

**Remarks of California PUC Commissioner Rachelle Chong
to Asians for Corporate and Community Action (ACCA) and Asian/Pacific
American Associations for Advancement (AAAA)
Perspective 2006 Awards Banquet
“Working Together to Bridge the World”
Oakland, California - September 21, 2006**

My great grandfather Yee Ah Tye had a dream. As a teenager, he boarded a ship from China and came to California – the “Gold Mountain” -- to seek his fortune. Sadly, he did not find a literal Gold Mountain -- but he worked hard and dug out enough gold to realize his dream of becoming a prosperous and respected merchant.

Chinese tradition dictated that upon death, your bones should be laid to rest back in China. But my great grandfather left explicit instructions to defy tradition, and to bury his body in America, his beloved new country of opportunity. This was a strong statement to his descendents that he no longer considered himself Chinese, but Chinese *American*.

Four generations later, the great grand daughter of this gold miner stands before you. I represent three generations of sacrifice by my ancestors, each of whom worked very hard, often amidst great racial prejudice, to give their children opportunities for a better life. Quite typically for a Chinese American family, it was all about education. In China, scholars are deeply respected.

Only in America can a small town girl from Stockton become the first Asian American FCC and PUC Commissioner.

I am very proud to be an Asian American.

For Asian Americans, California is a land of opportunity – made unique by our state’s tremendous diversity.

California’s demographics show that in the year 2000, of those under 17 years old, 45% were Latino, 39% were White, 9% were Asian and 6% were African American. This shows that California is very diverse, and will only grow more so.

I believe it is important to bring *more* diversity into the workforce of our increasingly high technology economy. In my view, the success of our California society depends on marshalling the talents of each of these diverse communities into our larger society -- and the creation of a shared common good.

Nowhere is that task more important than in the infrastructure industries that provide the power, water, and telecommunications needed by all.

This great state has embraced diversity. California has undertaken the experiment of building a society out of people with diverse religions, histories, and races. In California, we are a rich mix of cultures from every part of the world. We owe it to ourselves, to our ancestors who brought us here, and to our children to make this democratic experiment a success.

To this end, I support more diversity on our regulated utilities' boards of directors. I support supplier diversity initiatives and programs. I support efforts by utilities to increase the diversity among their workforce.

Looking around at all these hundreds of handsome Asian Pacific faces in this room, I am convinced that AT&T, SBC, PacBell (whatever you are calling your company today!) is doing a terrific job on workforce diversity.

I further congratulate your two employee groups – Asians for Corporate and Community Action (ACCA) and Asian/Pacific American Associations for Advancement (AAAA). I understand you are merging your groups today, and that is wonderful. I understand that you perform an important role supporting each member's professional development, giving the company feedback on diversity issues, creating pride in cultural backgrounds, and performing excellent community service. Thank you for this service.

CHOOSING TO LEAD

When I was invited here to speak to you, I was asked to reflect on my vision of leadership, how cultural identity influences leadership style, and some key lessons about leading others.

My vision of a leader is someone who has the ability to inspire others to a common goal.

Some lead because they have tremendous charisma. These people are natural leaders. Here I am thinking of John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton, and Oprah Winfrey.

Some lead because great events or a crisis puts them in a unique place in history, and they rise to the occasion. Here I am thinking of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, and Rosa Parks.

Some lead by example. Gandhi and Mother Theresa come to mind.

So *how* does one become a leader?

More specifically, how does one become an *Asian Pacific American* leader?

After all, Asian Americans have many stereotypes to overcome. Let's see, one stereotype is that we're the "model minority." Another stereotype is that we are quiet and passive.

Oh, and Hollywood has done a real disservice to Asian Americans in depicting our people. Either we are servants, computer science geeks and nerds, gangsters, martial arts masters, or exotic, mysterious and sex-hungry Suzy Wongs!

So the first step in being successful in a large organization is to get beyond the stereotypes. In my view, ethnic minorities often have to work a little harder to succeed in corporate America. But we have never shrunk from hard work, have we?!

Now, suppose you are not a natural born leader. We can't all have the charisma, personality and smarts to be Katie Couric, right?

Don't despair. Leadership skills can be learned.

First, and most importantly, you need to CHOOSE to lead. You have to make a firm decision that you want to be a leader, whether that is in your workplace, your community, or in an emergency.

Decide to be the leader that provides others with vision, and who directs the course of future events for your group.

Decide that part of your job is to inspire others to succeed.

Second, for whatever job you want to be the leader, you will want to identify the appropriate mix of traits and skills that will help you be a leader, and then go learn those skills.

How can you do that? Here are a few suggestions:

Be the person others choose to follow.

Be the one to come up with a vision for the future that others will want to follow.

Provide inspiration to others.

