

FEATURE

Moving Asian Americans into the Corner Office

Keynote Speech By S. K. Gupta Vice President, Operations Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company At 2005 Chinese Institute of Engineers - AAEOY Awards Ceremony

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Good evening! This is truly a pleasure! ... I have always joked about my accent but today has been a wonderful day! It is great to be in the company of so many people who also did not have an accent till we all came to this country!!!

I was just thinking about what a difference two years make! In 2004, I was standing here accepting the AAEOY Award and tonight... tonight, I am honored, flattered and delighted to be invited back to share some personal thoughts with you...about how to move many more Asian Americans into the Corner Office!

I am especially happy to be back in Seattle where I first joined Lockheed Martin 23 years ago when we were in the shipbuilding business. We enjoyed living in this beautiful God's country for five years!!... and I am delighted to recognize the progress this state has made in the past century...since the 1907 riots against East Indians in Bellingham to electing the first Asian American governor in the United States in 1996! As the ad used to say...we have come a long way baby!

CIE/USA certainly has been industrious over the past two years and has organized an outstanding program today, including the first job fair program. Having spent time with some of you in the audience, I see here a large group of creative, ambitious and motivated over-achievers... which are all very positive traits.

[Earlier we were discussing the differences between CIE and CIA. I think I

figured it out. Some of us in the audience support CIA but CIE supports all of us!]

Just as I am proud to represent the Asian community and the progress we've made in America, I am very proud to represent my company, Lockheed Martin, whose technological and diversity accomplishments are impressive.

Our Company was formed in 1995 by the merger of Lockheed and Martin Marietta. I know that you have heard the common phrase – “It doesn't take a rocket scientist to do this.”... Yes? ...Well tell you what – many of the things we do, does take rocket scientists, and we have many of them!

From stealth fighters to submarine-launched missiles, from GPS and high-definition TV satellites to highly classified military spacecraft, from launching rockets to building and operating Mars Landers and Saturn orbiters, we daily accomplish extremely technically challenging projects. We are the largest provider of information technology to the United States Government and the largest employer of engineers in this country.

I'm also proud that you don't see Lockheed Martin's name on the front pages of newspapers when they discuss poor corporate governance. Ethics and integrity are our two most valuable principles at Lockheed Martin. A litmus test that we apply to our decisions is “Would we be willing to see this on the front page of a newspaper?” If not, then maybe, it is not such a good decision! Powered by Innovation, Guided by Integrity, that is Lockheed Martin!

Let me share a not-so-secret, secret with you. We will be hiring about 50,000 new employees across Lockheed Martin over the next 5 to 7 years. Yes, that wasn't my accent! ...you heard right, fivezero thousand! And guess what? To ensure diversity in the work place, we are requiring that at least 50% of the new hires are entry level professionals and at least 50% of those are from the under-represented categories, i.e. females and minorities. We continue to exceed these goals.

In Sunnyvale, California, where my office is located, nearly 20% of our 7,200 highly technical and competent work-force identifies themselves as Asian Americans.

Lockheed Martin has had many distinguished Asian Americans. Our retired Company President Sam Araki and Division President Don Tang have been recognized for their contributions to the world of classified satellite imagery. In 2001, the Chinese Historical Society of America honored Don Tang as one of the outstanding Chinese Americans in science and technology. He was also instrumental in helping start the National Museum of Chinese American History in San Francisco Chinatown.

Our nation's Secretary of Transportation, the Honorable Norm Mineta, was an esteemed colleague during his ... and my ... tenure at Lockheed Martin corporate headquarters in Maryland.

Norm was the first Asian American cabinet member in history. He first joined the Clinton administration and is the only Democrat in the Bush cabinet. [He now has company with Elaine Chao as the first Asian American woman in the cabinet!]

Perhaps... if I share some of my personal experiences of breaking down the barriers to my career, my lessons learned can be used by some of you to move into the corner office!

Over the years I learned 3 rules to break down my own barriers, please allow me to share them with you:

Rule #1: The only person in-charge of your career is you. Not your boss, Human Resources department, or mom! So take charge!

Rule #2: The best way of making sure that you don't get something is by not asking for it. In other words, if you want something, ask for it.

Rule #3: Pull is stronger than push, but no one pulls someone who is not pushing themselves. Don't just be a good employee... be an exceptional employee. Stand out. Deliver more than is expected ...let me repeat that... deliver more than is expected...for nothing else leaves a better long term impression.

I do believe that these rules are especially important for Asians Americans. Think about it.

