

Alexis Robertson:

Welcome to The Path And The Practice, a podcast dedicated to sharing the professional origin stories of the attorneys Foley & Lardner LLP, a full service law firm with over 1,000 lawyers in 24 offices across the US and abroad. I'm your host, Alexis Robertson, director of diversity and inclusion at Foley. In each episode of this podcast, you'll hear me interview a different Foley attorney through our one-on-one candid conversations. You'll learn about each guest's unique background, path to law school, and path to Foley & Lardner. Essentially, you'll hear the stories you won't find on their professional bio, stories of obstacles and triumphs, with some funny moments in between. And of course, you'll learn a bit about their practice. Now, let's get to the episode.

Alexis Robertson:

Hello, and welcome back. In this episode, I speak with Galen Yu. Galen is a senior counsel in Foley & Lardner's LA office where he focuses on patent prosecution. We have a fun and wide ranging discussion to covering a variety of topics including, what it was like for Galen growing up in China and moving to the US during middle school, how it is he decided to focus on IP law, and why that was actually a family decision. He covers quite a bit about cross-cultural communications, shares a really funny story about a stately oil painting that he now has in his office of himself. And he gives some good tips about gardening, especially to anybody looking to grow tomatoes.

Alexis Robertson:

I hope you enjoy our conversation. Hi, Galen. Welcome to the podcast.

Galen Yu:

Hey, thanks for having me.

Alexis Robertson:

I'm so happy to have you here. And as I'm making all of my guests do, before we jump in and talk about your path to law and your path to Foley, I want you to share that like 30 to 90 seconds, I guess I'll call it the elevator pitch or the tell-me-about-yourself response that you give when you're giving people a sense of who you are professionally at a networking event, or if you were on a professional panel, what is your response?

Galen Yu:

Sure. My name's Galen Yu. I went to UCLA for engineering school and USC for law school, so native of LA. I work at the firm Foley & Lardner. I joined the firm in 2013 as a first-year associate, and I summered in the firm before that. My practice is intellectual property, and in

particular, patent prosecution in the electronics art. What I do is I put together a patent application based on technical descriptions made by inventors and I get them a patent.

Alexis Robertson:

Thank you so much for that. And as I mentioned to you, I wanted to ask you about that because I'm curious about everything that came before it, everything that led up to you being a patent attorney at Foley & Lardner. So let's start with the basics, where did you grow up?

Galen Yu:

I was born in Beijing, China. I grew up there. I left when I was about 12 and came to the United States. My mother came before that, and my mom left fairly early when I was in a mantra school, probably when I was six or seven. And she was looking for a place where she felt like she could be more free in whatever she was doing, so she left in pursuit of a better life. So then I came when I was in middle school. I didn't speak a word of English.

Alexis Robertson:

Wow.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. But I was able to learn quickly. It's surprising how much you learn when you're with people who help you.

Alexis Robertson:

How old were you? So is that like 11, 12?

Galen Yu:

Yeah. About 11, 12, right at seventh grade. Yeah. I came to Arcadia, California, which is next to Pasadena. Arcadia has got famous for its racetrack. So I went to middle school and high school.

Alexis Robertson:

I want to stop you there and just ask a couple of questions because it's your life, it's your life experience, you can say it matter of factly.

Galen Yu:

Sure.

Alexis Robertson:

That's hard. So you moved here when you were 11, 12. I'm assuming that you moved in with your mom when, after what? Five years?

Galen Yu:
Yeah.

Alexis Robertson:
She'd been away. She was like, "Come to the US." Is that how it happened?

Galen Yu:
Yeah. So she wanted me to be with her and she just thought in general there was more opportunities as an academic in the United States. I'm actually a fourth generation engineer.

Alexis Robertson:
Wow.

Galen Yu:
My parents and my grandparents parents were all engineers, so they valued knowledge.

Alexis Robertson:
Wow. Did your mom come over here to work as an engineer?

