of industries – advertising, airline, healthcare, financial services, retail, private equity, construction, education, philanthropy, energy, entertainment, technology, consulting, cuisine and of course, automotive.

Their Asian roots include China, Cambodia, Korea, Hong Kong, Philippines, India, Japan and Taiwan. Some leaders immigrated to the United States when they were very young, others are third and fourth generation. One thing they all have in common is that they have a deep desire to support, inspire and develop our next generation of Asian American leaders...all of you!

Through the years I have been fortunate to meet this accomplished group of executives that enjoy giving their time, talent and treasures to strengthen our Asian community and support many worthy causes. Had it not been for the Japanese American National Museum, U.S.–Japan Council, Orchid Giving Circle Fund at Texas Women’s Foundation, Asian American Executive Network, Yonsei Basketball, 2020 Women on Boards, Keiro, Little Tokyo Service Center or Toyota Asian American Society in Alliance (TAASiA), I might not have met these fabulous friends that inspire me to stretch further.

I hope that you enjoy reading their stories and gain new insights to help you continue to grow and thrive.

With gratitude and encouragement,

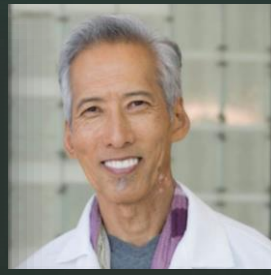
*Tracey*



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BONNIE CLINTON

VP, Indirect Procurement

Toyota

Asian roots: Korea



I was raised with the guidance to be respectful and not challenge a more senior person during conversations.

Upon entering corporate life, I learned that approach was not effective or helpful in navigating my career.

So... *Speak up in a respectful way. Express an important point or perspective that adds value.*

Don't be intimidated by seniority and don't discount youth.

Also make room for quieter people to participate in the conversation by taking a moment to ask for their thoughts. The results will be better outcomes all around.



SAKINA FOSTER

Partner

Haynes & Boone, LLP

Asian roots: India



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Advice that I wish I heard earlier in my career is “*when you make a mistake, give yourself some grace and focus your energy on learning from it and moving on, versus beating yourself up over the mistake.*”

I feel that women, especially Asian American women, tend to be very hard on themselves. When I was in law school and early in my career, I internalized every mistake – thinking that it meant I was a failure.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to join a women’s leadership development program through the Texas Women’s Foundation. Through that group of women and our coach, I was able to start shifting that negative way of thinking which was holding me back.

We all make mistakes because we are human. What is important is the next step you take after making that mistake. Instead of telling myself that my mistake proves that I am not good enough – now when I make a mistake, I reflect on what I did to contribute to the mistake and then focus on positive steps I can take to change those factors next time so that I can learn from the mistake. And then I work on moving on.

It doesn’t mean that I take my mistakes more lightly, but I use my energy in a much more productive way that helps me improve – and be kinder to myself. We can all use more of that!





ERWIN FURUKAWA

Managing Director

Ernst & Young, LLP

Asian roots: Japan

As a professional for over three decades I've had the pleasure of working in several positions, ranging from an Account Executive at a leading telecommunications company, to a Chief Customer Officer for one of the largest power utilities in the country. Each company provided a rich blend of experiences in sales, customer service and marketing.

My journey involved several rotational assignments that led to greater responsibilities in leading small to very large teams and organizations. As these companies evolved due to technology, competition, innovation, mergers and acquisitions, there were memorable moments of success as well as disappointments. Regardless of these moments, there were some key insights that I developed through this journey.

The most significant factor were the people and the relationships built during these times. I had the fortunate opportunity to meet and work with very diverse individuals professionally and personally. These ranged from team members, clients, competitors, and most importantly in the community. These relationships were critical in providing and receiving mentorship, insights, and most importantly long-lasting friendships.

The significant learning has been sharing the **tremendous value of building and sustaining these relationships**. The adage that the world is small and connected has been reinforced repeatedly. The childhood principle of what you put in is what you get out will come back in multiple ways. Treating others well, whether it's individually or as communities, is extremely important and will provide long-lasting relationships that I will forever treasure.



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MICHAEL FUNG

Independent Board Director

Franklin Covey, Floor &  
Décor, 99 Cents Only Stores

Retired CFO, Walmart U.S.

Asian roots: China

Like many Asians, I respected my elders - especially my parents. I didn't ask many questions, if any, during my time in grammar, high school, or even in undergraduate since I respected the teachers and didn't want to appear to question their authority or status. I would have learned a lot more if I was truly engaged and questioning.

I began college in Engineering because my father wanted me to be an electrical engineer even though I had no idea what an EE did. He was my father so why wouldn't I follow his wishes?

Early in my career, I turned down a promotion because I would have been promoted over a more senior and tenured associate. Respect for elders was incredibly strong. Even to this day, I think it is important to be humble and not stand out or seek recognition. Only once in my career did I ever ask to be promoted for my accomplishments.

