Breaking Stereotypes: An Asian American’s View of Leadership Development

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This article makes the case for targeted and intentional Asian American leadership development. I first provide a snapshot of the U.S. workplace, focusing on the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, to identify the status of Asian Americans in the ranks of leadership. An overview of Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc. (LEAP), its Leadership Philosophy, and the LEAP Leadership Framework is presented to provide context for its Asian American programming and leadership development strategies.

Keywords: leadership development, skills, cultural values, Asian American self-awareness

“Quiet. Respectful. Highly technical. Never says no. Hard worker.” Perception or truth? Regardless, these are the words most often used to describe Asian Americans, as well as common performance feedback heard by Asian American employees from their non-Asian managers. Although none of these descriptions are inherently bad, they are not part of the description of the typical leader in the United States, or, to some degree, globally. Applied to Asian Americans, they lead to the perception that people of Asian descent are “not leaders” or “lack leadership ability,” a perspective that hurts Asian Americans across all sectors, all industries, and all the various roles they assume.

Despite rapid growth in the Asian American population and workforce, and despite high rates of educational achievement and talent growth, the conclusion from a recent environmental scan by Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc. (LEAP, 2012a) reveals that Asian Americans remain among the least-represented groups in leadership roles in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, still finding themselves on the outside looking in, at work and in political and educational environments that are neither fully diverse nor fully inclusive.

After three decades of experience conducting leadership development, commissioning and authoring leadership research reports, and conducting studies on Asian Americans, LEAP continues to arrive at the same basic conclusion: Given how little stereotypic perceptions about Asian Americans have changed, the need for Asian American leadership development continues to be essential to increase the number of Asian Americans leaders. Efforts to address the underrepresentation of Asian American leaders remain a vital component of the larger drive toward parity and equality.

This article makes the case for targeted and intentional Asian American leadership development. I first provide a snapshot of the U.S. workplace, focusing on the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, to identify the status of Asian Americans in the ranks of leadership. An overview of Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc. (LEAP), its Leadership Philosophy, and the LEAP Leadership Framework is presented to provide context for its Asian American programming and leadership development strategies.

Asian American Leadership by the Numbers

In a follow-up to a groundbreaking McKinsey & Company report, the global management firm wrote, “Having great managerial talent has always been important, but now it is critical. In today’s competitive knowledge-based world, the caliber of a company’s talent increasingly determines success in the marketplace” (McKinsey & Company, 2001, p. 1).

Further, according to the firm, “The forces that are causing [the war for talent] are deep and powerful . . . better talent is what will separate the winning companies from the rest” (McKinsey & Company, 2001, p. 1). They found that one of the five talent-management imperatives organizations must execute is to grow great leaders: “Most companies leave a tremendous amount of human potential unrealized because their people are inadequately developed. Talented people crave the opportunity to grow, and without it they’ll leave” (p. 6). Given long-standing biases against Asian Americans as potential leaders, how much potential has been left unrealized because their talent and potential continues to go unrecognized?

The need to grow great leaders is as important in the nonprofit sector as it is in the private sector. According to the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance (2011), “significant commitment to management and leadership development is needed by nonprofit sector organizations” (pp. 6–7). They found that 35% of nonprofit leaders believe they have the leaders they need now, but they have no system to ensure future leaders. Further, 29% of nonprofit leaders felt that they did not have the leaders now nor did they think that they had a system in place to cultivate future leaders: “There is the sense that the absence of leadership continuity will place their organizational effectiveness in jeopardy” (Nonprofit Leadership Alliance, 2011, pp. 6–7).

Over the last 30 years, the Asian American population in the United States grew rapidly from 1.5% of the total population in 1980 to 5.6% in 2010 (Gibson & Jung, 2002; Hoeffel, Rastogi,
Kim, & Shahid, 2012). From 2000 to 2010, Asian Americans grew by 46%, the fastest of any race or ethnic group in the United States, and by 2050, the Asian American population is expected to increase 213% to 10% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

The growth of Asian Americans is paralleled by their expansion in the U.S. workforce, which, by 2018, is expected to experience the greatest increase (48.9%) to 5.6% of the total workforce (Toossi, 2009, pp. 46–49). They will also be a highly educated workforce. As of 2009, 50% of Asian Americans 25 years and older had a bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The continued increase in population and the rapid rate of growth and more education is not, however, translating into greater leadership representation across various sectors and industries.