Galen Yu:
I think she did, but when she came over to the United States, she was about 30 years old, almost 40, I think. So that was difficult for her because she didn't have any US degree. So she did work at computer companies where she fixed motherboards, but she's done everything. She's done the computer related stuff, she was a real estate agent, and she still is. She was selling houses, now she's selling vineyards. And she was accountant, and she learned database management, so she was doing software. So she was just learning stuff. She loves learning new stuff and getting certificates and going to school.

Alexis Robertson:
That's amazing. It's taking a lot in me not to go off on a very long aside about your mother and make this podcast about her.

Galen Yu:
I'm totally happy about it.

Alexis Robertson:

I know we were talking a little bit about the style of this podcast, a little bit about the Joe Rogan format. Because we're not going to have a two and a half hour podcasts, I can not do that, but that's amazing everything you shared about her. I am curious, coming to the US in middle school, if you can look back at that, what was that like? Was there culture shock? How was that transition for you?

Galen Yu:

I think it was fine when you're a kid. Arcadia had a lot of immigrants, a lot of Asian immigrants, Chinese immigrants as well from Taiwan, from Hong Kong, so it was kind of familiar, but at the same time not very familiar because everybody was trying to speak English. And that was what's good about it, because as a kid when you came to the States, if you were surrounded by a bunch of people who didn't want to speak English, they just want to stay in their, I guess within their language and cultural bounds, it would be difficult for you to accept the United States, especially accept it as a multicultural place. So it was good because I had friends who helped me learn, I had friends who corrected me and partly because they just want to show that their English was better, but that worked out.

Galen Yu:

I think we all improved. We all try to correct each other. And we had great teachers that helped us. And you'll be surprised to know what they teach you at cultural classes at these ESL classes in middle school.

Alexis Robertson:

Yes. Please go on. I have no idea.

Galen Yu:

They will teach you about Thanksgiving. I know you learn about Thanksgiving at the regular English classes and history classes as well. But to us, the teacher even brought Turkey and stuffing and raspberry sauce and stuff like that, just the very typical stuff, just really try to introduce you to the culture. I think they've done a good job, I think that was the right way to go about it because now if you're going to ask me which holiday do I celebrate if I were to choose one, Thanksgiving or Chinese New Year, I'd say Thanksgiving because I can make a good Turkey.

Alexis Robertson:

Oh my gosh. And then, what was class, the cultural class, in addition to the school you were going to, or were you going to a school that included that component?

Galen Yu:

So I think all ESL classes, English as second language classes, have a component where it is cultural and historical, where they teach you about American culture and practices. And then some schools like in Pasadena, I also went to South Pasadena for about three months, they have a separate history class for ESL students where they do more of the culture stuff.

Alexis Robertson:

I was not aware of this, but it makes a lot of sense. All right. So you get here in middle school, as you said, you're a fourth generation engineer. At what point was it clear that you were going to go to college for engineering? Take me through that decision process.

Galen Yu:

Right. So I think it was just the fact that I was forced to engineer, I just didn't know what to do. Like all kids, I didn't want to declare undecided major when I was going to college. I didn't really like engineering, to be honest with you.

Alexis Robertson:

Yes. I'm laughing.

Galen Yu:

My parents and my grandparents, they are electrical engineers, but they do a lot of geology. So they build equipment to access certain things like rocks and contents of certain mineral deposits or water within the rocks and the dirt in general. So we went to Yellowstone where there's a lot of rocks, where you can naturally see the different rock formations.

Alexis Robertson:

Strata layers.

Galen Yu:

Yeah, like the stratification and stuff like that. And they were just discussing, they were just arguing about what type of rocks they were and how it was formed, and I had no interest in it, so I put in my earbuds. I thought I didn't really want to do engineering, but then I didn't know what else to do. So we as a family decided, by we as a family, I mean them, decided it was probably better to be a patent attorney. We actually thought about doing that when I was in high school.

Alexis Robertson:

Really

Galen Yu:

Yeah. So they said that, "If you have an engineering degree and if you don't make any in law school, because your English sucks, maybe you can still be an engineer, that will be the safety net." So I was like, "Okay, fine." I didn't know what else to do. So it just worked out.