Rule #1....we were taught ...work hard, work smart and someone else will worry about rewarding you!

Rule #2: Ask for something? We were always taught that even if you were starving, you should say "NO" at least twice, before you accept the food!

Rule #3: Push? Remember the Chinese story that the nail pushing out of the wooden boards will get hammered down?

Yet, as we try to get to that elusive "corner office", we need to remember, "In Rome do as Romans do."



I was once told that I didn't need to give Asians ...or Hispanics... the same pay raises as others, as they lived simple lives and didn't need as much money! ... Obviously... they hadn't met my wife!

Another time, I was told that the reason Asians are not in the leadership ranks is because they don't want to be leaders...I couldn't help but

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point out that I didn’t see the Asian countries being led by European and American white males!

These three rules are good and beneficial but nothing beats hard work, determination and ability...and I see all three in abundance in this audience. What we also need is to seek to understand the American decision makers and make them comfortable with who we are...but first we must ourselves be comfortable with who we are!

Asian cultures teach us to look within ourselves. That is a unique strength. Let’s leverage that strength to assess who we are and who we want to be in this country and figure out how to close the gap.

America is often referred to as the melting pot. I have heard ...and prefer ...the alternate description of it being a stir-fry dish where each ingredient retains its shape and flavor but together it makes for a delightful dish! Let’s not lose our individual cultures but let us join together to speak about the Asian American issues with one voice. There is power in numbers. Let’s leverage our power!

Let me share a familiar short story from my ancient country.

There were five brothers called Pandavas who constantly competed with each other. Their guru, one day, gave them each a wooden stick to break. They all broke their sticks easily. He then took five sticks and tied them together and then none of them could break the bunch. I am sure you heard similar stories while growing up.

The simple moral of the story is that individually you may feel challenged but collectively ... no one can break you. Look around you tonight... and draw strength from the company you keep.

The Asian American community has put an indelible stamp on the technological map of not only the United States, but the entire world.

Our statistics show that we, the Asian American community, are “least unhappy” as employees. Our retention rate is the highest, and yet, we don’t seem to be making major advancement in the executive ranks. We are called the “model minority”. Is it true that Asian Americans only want to be technical leaders, not managers?...I submit that this is a stereotype that we must band together to overcome.

Further, we need to focus on how we leverage both our technical and personnel skills to go in a new direction for many of us: The Corner Office.

A good leader requires skill, style and standards supported by substance. I know that we have the skill, standards and substance in abundance; so maybe, I humbly submit, it is the style that we need to work on?

What about luck? I do believe that they go hand in hand with hard work. It is funny but over the years I have discovered that the harder one works, the luckier one gets!

I’ve also learned some tough lessons, particularly work-life balance. I personally never thought about it till my son turned 13. It was a wake-up call when I discovered that his favorite song was “Cat’s in the Cradle” by Harry Chapin.

I subsequently adjusted my work schedule to ensure that I was there for him – and it was absolutely the right thing to do for he is 23 now and a good friend!...He teaches me things like not BMW'ing...that is bitching, moaning, whining...and I tease him about being a coconut, brown on the outside but white inside!...Earlier this month he left for a six-month assignment in Shanghai.

Work-life balance can be hard if you are ambitious – career wise. If you want to be the CEO of your company, be ready to make some sacrifices...Your work life may be the only life you will have if your heart is set on becoming a CEO by 35 and retired as a multi-millionaire by 40!

My advice – there should be years in your life when family is more important than work, but if you are ambitious - find years when work is equally, if not more, important. Many people are happy working 40 hours a week and not bringing any tension... stress or ...work home - I envy them! The rest of us? We just need to learn how to relax!

As you go forth in your careers, dare to



dream ... and dream some dreams that require you to take some risks. No country, company or individual can prosper and grow by dreaming dreams that bear no risk.

One must practice due prudence, one must embody reasonable caution, and one must not court danger thoughtlessly...but prudent risk is an essential and significant component of progress for engineers and scientists.

What else can I share with you? ... Oh yes, can we talk about under-represented categories? I know that sometimes it is not a politically correct thing to talk about, but then I look out at the audience and feel that tonight I am in good company.

I recently noted that 44 percent of the Asian Americans over the age of 25 have earned a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 26 percent of the total U.S. population.

Yet, fewer than 0.3% of senior executives in the US are of Asian American descent. CIE has set the model of opening its doors to all Asians. We need to gather all Asian Americans together and speak with one voice...so that, collectively, we can improve the balance.