When I was the executive sponsor of Walmart's Asian Employee Resource Group and mentoring numerous associates, most of them were "shy". They wouldn't speak up at meetings to offer their opinions, ideas, or challenge decisions. Public speaking skills were rare as they didn't want to stand out. Asians worked hard and would get recognized if they got more degrees, but not through networking or asking for stretch assignments. Sometimes their managers might notice them and "promote" them. Many of the technology resumes cited degrees and computer languages they worked on, but very few mentioned accomplishments. Many of the technology associates also preferred the technical side and did not want any client/business-facing positions.

Face was way more important than I ever thought. Asians don't want to get embarrassed or risk failure. **Without managing and embracing risk or loss of face, it's difficult to advance.**



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GARRETT GIN

SVP

Bank of America

Asian roots: China

The advice I wish I had heard earlier in my career is that **a job title does not define who I am or what impact I can have**. Early on, I was too preoccupied about job title and my position on the organizational hierarchy... And did not put enough attention on opportunities to learn, grow, and expand my abilities. In hindsight, I wish I had seen the wisdom of accepting other projects and opportunities that would have stretched my abilities and given me chances to work with a variety of leaders and managers – instead of being overly concerned with the job title and where the role sat in the organizational chart.

I also ended up placing too much value on job title when it came to expressing my opinions and my thoughts... I would always defer to the senior people or felt that I could not speak up unless I was “higher ranking.” I recall a meeting many years ago between our company and a group of community leaders and advocates... After a presentation of a topic about the needs of the community in a large group setting, one of the civic leaders asked me, “So, Garrett, what do you think?” I automatically turned my head to my manager, who turned her head to our group director for the response. But the community leader stopped everything and asked again, “No... What do YOU think?” I realized I was so bound to job titles and the org chart that I really didn’t feel I had an opinion. I was not contributing to the company or the community in a meaningful way with that limited mindset.

Today I have a better understanding that leadership is no longer about position or job titles. Great ideas, great leadership, and great impact can be demonstrated and developed in so many ways – on working groups, leading volunteer activities, engaging in ERG events, and so on. I now see that a job title does not even come close to answering the most important questions of “What do I think?”, “What do I stand for?” and “What do I do?”



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KENJI HASHIMOTO

SVP, Finance & Corporate  
Development

American Airlines

Asian roots: Japan

**Focus on the outcomes desired** rather than only learning or perfecting the process/work you inherit.

All of us generally go into jobs that were held/done by someone before us, and it is common to focus on doing better whatever the person did before.

Instead, by focusing on the outcomes desired, you rethink the actual work and often can make a real leap in the outcomes.



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JIN-YA HUANG

Founder

Break Bread, Break  
Borders

Asian roots: Taiwan



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I wish I had heard earlier in my career the notion of ***“Use Your Voice”***.

I can’t tell you how many times at lectures or talks I’ve given, the number of Asian-American women who come up to me after and ask where and how I find the courage to speak up for what’s right and honestly what’s on my mind.

Digging deep in this vulnerability is where I find my strength - but it definitely took years in reflection, to be a part of this social justice in the making.

I often look to powerful civil rights activists like Yuri Kochiyama, and Helen Zia’s work for inspiration to find my voice. As Zia once said: “To be silent is a privilege. To choose to do nothing is a privilege.” This is why it is important to act on using our voice for the greater good and make lasting impact.





SANDRA ICHIGO

Operations Manager

Hensel Phelps

Asian roots: China



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I am a third generation Chinese American woman from Northern California. I chose a career in construction when there were very few Asians in the industry and even fewer women.

Early in my career, I thought it was okay to just stay in my cubicle, do good work, and my efforts would be recognized. I'm not sure if that idea was a result of my cultural upbringing, or just because that is where I was most comfortable. Well, I was wrong.

If you are interested in reaching senior ranks, it is important for you to **"Be Bold and Take a Seat at the Table"**. When you walk into a large conference room, are you likely to choose one of the seats at the table? Or are you more likely to choose one of the seats in the back along the wall?

Get out of your cubicle and **make yourself visible** by engaging in conversations; share your thoughts and ideas. Show others, with your voice, the value that you bring to the team. Look for ways to stretch yourself by volunteering for special projects or corporate committees.

This simple strategy will expand your network and give you more exposure to decision makers in your company. Along the way, you will build your reputation and your team of advocates. In our executive meetings, behind closed doors, **opportunities are given to those who are "known"**.



BILL IMADA

Chairman & Chief  
Connectivity Officer

IW Group, Inc.

Asian roots: Japan



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As a Japanese American, I was always taught to be humble and respectful. I was also told not to trouble or inconvenience others. I often hesitated to ask questions, seek advice, or request a favor because I didn't want to disturb my friends, relatives, colleagues or superiors.