Alexis Robertson:

So for the listener, Galen can see my face right now. This is not a video podcast, but he can see me at my mouth, which was like, "Wait, what?" The entire time he said that. And I just have to spend on that a little bit. So you're in high school, and as you said, you said we, but the family decided when you were, what? Was that like 15, 16 that that made sense as a path?

Galen Yu:

My family really cared about my education, so they sent me to cram school for SATs. And as a part of that cram school, they give you free college counseling. So they would just ask you, "Okay, what kind of school do you want to go to?" And I didn't really know. I didn't really know about anything. So I said, "Okay, how about Columbia? How about Brown?" That's the only two school I knew, actually. And they're like, "Okay, so what majors do you want to take?" And I said, "Okay, maybe engineering." And the counselor was like, "Well, those schools are not famous for their engineering. How about you become patent attorney so you can go through those schools and still be an engineer."

Galen Yu:

That totally does not make sense in retrospect. I mean, the suggestion was determined based on false premises, but it just worked out. My mom's like, "Yeah, that's cool. You're an attorney. You can be an attorney. You don't have to compete with people who are really good at English if you knew the technology." So it kind of just worked out.

Alexis Robertson:

Insightful. What were your thoughts? Were you just like, "Okay, makes sense. I'll do that."

Galen Yu:

Well, at that time, I think what was happening was, there was an Asian American engineer Wan Ho Lee, who was working at a US company, I think it was a government related project or with the government, I'm not sure, but he was allegedly stealing trade secrets from this company and funneling to China, and he was being prosecuted. So at that time in our community, it just seemed like he was only taking work home because he was... I mean, an Asian American, we all know we all try to work real hard, try to take work home and try to finish the project on time.

So he put certain data in the USB drive and took it home with him just to work. That made more sense to us.

Galen Yu:

We don't know if that's really happened, but the community at large recognized that might be a very strong possibility. And he was being prosecuted. And I think the general feeling was it was unfair, so we thought, "How do we give ourselves a voice in the United States?" Because the Asian American community had not been a very vocal community in terms of, I guess political power. The whole Asian American culture is work hard and try to give your best back to the community, but not to make a big deal about anything. And I thought, maybe being an attorney really matters because then I could help at least myself.

Alexis Robertson:

You'll know the law.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. And I think it did, because when my mother was working as an accountant, she was terminated unfairly because they were saying the reason for termination was she didn't speak English well, but they've been working with her for two years, that had never come up in any of her reviews. So I felt like if I knew the law back then, I could have done something about it.

Alexis Robertson:

Have helped her?

Galen Yu:

Yeah. So all that together just made me feel like I could help, at least myself or the people around me. I don't have a huge dream of helping everybody, that's for Jesus, but at least I can contribute to it, so that solidified the decision.

Alexis Robertson:

Well, and I appreciate you sharing that and walking through it because we've talked before and you told me a lot about your background, which I was telling you is one of the reasons why I wanted to do this podcast because your story and others are just so incredibly interesting. And I'm just going to state this another way, what I think you just said, but you essentially said that the perspective as an immigrant or first-generation person to the US was like, "As a lawyer, at least I'll know the laws." So I don't know if you want to further expand on what you just said, but it really struck me when you told me that the first time.

Galen Yu:

At the most fundamental level, I can only say it is just the American dream. Where we came to this country, I didn't speak English, my parents didn't really have any degrees here, and were able to achieve a lot in this country, by going to school, by investing into our future. We've invested a lot, law school is pretty expensive.

Alexis Robertson:

Absolutely.

Galen Yu:

It's actually a huge risk in retrospect, that's why I'm not sure if I want my kids to be lawyers. It's a lot of investment in time and energy, and a lot of times it might not turn out well. So we took a chance and we worked hard and it turned out well, I was really lucky to be working with great clients in the firm. So a lot of it is just really about the American dream, where you can start from nothing, literally nothing in this country, and really pull yourself up. I mean, I guess we don't really think about it all that often, like why do we do it? But if you were to ask-

Alexis Robertson:

What it is. That's the motivator. I appreciate you elaborating on that. And I now want to ask a bit about law school joining fully. But before we do, I did want to ask, so I know you go by Jay Galen Yu, and I did want to ask. Galen is not your given name, and I was curious if you'd share what your given name is and share how it is that you go by Galen.