Almost 6% of the federal sector workforce is Asian or Pacific Islander (API). However, at the senior executive service (SES) level, the highest levels of management for the federal government, just over 2% of those who are at the SES level are API (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2008). Examining the leadership ranks of the four federal agencies with the largest API workforce representation reveals significant disparities, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which has no API at the SES level (Table 1).

The picture is not that much better for Asian Americans in higher education. In 2011, Asian Americans were 6.5% of college students, 8.4% of faculty members, and only 1% of college presidents. Approximately 40 Asian Americans were presidents or chancellors out of the nation’s 4,788 degree-granting schools, yet half were at community colleges (A. Yamagata-Noji, personal communication, July 11, 2012). In California, where Asian Americans are the second largest minority group after Hispanics, at 15% of the population, and where several public universities have a majority or near-majority Asian American student body, only one Asian American heads a University of California campus (i.e., Henry T. Yang, Chancellor of University of California, Santa Barbara). Now, after a 9-year interval, two Asian Americans were appointed in short succession in early 2012 to head California State University campuses (i.e., Leroy Morishita, President of California State University, East Bay, and Leslie Wong, President of California State University, San Francisco).

In 2011, 82.8% of the Asian American workforce could be found in the cubicles of corporate America (Kugler, 2012). Despite the majority of Asian Americans being employed in the private sector, their presence is not reflected in the executive and boards of director ranks of corporations. LEAP’s (2011) research found that Asian Americans represent a miniscule 2% of Fortune 500 executive officers—13 are CEOs, and of that number, three are women. Only 79 of the 500 companies have an Asian American executive officer. At the corporate board level, APIs make up 2.6% of the total 5,524 board seats, and of that, 20.1% are women (LEAP, 2013). Moreover, only 114 of the 500 companies have an API corporate board member.

When looking at the near invisibility of APIs on nonprofit and foundation boards of directors, and at the CEO level, it is not surprising that the API community has been dismissed, disenfranchised, and disengaged (see Table 2). A 2011 LEAP report found that the Top 100 Nonprofits reflect the worst representation of APIs on boards, at only 2.55%, less than even the Fortune 100 Corporations, at 2.7%. Although the percentage representation of APIs on Top 100 Foundation Boards (4.05%) is better than Fortune 100 Corporate Boards or the Top 100 Nonprofit Boards, nearly three out of four Top 100 Foundations do not have an API board member (LEAP, 2012). Most disappointing is the lack of an API CEO and/or president among the Top 100 Foundations and Nonprofits, many which serve populations that include APIs. Given that corporate, foundation, and nonprofit board members are typically drawn from the ranks of business, academic, civic, and government leaders, these statistical disparities in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors are not surprising. More importantly, it highlights the urgency for increased leadership development among Asian Americans.

### The LEAP Story

In 1982, LEAP was established to address the lack of API leadership representation across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. Through LEAP, its founders hoped to create an environment in which APIs could develop leadership skills, realize their full leadership potential, and assume visible leadership roles that would impact the larger society. Recognizing that API communities needed more leaders as well as skilled leaders, LEAP embarked upon a plan both to increase the number of API leaders, as well as to train those leaders to be more effective in their work. Initially, LEAP focused only on the leaders at API-serving nonprofit organizations.

LEAP’s original programming began with awareness- and skills-building workshops and symposia featuring prominent API civic and community leaders. Although the initial intent of LEAP’s founders was to expand the pool of community leaders, to their surprise, they found that their leadership training was attracting not just API nonprofit staff and community volunteers but large numbers of APIs in corporate, government, and higher education jobs who were frustrated with the lack of advancement and leadership opportunities. Many participants shared similar stories of frustra-

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Permanent workforce</th>
<th>GS13</th>
<th>GS14</th>
<th>GS15</th>
<th>SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dept. of Commerce Patent &amp; Trademark Office (PTO)</td>
<td>25.61%</td>
<td>32.78%</td>
<td>29.17%</td>
<td>20.41%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcasting Board of Governors</td>
<td>13.77%</td>
<td>12.83%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>2.82%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHHS – National Institutes of Health (NIH)</td>
<td>13.49%</td>
<td>10.16%</td>
<td>12.89%</td>
<td>8.20%</td>
<td>3.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHHS – Food &amp; Drug Administration (FDA)</td>
<td>11.39%</td>
<td>13.59%</td>
<td>13.79%</td>
<td>8.67%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* API = Asian and Pacific Islander; FY = Fiscal Year; GS = General Schedule; SES = Senior Executive Service; DHHS = Department of Health and Human Services.
LEAP State of API Leadership, 2010–2012