After working with a senior Latinx executive for many years, I finally mustered enough courage to say, "Excuse me, sir. May I trouble you for twenty minutes of your time? I'd like to seek your advice on how to expand my business. I promise I will not take up too much of your valuable time." The executive said yes and I immediately made arrangements to meet him.

I arrived 30 minutes early for my 8 a.m. appointment. At the top of the hour, this executive invited me into his office. He was prepared. He shared a number of Fortune 500 contacts with me. He even made arrangements for me to meet some of these executives. We were having an exceptional conversation. I was elated. At 8:20 a.m., the executive abruptly asked me to leave. I was shocked and dismayed by this curt end to what seemed like a wonderful conversation. I also had invested my own personal funds to buy an expensive airline ticket.

As I was leaving, I said: "I hope I didn't offend you or say anything inappropriate. I came a long way to see you and you are ending our meeting at 8:20 a.m. I don't understand why you are forcing me to leave now." His response: "Mr. Imada, you asked for 20 minutes of my time. I honored your request. It is now time for you to leave. I'm busy." I felt angry and humiliated. As I was closing the door, he stopped me once again. "Next time, ask for what you really want. You asked for 20 minutes. I gave that to you. If you wanted an hour or two, you should have asked. Have a nice flight home."

I learned a very important lesson. **Know what you want and don't be ashamed or worried about asking for it. And, if you do ask, don't be surprised if you get exactly what you asked for.**





JENNIFER JAO

Group Manager, IT

Toyota

Asian roots: Taiwan



One thing I wish I learned earlier was about “picture perfect.”

Our fascination with wanting to be perfect isn’t new. In fact, it starts from a young age and manifests into everything we do in adulthood.

I grew up in a traditional Asian family. I was taught to be the perfect daughter, sister and friend. Then I wanted to be the perfect colleague, wife and mother.

I’ve found that this experience isn’t unique to me. We are raising our girls to be perfect, and we are raising our boys to be brave. We need to break that mold and shift that mindset. Because this is what often happens - before girls and women act on something, we stop short at, “I’m not good enough to do this.”

**The picture will never be perfect**, so we need to change that little voice to say, **“be brave and try it.”**



GENE KANAMORI

President & CEO

Keiro

Asian roots: Japan



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1. You'll never know everything. Every time I got a promotion, there was always a steep learning curve. No one told me that each promotion was harder, not easier, to get the job done. Each step up was more responsibility and accountability.

2. Find your replacement. Every job I went to, I was asked to find my replacement. Hard to digest, but after a few years I totally understood. Great companies have a pipeline, succession planning of potential leaders. I was told if I didn't find my replacement, I would not be able to move on. At my company, we always had the right talent, in the right place, at the right time.

3. Competition is tough, but competition is what drives you to be better. I didn't know that the competition would be so tough. Always remember, no one can argue with results. Yes, you may think promotions are political, but if you dwell on that, you'll never get your opportunity. Let the results do the talking. And an occasional conversation with the decision maker is always nice. When you have an opportunity to present, that is your chance to impress. When I presented, I started at least a week in advance, woke up at 4am and rehearsed. It was stage time so I needed to impress.

4. Do your best work, when your best is needed. When things are going well, anybody can perform. What I learned is that leaders look for people to step up, when the tough times arise. It takes a special person to do more and be effective when the chips are down. These are the people that will get the attention of the decision-makers.

5. If you're working for an international company, you better be open to relocation. I didn't know that when I started my career. I had to relocate 3 times in 10 years. Looking back, it made us stronger as a family. My kids have said it was a good thing for them as they dealt with change early on in their lives. They are both very successful people now.



As for any tips for people wanting to get ahead?

Find a mentor. I had many who took the time to direct and lead me throughout my career.

Make sure you lead with your integrity. Never, ever compromise your integrity.

Learn, learn, and learn. Many different ways to do this. I was never a “book type of person”. However, I always volunteered to head up company projects and initiatives. It forced me to learn and to organize and direct people during the process. It also taught me a lot about human behavior.

Always make the workplace better every day you walk in the office. Whether it’s picking up litter on the way to your office, saying something nice to people, getting a project done that you have been working on, mentoring someone, or calling a colleague that you know is going through some tough times, all of this is making the workplace better. Contribute every day.

As I was waiting for a promotion to a staff level person, I was in competition with 6 other people. I was working for the third largest company in the US. That particular level had only around 2,000 executives, so it was highly competitive. I waited and waited. After about a year, there were two of us who were left of the original 7. Was I ticked off, yes, did I think I was better than the others, yes, did I think it was political, yes.

But I figured I got into that pool because of my talents. Let me get better so when I do get that promotion I’ll be in a better position to succeed. Eventually, it happened and everything worked out. Always believe in yourself.

