



Education: JD, University of Chicago Law School; BA, computer science, legal studies, University of California, Berkeley

Company Name: Latham & Watkins LLP

Industry: Law

Company CEO: Richard Trobman

Company Headquarters Location: N/A

Number of Employees: 5,400

Your Location (if different from above): Bay Area–Menlo Park & San Francisco

Words you live by: We rise by lifting others.

Who is your personal hero? Nguyen Thi Dung and Nguyen Van Khoa (my parents)

What book are you reading? *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* by Heather McGhee

What was your first job: Unemployment Office

Favorite charity: Asian Law Alliance

Interests: Playing soccer, chasing my kids, and beating my family at Mario Kart

Family: Partner, Andy; children: Emma (6 years) and Reed (9 months); and cat, McClintock (17 years)

The Power of Learning to Own Who I Am

“Go back to your own country.” I remember hearing those words for the first time as a young child. Those words did not confuse me, but the words from my dad that followed did. In his Vietnamese-accented English, my dad yelled, “I am in my own country. I’m an American!”

At the time I could not wrap my head around what I perceived as conflicting ideas: Are we Vietnamese or are we American? Unfortunately, I took the wrong lesson from that day. In the years that followed, I worked hard to be more “American” and less Vietnamese. Even as a law student and young attorney, I tried to hide what I perceived as my differences, my Vietnamese identity, to be “more American.” I didn’t want to be known as a good lawyer for an Asian Amer-

ican; I just wanted to be known as a good lawyer.

As I matured as an attorney, I realized that my preoccupation with breaking the meek Asian woman stereotype and hiding my Vietnamese identity actually limited my ability to be an effective litigator. Instead of suppressing aspects of my identity, I could leverage the stereotype to surprise my opponents in arguments or to obtain more information at depositions. Instead of hiding my background, I could embrace my experience as a child of refugees to connect better with certain audiences and juries—people who had also watched their families work and sacrifice to achieve the “American Dream.” Instead of pretending that I “fit in,” I could use my experience of being

cast as “other” to better recognize how the skills, insights, and unique experiences of all team members would advance the group’s goals.

I learned to own who I am, and I have come to realize that being a good lawyer and a good Asian American lawyer are the same thing. I have learned to embrace the Vietnamese aspects of my identity, and to lean into my differences as strengths. I learned what my dad meant when he proclaimed that he was an American: The journey and experiences of my parents—coming as Vietnamese refugees with nothing to build a better life in the United States—is the quintessential American story. So I am Vietnamese and I am American. And I am thrilled to be recognized for my skills as a lawyer. Period.