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of API representation</th>
<th># of organizations with APIs on board or executive officers</th>
<th># of APIs holding board seats</th>
<th># of API directors or executive officers</th>
<th># of API CEOs and/or presidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fortune 500 API executive officers and top earners</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortune 500 corporate board representation</td>
<td>2.6% of 5,524 board seats</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortune 100 corporate board representation</td>
<td>2.7% of 1,213 board seats</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 100 foundation board representation</td>
<td>4.05% of 1,086 board seats</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 100 nonprofit board representation</td>
<td>2.55% of 3,061 board seats</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. API = Asian and Pacific Islander.

The Case for Asian American Leadership Development

In order to begin to provide Asian American leadership and talent development, we must ask why Asian Americans are not being tapped for more leadership opportunities? On this question, a report by the U.S. Department of Labor Glass Ceiling Commission is as true today as it was when released:

A significant factor in the availability debate [of white women and minority men and women] is the haphazard and inefficient developmental and advancement process within companies and organizations themselves. A major reason for the perceived lack of qualified women and minority males is that they have limited access to the developmental experiences and activities needed to become prepared for advancement. The selection procedures for these tend to be informal and bound by stereotypes, biases, and questionable “qualifications.” Thus, companies ignore many individuals with the education, interest, and potential for managerial and executive responsibility. (Wernick, 1994, p. 4)

Rather than wait for employers, government agencies, and nonprofit managers to remove the informal use of bias from their selection practices, organizations that work with Asian Americans must train leaders who understand such “stereotypes, biases, and questionable ‘qualifications’” and find ways to fight, disprove, and/or deny them. Our experiences at LEAP have demonstrated that Asian American leaders can and will flourish, if they are provided a safe, supportive, and comfortable environment in which to develop their leadership skills. It is not uncommon in our programs to see young participants, relatively new to the United States, with little to no family support, in a first job. Participants are introduced to American culture in graduate school, but do not begin to fully understand and navigate American corporate culture until their first job and the pressures that come, for instance, when judgments of competence come with assumptions about accents and English fluency.

Through three decades of creating leadership development programs, through trial and error, and through the support and feedback of thousands of participants, LEAP has found it essential to create programming in which Asian American participants can speak freely without fear of being judged, and in which they can build self-awareness and confidence while learning new skills. We strive to create an atmosphere that allows participants to feel confident about asking honest questions, sharing experiences, and giving opinions without feeling like they must constantly be explaining, defending, or justifying themselves. In other words, effective Asian American leadership development demands that we release participants from the burden of constantly having to perform cultural translation. One participant who, at the time, was a midlevel manager commented on his participation in an Asian-American-specific leadership training: “I just realized that I never do this at work—talk and laugh like this. I’m always reserved. The way I am here is who I am, and the way I should be at work” (personal communication, April 28, 1989). He retired several years ago as a vice president. Another participant put it this way: “I could just say something and people just knew.” In another setting, without the support and shared understanding of other Asian
Americans, these comments, valid and important though they may be, might otherwise go unsaid:

Just because one is not the typical Asian doesn’t automatically make one not Asian or the “anti-Asian” . . . Why shouldn’t a person of Asian heritage be allowed to be who he or she is without feeling like they are dishonoring their culture or background because they don’t exhibit or demonstrate the stereotypical or perceived common behaviors assumed for Asian Americans? (personal communication, September 26, 2012)

The dialogue that arises during such moments, given an honest yet respectful environment, can be rich with common experiences that allow participants to reflect more critically on their experiences in the workplace.