Galen Yu:

Oh, okay. So my Chinese name is Jianing, literally means serenity, which is a very girly name, even in Chinese.

Alexis Robertson:

Really? I like that a lot, but go on. I think it's great.

Galen Yu:

It's peace and serenity. My grandfather gave me that name and my grandfather had two names from a mother to pick. One is that, the other one is shepherd, because they lived in Inner Mongolia at the time, so there was a lot of shepherding going on. And my mom says shepherding is just dumb, so she picked the first one. And then when I came to the United States, my mother said, "Everybody who has a name starting with GA is really rich."

Alexis Robertson:

This is amazing. Your mom's fantastic.

Galen Yu:

That's literally what she said. She said, "Well, like Bill Gates, like Getty in the Getty Museum." I was like, "Mom, Getty starts with GE, not GA." She was like, "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter."

Alexis Robertson:

She found the pattern though. She found the pattern.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. So she opened up a dictionary and she found Galen, and she had no idea that was a famous Greek physician. So she was like, "Well, why don't you have Galen? That's a unique name. Nobody has that name. Why don't you just be Galen?" I'm just like, "Okay, fine." So yeah, that's where my two name come from. So when I became a US citizen, I just added Galen as part of my middle name.

Alexis Robertson:

That is fantastic. I'm so happy that I asked you that question. Thank you for telling me that. Well, fast forward a bit, you go to law school. I'm not sure, is there anything worth highlighting about that selection process or attending? And I've already forgotten, oh, University of Southern California.

Galen Yu:

That's right. Yeah. So I just wanted to stay in LA because it just felt easier. If I were just to spent a lot of money going to law school, it might just make sense to just stay around where it is familiar. I didn't really have a huge ambition, as you can tell. USC was between USC and UCLA, and I just wanted a change of scenery to go through the other side of town, so that's why I went to USC.

Alexis Robertson:

That's fantastic. Although you're totally underselling yourself with the, "I didn't have a huge ambition." As last I checked, USC is a pretty good school. All right. So then, how Foley & Lardner? Why Foley & Lardner? How did that come to be?

Galen Yu:

When I was applying for a summer job, for a summer associate position, I think the economy was getting better, we were coming out of that dip, but it was still not that great.

Alexis Robertson:

And as you mentioned, that was 20?

Galen Yu:

2012.

Alexis Robertson:

So you graduated 2012. So yeah, you're still affected by the great recession of '08, 09.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. So the class before us was just really difficult and more so the class before, but it was getting better. I had multiple interviews, but I just never encountered an interview where... I interviewed with my mentor, Ted Rittmaster and a bunch of associates in the LA office for the electronics group, and he was just really nice. He had long ear lobes. In Chinese culture, allegedly, that means this person is very lucky and very kind because Buddha had long ear lobes.

Alexis Robertson:

That's amazing.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. I hope you don't cut that part out.

Alexis Robertson:

I won't. I'll keep it in. We'll keep the-

Galen Yu:

Yeah. That's what my mom said, at least. He had a really kind face and he was really nice. He talked about the practice in a way where he made me feel like it was immensely interesting. It made me feel like I could be a part of something. Whereas the other interviews I went to, it was like, "Well, you got to make sure you write well, make sure you got to work hard. You got to make sure you stick it through." Yeah. I know that. I know that I have to write well, but you don't have to put it in a way where it was just kind of annoying. They were being big firm lawyers, in other words.

Alexis Robertson:

Yeah. Well, and likely he just had the kindness, but also the energy around it. It was that something extra.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. He has this way to go about it where he talks really slow, but really clearly. You are energized. You feel like, "Well, this is a wise man. This is somebody you can actually learn things from." And the associates are really nice. Now I think Justin Sobaje is still here. He was real nice. He was like, "Yeah, you got to impress Ted, and this is how you impress him." And I was like, "Wow, this guy has given me tips."