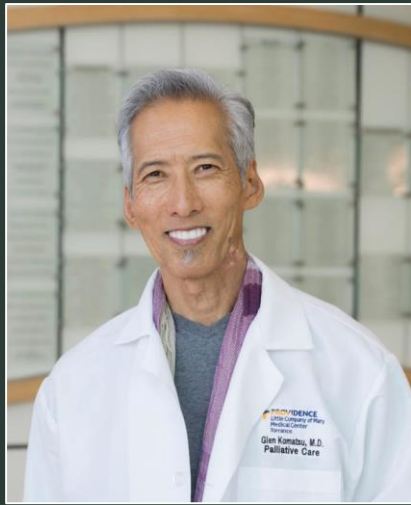
Never made it to the CEO Position, but looking back, for a kid who barely got out of high school, went to a state school (Long Beach), and started loading trucks for my company, I’m quite satisfied on my career.

As I close out my working career, I have worked for two Fortune 50 companies. I always wanted to end my career working for a non-profit. I currently work for a Japanese- American organization, and I love my job. I will be retiring in the near future and start my next career.....being a grandfather!



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GLEN KOMATSU

Chief Medical Officer

Providence

Asian roots: Japan



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*I wish I had been explicitly taught about the existence of and value of emotional intelligence in leadership.* With greater awareness of my emotions, I would have been better able to manage those emotions and been a more effective leader earlier in my career. With more emotional intelligence, strong leaders also have more empathy and awareness of the emotions of colleagues and in my case, patients, families, and colleagues, and in turn become more empathetic, kind and compassionate toward them. The most effective leaders, the leaders who have been my mentors, all have had a high level of emotional intelligence.

The second thing I wished I had been taught is ***mindfulness and the therapeutic value of presence***. In medicine, we are so focused on “doing,” we do not focus on “being.” Being with patients, families and colleagues in a mindful way is very therapeutic and healing. Developing my own meditation practice has been extremely helpful in learning to “be with” patients, supporting my own well-being as well as helping me deal with the stress of my job.

The third thing I wished I had been taught is ***the difference between curing and healing***. Curing is the first goal of medicine, but many times not possible, despite the best efforts of the best doctors. Many common conditions are not curable, e.g. asthma, hypertension, diabetes. Healing is always possible and dependent on the patient and family (not the doctor), and their ability to come to terms with serious, chronic or even terminal illness, finding meaning, purpose, gratitude and joy even in the last chapter of their lives. When that happens, we, the caregivers, are also healed. Doctors cannot make healing happen, when I speak about healing in this sense, we can only create the conditions for healing and hope the patient does the difficult work of reimagining their life and their sense of self.

The fourth thing, I was fortunate to be taught by my parents, but I want to mention it as it has been something I continue to carry with me. Mother Teresa has been quoted as saying “Humility is the mother of all virtues.” I could not agree more. ***The best leaders are humble and grateful for all the colleagues and staff who surround and support them.***





CAREN LOCK

Regional VP & Assistant  
General Counsel

TIAA

Asian roots: Hong Kong



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I wish somebody would have told the younger me that I should *network earlier and harder*.

My father worked for Colgate his entire life and I thought that I would also work for one employer and maybe two at best during my professional life. The reality is that is seldom the case for a lawyer. I was fortunate that coworkers and friends have introduced me to new opportunities along the way.

However, I wonder if I had broadened the scope of my network how that would have changed the trajectory of my career. Working hand in hand with that advice is to always let your circle know you are open to new opportunities.

My parents always remind me to be thankful for my job but that doesn't mean it has to be the same one.



ANTHONY LUU

Associate Partner

McKinsey & Co

Asian roots: China / Vietnam



TOYOTA



## Understand the difference between mentors and sponsors

A defining moment in my career was when someone influential in my organization took it upon himself to take an active interest in my success and sponsor my growth and development at the firm. I was lucky he did because I probably didn't deserve it at the time. For one, I didn't ask for it and secondly, I didn't know what it meant for my career.

Like many, I had many mentors, but very few actual sponsors - I didn't know the difference. It was only sometime after did I understand that sponsors are people that can guide you towards your goals AND are able to help you achieve it. Mentors can give you advice but are rarely in a position to help you achieve your goals.

Once I understood the difference, it changed how I viewed my relationship with the people I worked with and the leaders I would follow.





DAN MA

CEO

Medology360

Asian roots: China

*"Perception is reality."*

We Asians have always been taught to be modest and "just keep doing the good work, you will be rewarded". We were not very good at making our contributions known.

Many Asian subgroups are known as dependable working bees, but never the ones to go all the way to the top. We see them mostly in middle management, rather than senior management. We are not managing others "Perception" of us. We usually do the work and let others present them on our behalf, thus losing the opportunity to take on more impactful positions and contributing on a larger scale.