If the first goal for targeted Asian American leadership development is to cultivate an open, honest, and nonjudgmental atmosphere, then the second is to show trainees how to leverage their Asian cultural values in the workplace, while at the same time adding new skills and strategies for success. With our Leadership Philosophy—“Keep Your Values. Develop New Skills.”—LEAP focuses on trying to show Asian American would-be leaders that they can retain their culture, identity, and values, while at the same time developing skills necessary to become effective leaders within their organizations, communities, and broader society. Participants are not being asked to be hypocritical or to fundamentally change who they are. Instead, we ask participants to consider the following:

1. Multiple ways to demonstrate their values through behavior—no one way is either right or wrong.

2. Learning new skills does not entail an abandonment of who they are but instead can lead to an expansion of who they are. The following analogy is often used to illustrate this point: We all walk around with this imaginary toolbox of skills with which you accomplish many tasks. As you grow and develop, expand your toolbox by adding new skills so that instead of relying on “good-enough skills,” you will be able to use “just-right skills.” As an Asian American executive put it, “We’re culturally geared to be Michael Jordan—performers. But to move up, we have to shift to be Phil Jackson and know how to lead people” (personal communication, May 2, 2012).

3. “Overuse” or “overreliance” on values, particularly cultural values, can turn them from strengths into weaknesses. Instead, balance values to leverage them as strengths and explore different methods for expressing those same values.

In our leadership development programming, because we saw the need for workable models for Asian Americans attempting to make the transition into leadership roles, a LEAP instructor created the Asian Balancing Cultures model (Figure 1) to show participants how to deploy their cultural values to successfully enhance rather than hinder their leadership style:

We introduce the ABC Model in our leadership development workshops to push participants into critical reflection of what is comfortable, both in their own skills and their cultural values, and what is required in different environments. After asking participants to fill out their own versions of the chart, we emphasize the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Enhancing</th>
<th>Asian Cultural Values</th>
<th>Career Limiting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good team player, works well with different people</td>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>Avoids conflict, unassertive. Can be taken advantage of. Can’t be authoritative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful and loyal to boss(es). Seeks out &amp; values those with experience. Knows how to leverage that knowledge.</td>
<td>Respect for Authority/Elders</td>
<td>Reluctant to disagree or challenge. People pleaser or “suck up”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive to the feelings of others. Take other people’s point of view/feelings into account. Look for win-win when possible.</td>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Too concerned with appearances, what others think. Fearful of high risks. Not confident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not boastful of achievements. Share credit where due. Appear down to earth. Being willing to learn from others.</td>
<td>Humbleness/Humility</td>
<td>Doesn’t get/take credit for contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable, Results-Oriented. Doesn’t give up. Puts 110% to do the best job.</td>
<td>Hard Work</td>
<td>Inefficient, limits opportunities for social interactions/networking. Worker bee, not a leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t like to lose. Strive to meet and exceed company goals.</td>
<td>Importance of Success - Be #1/Be the Best</td>
<td>Inflexible and overly demanding. Perfectionist. Not a good team player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to new ideas, resourceful. Thoroughly understands the work and strives to continuously learn.</td>
<td>Learning/Education</td>
<td>Danger of being too narrowly focused. Relent on book smarts, not people smarts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** Asian Balancing Cultures (ABC) model. Copyright 2013 by Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc.
The third goal of targeted Asian American leadership development is to provide a tailored learning experience that is both culturally relevant and culturally sensitive. Despite the availability of a wide spectrum of leadership development programs across the corporate, nonprofit, government, and higher education sectors, our experience and research indicate that generic leadership programs frequently do not include large numbers of Asian Americans. Although there are varying reasons for this low participation, perceptions about the lack of leadership ability, disinterest in leadership roles, as well as perceptions about overrepresentation and “having made it already” are contributing selection factors in the corporate, government, and higher education sectors.

Informal conversations that take place among Asian American colleagues in large organizations often come around to the perception that Asian Americans are faring well in the company and are successful in their careers. As one Asian American manager at a financial services firm put it, “There are so many of us, people just assume we’re doing well and so they don’t have to focus on us.” Additionally, some people believe that Asian Americans are more prevalent at the executive levels than they actually are. Even diversity and inclusion professionals, who should be more aware, have this misconception of “overrepresentation” of Asian Americans at the executive level. As one senior manager and participant in one of our leadership development programs observed,

> Nothing I had gone through prior to the LEAP [program] addressed the whole cultural aspect. And what I found . . . when I had time to think about it and reflect upon it, was that this was the missing piece in a lot of the other leadership courses I had taken. (personal communication, February 4, 2012)

Within the nonprofit sector, the most commonly cited reasons for a lack of Asian-specific training are the lack of understanding of Asian culture and values, the nature and nuances of Asian American communities, the language barriers, and the need for this cultural relevance and applicability. Other reasons include a lack of awareness of gender and generational dynamics within the Asian American community. Participants often experience having their opinions and thoughts discounted or ignored, due to accents or limited English proficiency, as well as their input not being valued.