Alexis Robertson:

He's helping.

Galen Yu:

Yeah, this guy is really helping. And he remains a very, very helpful, I guess, personal connection at Foley just throughout the years.

Alexis Robertson:

That's fantastic. So you joined, that was your, presumably two-L summer of law school?

Galen Yu:

Yeah, that's right.

Alexis Robertson:

You graduate. And what I always find interesting about talking to the IP lawyers is, unlike a lot of the other lawyers, you know earlier on what your practice area is going to be, because for many summer associates and even... Well, we've usually decided at the time of your first year, but they're still in that like, "Oh, I could do corporate, I could do litigation." If anything, they just know they're not going to do IP. But for the IP lawyers, you come in knowing. I find that really interesting. I'm going to bounce around a little bit because I have a favorite story that I'd love you to share. When was it that you visited Foley's Milwaukee office for the first time? Just to answer that and then I want to set this up a little bit more.

Galen Yu:

Sure. I think it was when I was a summer program coordinator where I was having that summer event at Chicago. It was at summer's, so I just took a morning and took the train to Milwaukee. Because I heard it's real nice. I'd never been to Milwaukee at all, I'd never been to the mothership, so I just thought I'd take the morning to visit.

Alexis Robertson:

I asked you that because when we talked before, I don't know how we got here, but I was so glad we did. We talked about how at HQ, like many large organizations or law firms, who are older, and Foley was founded in 1842, there is a wall of firm's CEO's leadership, like you've seen a lot of places. And of course, with the older organizations that tends to be a wall of white men. So could you tell me your thought process when you saw some of those portraits at Foley?

Galen Yu:

Yeah. One thing that strikes me is that you know the firm has been there for over 170, some years, 180 some years. And when you go to the mother ship and you see all these paintings of the leadership in the past and you're just like, "Wow, they're present." That's literally what you see at DC-

Alexis Robertson:

Lately. It looks very lately.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. They have these long beards and they have these clothing and it just made me feel like, "Wow, I just thought that they will be all pictures, but there are paintings." It's like, "Oh, of course, 180 years ago, they will be paintings." And I just thought, "Would it be cool if I had my own painting and maybe one day, maybe one day, I can hang my own paintings along with the rest of the giants that are hanging on the wall." It doesn't mean I have to be the firm's leadership, it just means maybe I-

Alexis Robertson:

I just have to get it on the wall. And tell me, how did you get the painting? You have to share the how it was created.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. My wife is a very good artist or very good oil painter. She in fact lectures at a university, at American university in China, before coming to the states, she loves drawing and our houses filled with her painting. So she asked me what I wanted for my birthday two years ago. And I said, "Hey, I'd like an oil painting of myself in the most obnoxious manner." I just thought only famous people, only powerful people have oil paintings of themselves.

Alexis Robertson:

Great. Let's get one.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. She's like, "Well, that's a lot to ask." She agreed to do it. And he took about hundreds of hours, at least 100, not 200 hours to just get it exactly right. And she was telling me how the background is a solid brown, because if you look at the painting by famous painters, especially in the Getty Museum where we go a lot, all of them have a very simple clothing and a very unified, I guess the same color background, which is brown or black or something like that. So she did it like that and it was real good. So it's hanging in my office right now.

Alexis Robertson:

It's hanging in your office waiting, and I will share, when you originally told me the story, I thought it was the best thing ever. I recall, I'd like to say I demanded, but I think I requested, inside I was demanding that you send me a photo of it, which you did. So I can attest that it is a fantastic painting. I will not be surprised if there's outreach for more to see the painting, we'll just see what happens, but I think that's a fantastic story and we will work together to get it up on the wall one way or the other.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. One day if I die on my line of duty, if I just work too hard one day and I just drop dead, I hope my painting will make its way to the-

Alexis Robertson:

The painting will go on. The painting will go on. I don't want to agree to that fate for you, but I also think it's funny that you should say that. All right. Switching gears a bit to your practice, which you previewed for us at the beginning, tell me more about it. Tell me more about what you do as an IP lawyer at Foley & Lardner?