One thing I wish that we could do is to pair COMMITTED mentor/sponsors for every aspiring individual depending on their desired career path. Through active management, both mentor/mentee can make measurable progress on career advancement.



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DEBRA NAKATOMI

Founder and President

Nakatomi & Associates

Asian roots: Japan

As a 3rd generation Japanese American woman, these often conflicted with my upbringing and my culture. There were no affinity groups, women's leadership programs were limited and my early mentors were African American women and men early in my career at Walt Disney and CBS.

Three learnings I wish I had internalized and practiced earlier and often in my life and career.

**1) Take risks, move out of your comfort zone**

No risk, few mistakes, no learning. The COVID-19 crisis has created an uncertain environment, but it has also become a laboratory for innovation and revision of the status quo. We're seeing examples everyday emerge in design, philanthropy and across all sectors.

**2) Trust yourself, your instinct, "your gut" and act on it**

Especially for women, we often look for affirmation, someone else to be first, and "permission" sometimes to our own detriment, resulting in lost opportunities.

Be decisive and learn to trust your intuition. (Men do it all the time, often wrong, but they don't seem to mind!)

**3) Surround yourself with people who inspire you, hold you accountable**

For me, it's a circle of friends, some for 20-30 years who have been my board of advisors, my critics and cheerleaders. They are my chosen family and embody health, hope, gratitude and joy.



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NEENA NEWBERRY

President

Newberry Executive Solutions

Asian roots: India

**Be Bold. Be You.**

As a first-generation immigrant, I remember wrestling with how much I wanted to stand out, to be “me” vs. blend in. In my early years at Deloitte Consulting, I prioritized fitting in because I didn’t want anything to get in the way of my credibility. Although I have had a very successful career, I now know this made me play smaller and lose important parts of myself in the shuffle.

I wish I had taken more time to truly notice who I was, my strengths and their impact, rather than assuming they were no big deal. I overlooked how my heritage, culture and life experiences allowed me to do things that others couldn’t do as easily – to take big risks, deliver in really challenging situations, and develop strong leaders.

If someone had asked me to notice my strengths, like many Indian and other Asian women I know, I would have babbled something about just doing my job and the importance of showing humility.

But as I’ve grown as a leader and coached executives for over 20 years, I have realized that when you allow yourself to really explore what you consistently do well and how you do it, you can create a lasting ripple effect—one that lifts others up in ways you couldn’t have imagined. It allows you to teach others and purposefully leverage your strengths to make a bigger difference.

So, the next time you think about blending in, I want you to think about how you can **Be Bold. Be You.**



TOYOTA





JILL NISHI

Former Director

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Asian roots: Japan



TOYOTA



I had a boss that once told me - 'why do you undermine yourself?' I was surprised by this and asked, 'what do you mean?' He went on to say that very frequently I criticized my own work, which he thought was quite strong, but then questioned himself. He told me, 'If you can't be confident about your work, how can I?'

In that moment, I recognized that my values of modesty and humility which I attribute to my Japanese American upbringing, were actually professionally detrimental. I reflected on how many other times I had done this throughout my career - questioned my own work and freely admitted this to former managers, colleagues etc. This was an incredibly important piece of advice, one that I had wished I learned earlier.

In many Asian cultures, we learn to downplay our contributions and value - in the workplace this is not helpful!

This seems so obvious now as I type this, but it really was an epiphany at the time. I have since learned that I can hang on to my humility but am mindful that this does not inadvertently diminish perceptions of me as a leader or my contributions.





MARK OKADA

Managing Partner

Sycamore Tree Capital  
Partners, L.P.

Asian roots: Japan



TOYOTA



I work in the hedge fund space. It is filled with very smart people, often with very big egos. Assertiveness is often rewarded in this sort of environment. So for the typically reserved, soft-spoken Asian, it's easy to get drowned out.

My advice though is *nothing speaks louder than someone who works "incrementally"*. By that I mean a simple four step process of:

1. *clearly understanding your current work expectations;*
2. *mastering them;*
3. *bringing more junior workers into them;*
4. *reaching for more.*

This incremental process is what I have always adhered to and taught those I mentored. Many young people starting out can fall into the poor attitude of thinking their current responsibilities are beneath their capabilities. And that may indeed be the case. However, advancement is an earned reward, not a privilege.

Understanding what is truly expected of you may seem obvious, but I'm always surprised at how few people really understand this well. Mastering your current expectations is a critical step in gaining your superiors' confidence that you will succeed as you move up.

Now who will do your job so you can advance? Owning that responsibility by bringing more junior colleagues into your expectations will make your transition easy. Asking for more in this context will be much more successful at this point in your journey!