By contrast, Asian-American-specific leadership development programs enable a shift of focus to individual participants’ needs rather than on the “Asian Americanness” of the participant. Because participants share, or are familiar with, a baseline of common Asian cultural assumptions and values, being Asian American becomes, in a sense, like the air that participants breathe. This acknowledgment allows the conversation, discussion, and focus to be directed toward individual participants’ skills. This tighter focus gives participants greater insight into their own strengths and weaknesses and clears the ground for more effective personal development.

Research and anecdotal evidence now show significant benefits of single-gender, single-race programs that train women and minorities within the context of their own needs and experiences . . . An important lesson we’ve learned is that applying a “one size fits all” strategy to leadership development doesn’t work. (Ohlott, 2002, p. 33 and p. 37)

The fourth goal of targeted Asian American leadership development is to keep Asian Americans from falling behind the leadership curve in the workplace. Many of our conversations with diversity and talent-management professionals across the corporate spectrum have returned to an interest in leadership development for mid-senior-level managers. Our experience and studies on career advancement suggest the need among potential leaders early in their career to develop soft and hard skills. By the time a person reaches mid-senior levels of management, much of that person’s hard skills or technical abilities have already been “branded.” The soft skills (personal brand, executive presence, networks, and relationships) are the differentiators at these levels. By the time an Asian American manager realizes the critical need for soft skills, he or she could be 5 to 10 years behind her or his colleagues, who have already established relationships, built visibility, and projected a leadership brand to a broader array of people. Without an understanding of the importance of assertiveness, self-promotion, networking, and unfamiliar or uncomfortable practices in many Asian cultures, these individuals may instead operate under the assumption that as long as they excel in developing their hard skills, that their “work will speak for itself.” As a consequence, many Asian American employees are overlooked as potential leaders and frequently miss out on growth opportunities. The results are an underutilization of a company’s Asian Americans talent and costly, possibly unnecessary, turnovers.

The fifth and final goal of targeted Asian American leadership development is to benefit those organizations that support it. With culturally specific programs, employers receive

- focused, motivated, and productive API employees who are engaged and apt to be more loyal to the enterprise, agency, or institution;
- greater productivity and innovation within the organization, translating into greater revenue, profits, and growth;
- attractive and desirable image for potential clients and employees as a company with a demonstrated commitment to diverse-leader development; and
- improved pipeline and retention of diverse talent.

Contrary to the opinion that targeted and culturally specific leadership development may create divisions in the workplace, our experience has shown that, when done well, such training actually produces stronger group cohesion and improves productivity.

### Training and Developing Asian Americans to Be Leaders

The LEAP workshop changed the way I thought—of myself, of being a leader, and of being Asian American. I learned things about myself that I never would have had . . . things like how my culture influences how and what I do. I never realized how important that was to know until I heard, learned it, experienced it. (personal communication, August 16, 2012)

When our participants reach higher levels of self-awareness and get to their cultural roots, they can tap into useful skills or strategies for the workplace. Asian Americans oftentimes believe that they are deficient in particular skills. They can attend general, one-size-fits-all classes and workshops and enroll in programs, but
if what they are being taught contradicts their culture and heritage, it will always be difficult and uncomfortable and may never result in greater proficiency or skill. By contrast, LEAP teaches self-awareness as an integral element of its philosophy and Leadership Framework. LEAP’s Leadership Philosophy—“Keep Your Values. Develop New Skills.”—is the result of its understanding, knowledge, and history of working with Asian Americans. With it, LEAP teaches Asian Americans how to retain their culture, identity, and values, while developing skills necessary to become effective leaders.

LEAP has created and refined the LEAP Leadership Framework through 30-plus years of experience in growing and developing Asian American leaders. Composed of five critical elements, it stands as the cornerstone of virtually all of our leadership development (Figure 2).