Galen Yu:

Sure. A lot of what I do, the bread and butter, is patent prosecution, writing the patent application based on the technical description, by the inventors, and then prosecuting it, meaning responding to the patent office, rejections and the objections, they say, "Well, you can't get a patent because you're missing a word here," where you distinguish yourself, I guess, this piece of background technology that had been existed for the past five years. And we have this back and forth with a patent office. I like that a lot, that gives me a lot of time with the client that allows me to communicate with the vendors in a way where I understand technology.

Galen Yu:

Patent attorneys are the engineers who cannot invent, but are just taking other people's work product and repackage it in a way to get them a patent.

Alexis Robertson:

Can I pause you for one second? You just said, patent attorneys are the engineers who cannot invent, so we help others get their inventions.

Galen Yu:

I'm sure my colleagues would disagree with me, but I think the best thing about it is that you don't have to yourself invent the cutting edge technology, your clients are teaching that to you. And you learn something new, you learn something new every day, every day you're seeing, "Okay. The world is going to move forward. I know about it five years before everybody else does."

Alexis Robertson:

That's a very exciting way to convey that, if someone may have conveyed that to me earlier, no, I probably still would have just become a general litigator, so never mind, but I really appreciate the way you just defined that. That was great.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. I have engineering friends and they're like, "Oh look, this new thing had come out, blah, blah." I can't say anything because obviously it's privileged, but in my mind, I'm like-

Alexis Robertson:

I knew about that.

Galen Yu:

I knew about that. And then they always say, "Well, Galen, you know you're a lawyer now. You're not an engineer, you don't understand this stuff." I'm like, "I knew this stuff way more than you."

Alexis Robertson:

Right. You have some insights and you know what's coming out now and you have an idea of what might happen in five years, it sounds like.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. Five years, 10 years, sometimes the technology we invent stuff, but we just can't implement it commercial fashion, or something has not worked out because to apply for an

invention, you only need conception and reduction to practice in a way where it's just at an experimental level may be sufficient, but it doesn't mean you have to have exact working prototype and that's commercially feasible for everybody.

Alexis Robertson:

That's really helpful insight. I often perpetuate in a friendly manner, some of the, I don't know, disputes we may have as lawyers depending on what practice area we have. So you have litigators look at corporate lawyers and think, "I don't get what you do, but I'll probably be litigating it 10 years from now." And then I think in a lot of ways, and maybe I'm just speaking for myself, I shall speak for myself and not the industry, we all look at the IP lawyers and we're like, "I don't understand that at all." But I think the way you just described it was really user friendly as well as making it clear that it doesn't have to be at the working phase to get the patent, which further supports why you really would have an idea of what's to come.

Galen Yu:

That's right.

Alexis Robertson:

I really, really appreciate that. And I know you also mentioned, we've talked before how being Chinese and how that affects your practice, like your client relationships, the way in which you're able to appeal to those who have a similar background. So if you could just share some about that, I would appreciate it.

Galen Yu:

Sure. So at the beginning of my practice, I think there was a common belief that Chinese clients, no matter how big, just simply did not want to spend the big firm legal costs. I think that to some extent is true, is true today as well. But what I figured out is a lot of these companies are indie Chinese-American because they are run by people who immigrated from China, just like me that have taken roots in the United States, that are running companies, at least Chinese-American companies if not entirely American company, is hiring American, and they want to do business American way.

Galen Yu:

They understand that in your words, you do business in America, you've got to have a lawyer that you trust. You got to have a law firm that you trust, you've got to have somebody to handle your legal stuff, so you can manage your liability. It's a slightly different way of doing business in China, I think there it's getting better in China, of course, but definitely more so in the United States. So, I work with a lot of companies like that, where I have people that are approximately

my age that are Chinese-Americans basically, their kids are all English speaking, their kids speak very little Mandarin and they're like, "Wait, how do I make my business better?"