I have built my company from 3 people to 300 people and have hired and fired over 1,000. The best colleagues were those who worked in this incremental process. Unfortunately, they were the minority of employees; maybe 5% have the humility to work this way.



CARINA REYES

Managing Director

Ernst & Young

Asian roots: Philippines



TOYOTA



*A leader leads with innovation and empathy, while a manager leads with controls.* You need both, but the former is what distinguishes you from the rest of the pack.

Spectacular achievements are preceded by unspectacular preparation.

My family immigrated to the US when I was 11 years old. Our first stop was the Silicon Valley where I met my first love, an Apple computer. I knew my career at age 12 would be in technology and followed my heart. Today I help companies innovate and transform when they don't have the capacity or capabilities to do it themselves.





CAROLINE RISKEY

Managing Director

Goldman Sachs

Asian roots: Japan



TOYOTA



One of challenges Asian professionals have is navigating the balance between being a specialist and/or a generalist as we grow in our careers. Asian professionals tend to gravitate towards roles that are more technical in nature – accounting, finance, engineering, etc... We become more specialized in our fields as we gain more experience in our roles. My view is that specialization and building credibility is critical early in your career. As you become more experienced, you should become more open to opportunities that might be outside of your core competencies.

It can be unnerving, and I remember having some hesitation transitioning from my early work as a specialist; when I was a core member delivering key services or advice. When I joined my current Firm, I still maintained the functional expertise but I was tasked with directing an incredibly diverse group of teams across different businesses outside of my core experience. Having a strong balance of technical skills, and a strong track record of performance is critical. Allowing yourself to take risks to help grow and challenge yourself is something we don't often proactively seek as Asians. Sometimes change does not feel safe, so we don't allow ourselves to even consider taking a new opportunity or necessarily do we think to seek changes.

**Becoming more comfortable with embracing change is an important element in any successful career.**

Seek ways to better understand your own Firm / team's goals and objectives and how your role fits into the broader picture. This is key in weathering business changes or uncertain times. It may allow you to find ways to become more commercial and impactful in your day to day roles. You may meet people outside of your direct team, and allow for collaboration across divisions, or for opportunities to coach or be coached by others. **Challenge yourself to find ways you might be able to bring impact to your organization.** Doing your job well is an expectation, as Asian – we often commonly mistake that hard work will be noticed and eventually rewarded. But especially in uncertain and challenging times - continue to challenge yourself, find ways to contribute, and be curious. I find that these opportunities will grow you the most and can lead to additional responsibilities.



CRAIG ROBINSON

EVP

NBCUniversal, Inc.

Asian roots: China



TOYOTA



**I wish someone had reminded me that the workplace - like life - is not always fair.** There will be instances in your career where you will feel that you were passed over for a project or opportunity and that others are being favored for one reason or another.

There may be times when, in fact, favoritism is coming into play. But there are other times when you don't have all the information on why decisions are made. **What's important is that you focus on things that are within your control.** How you behave after you have been passed over is as important as how you interviewed for the position. Rather than focusing on the perceived slight, focus on making your performance and credentials bulletproof. If you are told that you weren't chosen because you are lacking in a certain skill set, go and acquire that skill set. And approach the next opportunity with a positive attitude.

I have often seen people sabotage their careers by becoming a negative or toxic employee when they feel that they've been passed over. This will not serve you well in the long run. All you have is your reputation, and if you develop a negative brand, it will follow you through your entire career. Don't look for perceived slights or discrimination that may or may not be real - keep focusing on being great in your current role and acquiring talents and skills that increase your value as an employee.



Always keep in mind that the number one priority is focusing on your performance. Take away all of the conceivable reasons that someone can say “no” to you for a new job or promotion. I know that can sound overly simple or clichéd, but I’ve found it to be case through my decades-long career.

And yes, I know that it sometimes feels like diverse employees are held to a higher standard in your organization. But be honest with yourself - will you gain more by fighting what you see as bias, or will you gain more by being beyond reproach in your performance?

**Seek out allies, both internal and external...and at all levels** - not only those who are senior to you but among your peers and those who are below you on the organizational chart. Everyone can be an ambassador for your good work. People often think of “mentors” or “sponsors” as only being senior leadership. Mentorship and sponsorship can come from anywhere so don’t limit your efforts on senior leadership. And remember that other employees of color can share some of our same challenges. There is strength in scale, so be a good partner to your fellow employees who are female, black, Hispanic, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ community or any other underrepresented group.

Some of their challenges are our challenges, and there is strength in collaboration.