Make people feel important and appreciated.

Be ethical in your dealings.

Be a model for high values.

Set the right pace through your expectations and lead by example.

Encourage continuous growth and improvement in your employees.

Care and act compassionately.

Finally, *how* does a leader lead?

A leader communicates a clear mission and vision for the future, so others may follow it.

Change is always unsettling to people, but if they know what the shared vision is, they can then see a path to get there.

A leader leads by example. A leader does not hold back and wait for consensus and then follow that consensus. A leader makes a decision, and leads the pack by providing clear direction.

A leader establishes the tone and work environment in which the employees may exercise personal courage and freedom of expression. A leader has the power to encourage or stifle debate. Use that power to genuinely encourage input, debate and differing opinions. Leaders then have more information to make better decisions in that kind of open atmosphere.

In leaving this leadership topic, I encourage you to decide to be a leader today. Lead your work group. Lead your project. Volunteer to be the den mom or your jury foreperson.

Do you know why? We need more Asian American leaders in every sector. Especially in the political arena, and most particularly on the national political scene where our representation is slim, but don't get me started on that topic. . . That is a different speech.

LEADING TELECOM CHANGE IN CALIFORNIA

My final topic is leading change in telecommunications regulation.

This is my way of saying I am putting my money where my mouth is. I certainly can't ask all of you to lead, unless I am willing to lead myself.

Now, I had already done a stint of public service with the Federal Communications Commission in the mid-Nineties. I had considered myself retired from the demanding pace and media glare of FCC public service when the proverbial call came, asking me to consider becoming a commissioner of the California PUC. I felt I had "been there, done that."

It turns out that Governor Schwarzenegger – an immigrant himself, let me add -- has a bold vision for the communications industry. In his January 5, 2006 State of the State Address, our Governor expressed it nicely:

"We must not only expand the concrete highways that connect Los Angeles to San Francisco and Stockton -- but the digital ones that connect Stockton to Shanghai, and to Sydney and to Seoul."

It turns out the Governor and I have a shared vision, which is why I ended up accepting this new PUC appointment. We want to bring the most advanced broadband infrastructure to every Californian, so that our economy will grow and the best high tech companies will come here. After all, we are the home of Silicon Valley, Hollywood and the music industry. We should have the most blazing fast broadband system on the planet!

Further, broadband is good for our children, the next generation. We want all the children of California to have the opportunity to get the best educations, so that they can grow up to get the good paying, high tech jobs in the nation.

Finally broadband has many benefits for health centers, particularly in rural areas. We can heal people and save lives with broadband applications.

I have a vision of what California's telecommunications market can and should be. It will feature vigorous intermodal competition among telephone companies, cable companies, competitive local exchange carriers, wireless and Voice over Internet Protocol providers.

Companies will have to put delighting customers first, in order to keep their customers. In a competitive market, customers vote with their feet.

In this new competitive world, the PUC would become less of a command and control regulatory agency, and more of a referee. I have worked with the phone industry collaboratively to find a less regulatory atmosphere where they have more freedoms to compete. I hope to be a change agent at the PUC to help it transform itself into a modern agency that can handle this new style communications marketplace. To this end, I am working to make the agency more consumer focused. I have supported hiring more consumer affairs representatives, and improving their training and tools for getting their job done.

I have also led efforts to radically improve our consumer education efforts – via consumer oriented brochures and a new website, www.calphoneinfo.com. This website includes downloadable brochures and information about the changing phone industry in the 12 most popular languages spoken in California. It gives consumers needed information to become smart telecom shoppers, and lets them know where to complain when they have a problem.

We established a new Telecom Fraud Unit to catch bad actors who attempt to defraud telecom consumers with slamming, cramming and other schemes involving fraud.

There is also some important telecom deregulation work to finish, that Commissioner Susan Kennedy had begun. Sadly, our regulations at the CPUC are stuck in the Gunsmoke era, while the competitive telecom market is in the "X-Man" era.

In late August, we adopted a uniform regulatory framework that ended price controls on all services except basic residential service. By a unanimous vote, the Commission approved a sweeping deregulatory order for the four biggest incumbent telephone companies including AT&T. It was badly needed reform, quite overdue.

I also wanted to congratulate AT&T on the new Video Franchise bill passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor. The Video Franchise bill next comes to the PUC for implementation and we will be ready for it. We are committed to implement the new law quickly so that AT&T and Verizon may apply to build out some exciting new broadband infrastructure for California by early next year.

I recognize that this will be a huge undertaking for your company, and I wanted to thank AT&T for its leadership and commitment to bringing California the most advanced broadband facilities. I look forward to working with your company on this important broadband initiative.

It is an honor to be invited here to speak to you. Please go out and be a leader in your life today.