Galen Yu:

So those are the clients I work with. We actually do a really good job at cross-selling with these clients because we can handle everything. They don't need to go to a million lawyers for all different things. We're a one-stop service firm, and I work with just so many groups, labor and employment, business, litigation. And we just get so much done for these clients. And once they know us, it's really more likely that they like us more because we are really, really efficient. Our firm model is being the stewardess of their companies, and that resonates with Chinese culture, definitely. You want to work with counselors that are watching out for you.

Galen Yu:

A lot of other, I guess, services do not have the same types of duty as we do. And it takes a while to explain to them that, "Look, you don't have to worry." Because there's some cases in China where the lawyers are holding companies hostages because they knew about the confidential information of those companies. Not a lot of them, but it happens. So it's something that takes a while off explaining and eventually they get it because you have to consistently show that duty over time so that people get familiar with you.

Alexis Robertson:

Feel that trust.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. And you know what, it's a really good, it's been really rewarding, it's more so when I see the clients themselves turning more American, their beliefs change, their beliefs do change over time.

Alexis Robertson:

Tell me about that. What does that mean? I imagine what that means, but if you could just... And like I said, I don't need any specific clients, but just that general idea of turning more American, what does that mean?

Galen Yu:

If you work with a Chinese affiliate or if you have a Chinese parent company, you probably will be influenced by the way that they do things, or you have to at least explain your decisions in the United States. Trust is always an important issue because you want the parent companies to trust you, to trust what you're doing is best for the company, for everybody, including the one

in the United States and the one in China. And you have to justify your actions, especially when they first come over to the United States. They know that they want to be American, they just don't know how.

Galen Yu:

So they have these preconceptions and then slowly you tell them, "Okay, this is a better way to do things." And in the beginning they'll say, "No, no, no, I don't want to do that. I understand the risk, I understand that maybe what I'm doing is not optimal, but I won't do that because it's difficult to explain to my parent company why that is." And then little by little they realize, "Okay. There is an advantage that we have not seen before. Maybe we can try this way." And then when they try it, they like it. And sometimes they incorporate both the Chinese way of doing business with American way of doing business. So they get the best of both worlds.

Galen Yu:

And that's what I've been advocating is you don't have to choose one way or the other, many aspects of the American culture, it actually resonates with Chinese culture as well. I see a lot of similarity in the sense that both culture value hard work and you will go far in America and in China if you have hard work. So a lot of that just resonates with them.

Alexis Robertson:

Absolutely. And this is one of my favorite things that you're talking about because as you know, I'm director of diversity and inclusion at the firm. And so I think these discussions are so important to have and to acknowledge and those similarities. And I will say, in some ways, it adds to both the complexity of what you're saying, but also the straightforward nature, that hard work is hard work, good ideas are good ideas, and that after you build a relationship as a trusted business advisor, you can help get a client there. Although it does make me, and kind of a different question and I want to see what you have in terms of your thoughts on this, but in my role, it comes up at Foley and in other roles I've had at firms, where I will also make people aware of those cross cultural differences.

Alexis Robertson:

So even leading workshops or trainings on cross cultural differences, which are frequently trying to make Americans aware of just how American we are. Because often, we forget we even wear that American lens and it will show up in our business interactions, particularly when we are able to work with someone from another country. So I'm just wondering if you've seen, and not like specifically at Foley, but just in general, a cross cultural or culture clash that can occur. And if you have any thoughts on how one can either raise their awareness, is it about...

Alexis Robertson:

Let's give an example, I want to reach out to a Chinese company, hypothetical, nothing specific, nothing related to what we do at work day to day. Is it I should go learn a bit about culture there, I should find someone who's Chinese? How do I navigate that?

Galen Yu:

Sure. I think definitely knowing the culture is very important. I know our China practice here at Foley has been pretty good at that. We've had a lot of good attorneys, Chinese or otherwise that are really familiar with Chinese culture. We have people who speak Chinese, even though they're not born in Chinese. And that's really impressive. In terms of cultures, I haven't seen a clash of them, but I do see certain times, I feel like people, just in general, maybe not even in Foley, but just in general, could do better in terms of understanding what each other means.