TOYOTA



Craig Robinson continued

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THEAR SUZUKI

Americas Talent Leader

Ernst & Young

Asian roots: Cambodia /  
China / Vietnam

**Attack the issue and not the people.** The majority of my career has been working with diverse teams from different organizations to solve large scale and complex technology program delivery. They were hard projects...timelines were always tight, multi-million dollars at stake, and the stress levels were incredibly high. In my early 30s I was picked by a client to be the leader for one of these programs...his advice to me was to attack the issue and not the people. That advice helped me work through the most difficult of teaming challenges, earn the respect and trust of more experienced team members, and in the process, build lifelong relationships. We are constantly problem-solving in our personal and professional lives...keeping this top of mind will serve us all well.

**Show up, engage, and speak up.** Earlier in my career I viewed myself as “lesser than” and that I was lucky to get the job. I had no idea what I was doing and everyone else was more technical and smarter than me. I was heads down, worked hard, and didn’t think I had anything valuable to offer in meetings. When I was a manager, at a technical vendor bake-off where I was in the audience, a mentor sitting next to me nudged me to ask a question. I was halfway paying attention to the presentation, wasn’t really interested in the subject matter, and I had zero desire to ask a question. For over 20 minutes, this mentor persisted. I was very nervous. I can still feel the heat rising in my body as I recollect this story. I managed to get a question out and after the workshop, I received a compliment or two from colleagues. That experience was a turning point for me...I made a personal commitment to pay attention, engage, and ask a question or make a meaningful comment whether in a meeting of 5 people or 5000. I have done that ever since, and it has helped to build my confidence and raise my visibility as a high potential.



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CHARMAINE TANG

Executive Director

J.P. Morgan

I think as Asian-Americans and children of immigrants, we are told to study and work hard to be successful.

In my own life, as a young student I worked hard on my academics which led to a great high school and consequently a full ride to a great college. I studied finance/business and achieved great grades. That landed me an excellent job out of NYU, as a first-year investment banking analyst.

However, what I learned once in the business world was that hard work alone was not enough. I realized that building a strong network of peers, senior people, and management is important to do (even while you're in school). Networking is a very American business thing and I didn't realize the power of it until later in my career.

My advice is to *make building a network a complement to your hard work!*



TOYOTA





GEORGE TANG

Managing Director

Educate Texas



TOYOTA



**“Let Fear by Your Guide”** – At my first consulting job after undergrad, I was young, ambitious, and eager to prove myself. Over the course of the year, I started to get some more responsibilities and then on one of my next assignments, I was asked to lead the effort and be the day-to-day, onsite relationship manager for the project. My client was a Senior VP for this Cleveland Bank, and while I thought I would be able to take this on, I was anxious and uncertain if this would be too big of a leap for me. Fortunately, one of my partners, a tough, five foot five Irish man, said to me, “George, c’mon let fear be your guide and you’ll be just fine.” I thought about how we often let fear deter you from what you should try, but never thought of it as **the flashlight to discover where you should go**. Fortunately, I mustered the courage to get out there and the project went extremely well. It brought me even greater opportunities to lead projects and ultimately connect with another partner who I then started a business with and grew to 1,200 people.

**Social Capital is Critical** – Whether it’s on a personal, professional, or social perspective, finding a leader or group of leaders that can give you guidance, counsel, motivation, or sponsorship is needed. We often don’t seek out the type relationships that other peers develop during their careers. I was fortunate to find a partner early on who took me in under his wing and provided me with insights about my strengths/development areas, direction on things that I should consider in my career, and advocacy to ensure I was seen and recognized for my contributions.





JEFF TOM

Global Lead Partner

KPMG, LLP

Asian roots: Japan / China

First of all, I am 4<sup>th</sup> generation Japanese American “Yonsei” and 7<sup>th</sup> generation Chinese American. My mother and her parents were interned at the Gila River Internment Camp in AZ in 1942 during WWII as part of the forced relocation and incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry. My great-grandparents immigrated from Japan (Kumamoto) to pursue the American dream as small business owners. My father and his parents owned and operated a local family supermarket in South-Central LA that survived multiple periods of civil unrest and riots, primarily because they were considered family and took care of the underprivileged locals. My earlier family immigrated as laborers during the California gold rush. My parents were divorced when I was two and I grew up in Boyle Heights in East LA with my mom and grandparents, and I would also see my dad’s side of the family frequently. Essentially, I was raised in a multi-cultural environment of American, Japanese, Chinese and Mexican influence and my family and friends would be sure to celebrate all the various cultural holidays, much of which centered around a wonderful meal.

With that said, I am the first in my immediate family to attend and graduate from a 4-year university. I have been a partner with KPMG for over 20 years, and I am the KPMG Global Lead Partner for Toyota as well as the Chairman of KPMG’s Asian Pacific Islander BRG.



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The following are some suggestions on how to overcome challenges and gain career momentum.

**Remember where you came from and be comfortable in your own skin.** Be proud of your cultural heritage and identity. Each of us have a different upbringing that shapes who we are. Leverage and maximize your “Asian-ness” to your advantage. You can be respectful and humble and strong and resilient at the same time.

