

Minority Powerbrokers Q&A: Hanson Bridgett's John Cu

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John T. Cu is a litigation partner with Hanson Bridgett LLP in the firm's San Francisco office and a former deputy district attorney for Contra Costa County, California. An experienced litigator with jury trial experience, he has litigated complex business and commercial disputes involving contracts, unfair competition, business torts, trade secrets, products liability and real estate. He also has litigated various kinds of insurance coverage issues, including significant multimillion-dollar environmental, toxic tort, subrogation and contribution disputes.

As chairman of Hanson Bridgett's diversity and inclusion committee, Cu oversees policies impacting diverse attorneys and partners, both within the firm and in the community, including pipeline programs and mentoring and retention initiatives. Cu also serves as vice chairman of the board of directors for the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, and he is active in Ascend Leadership, the largest nonprofit Pan-Asian organization for business professionals in North America.



As a participant in Law360's Minority Powerbrokers Q&A series, Cu shared his perspective on five questions:

Q: How did you break the glass ceiling in the legal industry?

A: I have not broken the glass ceiling in the legal industry. There is far too much work left to do for anyone to proclaim that they've achieved the goal of breaking the glass ceiling. But, to the extent you are asking me what I attribute my success thus far, I would answer by saying that no one achieves success on their own. Everyone needs help along the way, in the form of mentors and, more importantly, sponsors. I am privileged to have had terrific sponsors, both diverse and nondiverse, partners and clients along the way. I would not have made it this far without them.

Q: What are the challenges of being a lawyer of color at a senior level?

A: I can only speak from an Asian-American lawyer's perspective. I do not think you have to look very far to understand the challenges confronted by Asian-American attorneys. The statistics for Asian-American lawyers in law firms who make partner are not very good, certainly by today's standards, and the

numbers get even more bleak when you consider equity partnership. We need more Asian-Americans in equity partnership and leadership positions in law firms and legal departments, plain and simple. Asian-American lawyers who are currently privileged to be in leadership positions in their respective law departments or law firms need to also be leaders in advocating for change; they need to be an integral piece of the solution.

Q: Describe a time you encountered discrimination in your career and tell us how you handled it.

A: Unfortunately, I have encountered discrimination on several occasions over the course of many years, in varying degrees, some conscious, some unconscious. However, I do recall when I was a much younger attorney, my ability to try cases was questioned by a senior lawyer from my previous employer, on the grounds that Asian-Americans are perceived to be meek and shy. How did I handle it? I won.

Q: What advice would you give to a lawyer of color?

A: Be authentic.

Q: What advice would you give to a law firm looking to increase diversity in its partner ranks?

A: Do it because it is in your firm and/or partnership's culture to understand and appreciate the values and merits of diverse partnership, not because optics dictates. I believe that if you are forced to do something as opposed to doing something because it is inherent in your value system, you will not succeed. Moreover, you need the support of the collective behind you to affect change. Ideally, the support comes from top-down.

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