

Making it in America

Asian American Engineering of
the Year

Washington, DC

March 31, 2007

Personal Experience

- Came in 1949 for college, planned to return, very low expectations on what I can achieve in US.
- Graduated 1955 from MIT with ScD in Chemical Engineering.
- Required to remain in US due to Korean War, and took a job at Mobil Oil in 1955. "He does not have a Chinaman's chance".
- Learning from several mentors at critical growth periods, and receiving from friends timely nominations and recommendations.

Changing America

- Dramatic changes towards equal opportunity in China, much credit to Martin Luther King from 1955.
- My sponsor thought that I should get into management. Sent to Harvard Business School in 1969.
- Believed in 士農工商, resigned Mobil and became professor at University Delaware 1971.

More Unexpected Turns

- 1977, called by MIT to become department head of chemical engineering. Recommendations and support from mentors and friends. Learn new skills.
- Changed all the rules, and prospered.
- 2001, called by Princeton to become Dean of Engineering and Applied Science. Recommendations and support from mentors and friends. Learn new skills.

Making it in America as Immigrant

- It is still more difficult , but becoming more possible
 - numerous success stories for Asian Americans, in many spheres - engineering, science, education, arts, business, law, government.
 - there is no better place on earth for immigrants - why else are we still here?
 - but there are much room for improvement, especially at very conservative establishments.

Dean's advice to young Asian engineers

知己知彼，百戰不貽

- 1) Evaluate your assets and abilities, be objective. Evaluate organizations and their profiles, seek a match with your current assets
- 2) Continue to learn and grow, increase your assets. Create networking with many people, seek and maintain relations with mentors. Remain alert to professional societies and outside contacts.
- 3) Dynamic life cycle, periodic re-inventing yourself to adapt to environment. Change job when you hit a ceiling.

What are my assets?

- What do I know?
 - education
 - technical skill
 - creativity
- Who do I know?
 - people skill
 - relatives, friends
 - network, mentors



My Assets fit this Position?

- Position is highly skill-oriented [back office]
 - Chandrasekhar, Yang, Tonegawa, Nobel Prizes
 - Hei-kyung Hong, NY Metropolitan Opera
- Position is highly people-oriented [front office]
 - Tian Chang-lin, Chancellor, U California at Berkeley
 - Raj Gupta, CEO Rohm and Haas
- My assets should grow continuously with time, to fit higher positions.



Dynamic Life Cycle

- Entry jobs are more skill-oriented, issues simpler and in smaller scales [back office]
 - design a message filter, write a software
 - teach a course, do research
- Climax jobs are more people-oriented, issues complex and in global scale [front office]
 - manage a university, campus life, investment, diversity, community relations
 - trustees, administration, faculty, students, parents, alumni, industry, government, etc.
- You should change with time, to match changes in society, and grow.