**Be seen, be influential.** Network and spend time with your clients and associates to better understand their own situations, and also help them get to know you and understand your situation as well. You can do this explicitly or implicitly depending on the circumstances.

**Take control of your career.** Clearly articulate your personal and professional goals and expectations with those individuals that have input in your career and have them confirm with you what you need to do to be successful. Be accountable to getting things done. Identify a reliable and candid mentor and an influential sponsor.

**Be patient, be present, be persistent.** Listen to your clients, associates and leaders and understand where they are coming from. Maximize your emotional intelligence and understand political ramifications. Continue to build and enhance relationships. Do what you can to stay in the game and be present. Most of all stay persistent.



TOYOTA



Jeff Tom continued

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JULIA WADA

Group Vice President

Toyota

Asian roots: Japan

**“Check your story”** is something I learned through Crucial Conversations training and it has changed the way I think and act in both my professional and personal life. The idea is that we all have stories in our heads, usually based on assumptions. By taking a breath and not letting those stories drive your reactions, you can focus on getting to the root of the issue. For example, going to the source and listening to the other perspective, using things like the 5 why’s or other problem solving techniques, and getting to next steps and countermeasures so that you can move forward. Focus on the things you can control, not the things you can’t.



TOYOTA



TOYOTA ASIAN AMERICAN SOCIETY IN ALLIANCE



CHRISTOPHER YANG

Vice President

Toyota

Asian roots: China / Japan



TOYOTA



I have always embraced the words 一期一会 (Ichi-go Ichi-e). Literally translated, it means One Chance, One Opportunity - but the true meaning is the reality that **you only ever have one chance to seize any single opportunity.**

Early on in my career, I felt insecure, reluctant, hesitant and downright afraid to speak my mind, stand out or take a firm position - all because I had feared some overarching failure or negative impact on my career. The fact that I was raised in a Chinese/Japanese household that taught respect, reverence, humility and self-deference likely contributed to this as well.

However, through the many ups and downs in my career, I have come to realize that there never really is any “negative impact” to holding firm and trying to seize or chase an opportunity or dream that you believe in. In fact, the most important and fulfilling motivation in my career is to chase what you truly believe in, and work as hard as you can to seize opportunities or dreams that you think are worthwhile and important to you. And oftentimes, if you remain complacent, or humble, or stagnant, those opportunities will pass you by, or more likely, be taken by others who want it more than you do.

I wish someone had told me this earlier on in my career, but perhaps it takes time to gain confidence in your own ability and your own beliefs. These days, I always try to remind myself of 一期一会, and that I have nothing to lose in pushing forward and championing initiatives or visions that I am truly passionate about, and running at full speed to chase my dreams and seize those opportunities that are important to me.





CYNTHIA YUNG

President

The Boone Family  
Foundation

Asian roots: China

Some advice I wish I had heard earlier in my career would have been to learn about the art of negotiation outside my corporation/ organization.

I started my career in global companies that offered internal professional development training ranging from technical courses to management and leadership. As you move in a company and take on leadership roles, you have to negotiate on behalf of your team, your division, your customers and so on. If you are not a trained lawyer, the art of negotiation was not covered in school. The internal training seemed to focus on “win-win” scenarios that just did not ring true to the challenges we faced. It seemed more politically correct based on the corporate cultures that promoted teamwork.

It wasn't until later in my career after exhausting all the internal courses that I advocated for a negotiation course by a third party. It was game-changing to learn real life high-stakes negotiation with people from different industries and cultures. There were no constraints of my company's culture, my age, gender, job function and nationality. I was free to test strategies and negotiate for outcomes unhindered from expectations. I learned with and from people who did not share culture burdens of being “nice” or deferential. This helped me grow professionally and removed the limits on what is possible when you are able to negotiate effectively.

When I returned from the training, I had the opportunity to lead a project started by someone else. The training helped me negotiate a change in the original plan that I would have not dared or known how to position prior to the training but I was able to negotiate changes in return for better outcomes than originally envisioned. This led to new opportunities in the company because I demonstrated ability to negotiate with Senior leaders and deliver.

I wish I understood *the importance of expert negotiation skills* earlier and to seek it externally.



TOYOTA





RADHIKA ZAVERI

Adjunct Professor

SMU

Asian roots: India

Most careers ebb & flow, situations happen that may be undesired & come at inopportune times. One of the best advice I received (wish I would have received sooner), is that no matter how undesired the situation might seem to be, *“life is 10% what happens to you & 90% how you react to it.” Attitude is everything in life.*

My greatest moments have been those in adversity. It shaped my values, beliefs & got me results. Consider those yucky moments as detours till you journey towards your destination.

As an Asian-American, perhaps receiving that sort of mentorship & advice was most valuable. I would urge folks to seek that mentorship at all phases of your career.



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