Expand Self-Awareness

I think if someone is self-aware, then they can always continue to grow. If they’re not self-aware, I think it’s harder for them to evolve or adapt beyond who they already are (Tony Hsieh, CEO, Zappos.com). (Bryant, 2010)

This first and most important component of the LEAP Leadership Framework is essential to leadership development because it focuses on the individual. From the LEAP perspective, self-aware leaders are, first and foremost, comfortable with themselves. Being comfortable does not mean being complacent. Being comfortable means you like who you are—on the inside and outside. It means that you accept yourself for who, and what, you are, that is, an Asian American. It means being comfortable being around other people like you. Most importantly, it means you do not try to change yourself to meet other peoples’ definitions of what you should be. At the same time, you accept others for who they are and you do not try to change them to meet your definition of what you think they should be.

The second element to expanding self-awareness, lies in understanding relationships among perceptions, behaviors, and values. In LEAP workshops, we typically introduce this idea through a series of questions:

- How do my values influence my behavior and how is my behavior perceived by other people?
- How do other people’s values influence their behavior and how is their behavior perceived by me?
- What is the impact of perceptions?
- How can behaviors enhance or hinder my effectiveness?

These questions are used to initiate introspection by participants on the influences of their culture and values on themselves and their behaviors. In understanding how cultural values are expressed in the form of behaviors, one can then understand how cultural values can influence behaviors. Furthermore, with an understanding of how behaviors can impact one person’s perceptions of another, participants can gain a greater self-awareness of how they might be positively or negatively perceived.

Although cultural values are exhibited through one’s behaviors, the key is to discern how others may be interpreting such behaviors, consciously or unconsciously, through their own cultural lenses. Our perception of others is, consciously or unconsciously, filtered through our values “lens” (e.g., cultural, regional, gender), which allows us to interpret other people’s behaviors. For instance, silence has widely varying meanings among various cultures. For the non-Asian, who may have been taught that being respectful means talking, participating in the discussion, and sharing...
mandate.

right choices. The more well-communicated and understood makes people uneasy and fearful. At these times, people will look the element of the unknown that is always contained in change and managing change entails a willingness to communicate openly.

inevitable changes that lie ahead for any organization. It means maintain a place of permanence, leaders must

person chooses, change and uncertainty are the order of the day. Rather than seeking ways to resist change, to locate, and to

leaders must embrace those moments, helping to bring others a deeper of understanding of the diversity among Asians Americans; the history of Asians in America; demographic data; community issues and concerns; myths, misconceptions, and stereotypes; and Asian cultural values. The impetus lies not in knowing everything about Asian Americans, but in cultivating curiosity and acting as a facilitator of knowledge between Asians and non-Asians.

The fourth and final element of being a self-aware leader depends not upon looking inward but upon directing yourself outwardly toward what LEAP calls giving back of your "time, talent, and treasure." None of us have gotten where we are on our own. We all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. The responsibility to give back comes with being a leader, and it is also an important way to honor the people who have paved the way for others.

Additionally, it is provides the means and opportunity to practice and hone leadership skills.

Regardless of what profession, what sector, and what job a person chooses, change and uncertainty are the order of the day. Rather than seeking ways to resist change, to locate, and to maintain a place of permanence, leaders must lead and manage the inevitable changes that lie ahead for any organization. It means dealing effectively with change and ambiguity, deploying adaptability, flexibility, a willingness to go outside of one's comfort zone, and a measure of risk taking. But most importantly, leading and managing change entails a willingness to communicate openly about the changes as they are happening. Change is stressful, and the element of the unknown that is always contained in change makes people uneasy and fearful. At these times, people will look to leaders to make sense of ambiguity and to help them to make the right choices. The more well-communicated and understood change is, the more easily people can accept and adapt to its mandate.

The purpose of learning is growth, and our minds, unlike our bodies, can continue growing as long as we live. (Adler, 2013)

Continuously learn, in the context of the LEAP Leadership Framework, means more than simply adding degrees. Although a PhD will likely open doors for some, it is important to remember that one's range of experience and expertise is also critical to effective leadership. At LEAP, we encourage the addition of leadership, people, and communication skills to a person's toolbox. We ask our participants to think about the areas in which one can develop skills further or acquire new skills, and not to be afraid to put themselves into situations that will force them to contend with new situations and to learn new skills or new ways to deploy old skills. Along with the directive to be continually looking to add new skills, we also stress the importance of feedback and the opportunities that constructive comments and evaluation offer to growth.