When I speak with African American colleagues, they consistently refer to African American issues, not issues in the homeland of their ancestors. Similarly, Hispanic Americans tend to speak collectively on Hispanic issues, not issues in Mexico, Chile or Argentina. Even Native Americans have banded together to leverage each other.

That just leaves us. We Asian Americans have not reached that point yet. We tend to talk and band together about issues related to our heritage country, whether Thailand, Philippines, China, Japan or India, not collective Asian American issues... How can we subsume our national heritages for the one unifying Asian American heritage? May I suggest that we are missing an opportunity here? I would leave it as food for thought for all.

Moving forward...I submit that, we - the minorities - are fortunate to be living in this time and age. Yes, there have been some initiatives against affirmative action, but let's be honest with ourselves.... Females and minorities have better opportunities today than we have had in a long time.

Although...today, there are some role models... but not enough. Although some

representation in the management ranks... but not enough. Although some presence in the Corporate Board rooms... but not enough. Let's get our fair share, but not by quotas, but by earning it!

Our challenge is to fill the pipeline, so that when the next executive opening happens, there are enough minority candidates ready to take up the challenge.

The days when people said that hiring females and minorities would be lowering our standards are long gone. The new standards are being set by the people in this room. The ability, capability and talent in this room define this room, not an outsider. We will be recognizing many exceptional individuals shortly, let's bask in their glory, take pride in their achievements and congratulate them!

How does one find the balance, and avoid the stereotyping? I submit that each of us needs to fight the stereotyping daily until the walls of stereotyping come crashing down.

About 10 years back, an airline was advertising its punctuality on the radio in the Bay area. They used the heavily accented voice of an Indian American as the taxi driver for an American voiced passenger. Was that stereotyping? I thought so. My wife and kids told me that I was being too sensitive.

However, after listening to it for a few more days, I had to do something... I called the airline and after spending 3 to 4 hours with different people...and getting accused of not having any sense of humor ... I finally got through to their advertising department.

As I explained to them, if their next commercial used a heavily accented Indian voice as a Doctor or a scientist, I would accept that portraying Indians as taxi-driver in this ad was not stereotyping but humorous. The next day the ad was off the air.

A few weeks after I first told this story, I heard from a young Asian American lady. She

told me that she had been bothered by an ad in a magazine that stereotyped Asian American women. After listening to my story, she e-mailed the advertiser and was surprised to get a phone call from them, apologizing for the ad, and promising to never run it again! Her success was inspirational!

So, would you be discriminated against some time because of stereotyping? ...I can guarantee that! Is there a glass ceiling for Asian Americans? ... Yes, but it is beginning to crack...and as LEAP points out so well, we need to attack it both from top and bottom!

In our career there will be good days and bad days, good bosses and bad bosses. Let's learn to deal with the bad ones and enjoy the good ones. Let's take our cue from the United States Army slogan – be the best that you can be. That is what we need to do not only on the good days but also on the bad days.

Let's put on our game face when we get to work. Don't give that less-than-perfect boss or co-worker the satisfaction of knowing they got to us.

We can't control their actions, but we can control our reaction! As engineers we should recognize that it is an issue of mind over matter. If we don't mind... it doesn't matter!!!

“I hope that you see the glass ceiling, not as a barrier, but as a hurdle, an opportunity, to take in our stride.”

If you think the government is poorly run, run for public office – like Governor Gary Locke did. If you think schools need improvement, join the PTA - or become an educator like Dr. Phyllis Wise, provost and VP of University of Washington did - and improve

them. Give your job your best, if you think it deserves it...if not, get another job...or start your own business...like Dr. James Lee did... and run it the way you think a business should be run...Don't just be a spectator, do something to change what you have passion for!

Finally, figure out how to have fun. Life is too short not to have some fun everyday. Find something to laugh about. Can't find something? Make something up. Don't you want to make sure you had some fun on the last day of your life? Well guarantee that by having fun everyday for the rest of your life.

Having a bad day at work? Well, don't you think there is a reason they call your paycheck... "Compensation?"!!!

CIE is a great organization and you have been a great audience. Many of you are young enough and ambitious enough to want to be in the Corner Office.

I hope that you see the glass ceiling, not as a barrier, but as a hurdle, an opportunity, to take in our stride. I am confident that you don't need much of my advice, but if any of it causes you to think, I have achieved success tonight. If just one of the thoughts helps just one of you move into the Corner Office... it will be Nirvana!

And as we learned from the five Pandavas, there is strength in unity.

Thank you and goodnight.