Grow High-Performing Teams, Coalitions, and Partnerships

Leaders not only assemble teams, build coalitions, and initiate partnerships but also set the terms of operation and success, and can be instrumental, even decisive, in the eventual success of that team, coalition, or partnership. Effective leaders understand the importance of diversity in a group setting are able to create teams that reflect a multitude of diversities—experience, function, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, geography, generation, work, and communication styles. And, increasingly, they utilize the range of technologies available for virtual interactions, so one is no longer limited to working with and collaborating with only those who are in the same geographic proximity.

Sustain Energy and Stamina

Bringing and maintaining energy and stamina to the workplace, and keeping colleagues and employees excited and focused on their work, are skills that many overlook and all too often simply label "cheerleading." However, for leaders, the ability to sustain their own energy and stamina is a critical differentiator that can lead to greater creativity, resilience, and effectiveness. Being able to sustain energy and stamina are as much about being able to reenergize oneself as well as stimulate oneself intellectually, psychologically, spiritually, and physically. It also means maintaining a sense of passion and persistence in achieving one's leadership vision and goals.

Inspiring Asian Americans to Aspire to Leadership Roles

The world in which we live has been fundamentally reorganized by the winds of economic change, with virtually every sector of the economy still feeling the pain of a long recession. Literally every sphere of our collective experience—economic, political, social, and cultural—continues to undergo a massive change. Although no one can know what those changes will look like or where they will lead, the necessity of leadership during times both good and
bad is clear, and LEAP is absolutely positive that they cannot be navigated without competent leaders.

Working with Asian Americans over the last 30 years, LEAP has never doubted that Asian Americans desire leadership opportunities. Our observation has been confirmed, for instance, by a study conducted by the Center for Work-Life Policy (Hewlett, Rashid, Forster, & Ho, 2011, p. 12), which found that 64% of Asian Americans aspire to hold a top job. Years ago, they may have been less vocal about revealing their ambition, willing and waiting to let their work speak for them, but the desire was there, waiting to be asked, to be invited. Today, Asians Americans are more quickly voicing their interest and sharing their aspirations, yet perceptions about what Asian Americans are and are not, as well as what they should or should not be, persist. This results in opportunities to continue breaking new ground, even in this time. The recent success of National Basketball Association (NBA) starter Jeremy Lin has been instructive (and not a little eye opening) for many. Unrecruited out of high school, undrafted by the NBA, and relegated to the NBA’s developmental league, his play sparked a midseason surge by a flailing New York Knicks team, and he now has a multimillion-dollar contract with the Houston Rockets. Only injury and what some have described as the head coach’s “desperation” gave Lin the chance he needed to prove himself. How could literally hundreds of college recruiters, NBA scouts, and sports writers over a 6-year period have all been so wrong? Because the weight of the cultural assumptions about Asian Americans did not allow the experts to evaluate his skills in an unbiased way. Certainly, the story of Jeremy Lin’s meteoric rise is the stuff of NBA legend and its more sensational aspects have been worked over by the opportunistic news media. And yet the core story is one of bias—the continued invisibility under which Asian Americans have had and continue to operate. It pays to the claim that we live in a color-blind world, a simple meritocracy, and it reveals a portion of the terrain through which aspiring Asian American leaders, for better or worse, must navigate.

Are there other and better ways to develop leaders than the path that Jeremy Lin had to follow? Let us hope so. Currently, a good majority of leadership development and definitions of good leadership are based on American/Western-centric culture, theories, and models. As the assumed baseline for leadership, it is the standard to which leaders and aspiring leaders are compared and expected to conform, the world over. However, as the center of the global economic system shifts increasingly to Asia and other non-Western regions, will definitions of good leadership also shift? Will scholars and experts in management and leadership development take into account other styles, methods, and cultures based on the best of Asian culture and values? Or will it evolve on its own, perhaps out of necessity or perhaps because it is inevitable?

Either way, LEAP has created the means for Asians and Asian Americans to grow, build, and develop as authentic, self-aware, change-making, knowledge-seeking, team-building, and energizing leaders for diverse organizations, communities, and environments. Although not every Asian American will need Asian-American-focused leadership development, there will be many who will find value in targeted instruction, because culture runs deep and does not change in one, two, or even three generations. We also know that despite recent population increases, and social and political gains, there is still much work to be done to ensure that underappreciated and overlooked Asian Americans have the openings to become leaders, and communities have the benefit of Asian Americans as part of the diverse pool of today’s leaders.

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