Galen Yu:

Because as an example in Chinese culture, a lot of things are unsaid, if they say, "I'll get back to you," it pretty much means a no. They will just not tell you no. They won't tell you, "Okay, we're sorry, we're not doing it." They will just say, "Okay, I'll get back to you." But then they don't get back to you for a month. And it's like, it happens all the time.

Alexis Robertson:

But if you knew the culture, you would know what that meant.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. That's a minor point. I think most Chinese companies I work with, they wouldn't care if you didn't know their culture if you do a good job, they are pre-international. But in terms of, the culture integration, one thing that I do, and a lot of people, including our clients tell me, I need to be an ambassador of the Chinese culture to America. I'm like, "No, of course I don't need to be an ambassador, but I can spread it." I don't have to make a concerted effort to say, "Okay, I'm spreading Chinese culture. " I don't think that's necessary because I think a lot of Americans already know a lot about Chinese culture. But I think there is a way of about food that gets people. I think if you want to spread the culture, the food is the key.

Alexis Robertson:

Interesting. I didn't know we would get here, but go on.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. I'm sorry.

Alexis Robertson:
No, please.

Galen Yu:
I love making turkey, I love making steak, I love making a pot rolls or pasta, fresh pasta, I've been getting to that. But a lot of times our colleagues, they'd say, "Well, I want to go to your house, I want you to just make the beef noodle. I want you to make the siu pork belly." And that's what they like, because they don't have this authentic Chinese cooking, home cooking. They can go at restaurants, but it's not authentic. And it's also not free, they come over, I cannot charge them for it. They're looking for our free meal.

Galen Yu:
So, I was like, "Well, when do I get to make you pasta? When do I get to makes you lofts or fresh pasta? It's real good." "No, no, no. I want you to make the fish, the stir fry fish filets that you make. I want you to make hot pot. I want you to make me like a Sichuan spicy hot pot." I'm like, "Okay, fine. So we can go there." So in a way, I guess I am the ambassador. One thing that was crazy to my wife who just immigrated to the United States is that every fully attorney knows how to use chopsticks real well.

Alexis Robertson:
Interesting. Go on. I don't actually, and now I feel pressure, but go ahead.

Galen Yu:
You use it much better than a lot of other people. She thought that American people didn't know how to use chopsticks because it's a very difficult thing. Because in China they're like, "Okay, everything that we have, that's unique is very difficult to use for all the other." But that's not true, all our colleagues use it really, really well, probably better than me and is because they are open to that culture. So that's why when I bring them to see our Chinese clients and this is a story I want to tell, I think he might not appreciate it, but I'm going to say it anyway.

Alexis Robertson:
Please don't make anything that... But share it, but leave out what you need to leave out then.

Galen Yu:
Okay. I will leave his name on sand because I know-

Alexis Robertson:
Please do.

Galen Yu:

We went to China for a pitch to a certain large computer company. And then I have really good relationship with the high level management and we're really good friends, and we went to dinner. At dinner, there are all, I guess, men of the middle age and above, so at dinner, they wanted to know whether we would like to eat kidney skewers. And I look at my colleague who was in the cleanup, Chinese and I'm like, "I'm not sure how he's going to respond." And he was like, "Yeah, sure. Let's do it." And we had it and it was really good. He liked it.

Galen Yu:

And I said, "You know, that's really something that has health benefits to middle-aged man, not too much for young man." And it was his kidney, his intestine. He was like, "Yeah, I'm open to try new things." But I couldn't believe he did. I couldn't believe he said, "Yeah, I'm down to try some kidney." But he goes on to say, because clearly, the potential clients wants to eat it, they just wanted to make sure if he was okay with it. So he made them comfortable. He wasn't like, "Okay, I'm the guy who is not going to..." "

Alexis Robertson:

That's such a good point though. That's such a good point, being open and making them comfortable.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. Because I think it somewhat off-putting if they say, "Okay, do you want to have these entrails? And then your response is, "No, no, I don't eat that. What is that? That's so gross." Which does happen from time to time, but with Foley attorneys, I've seen people, they really try to get out of their comfort zone and try new things.

Alexis Robertson:

Obviously, that's heartwarming for me as the director of diversity and inclusion. So I like hearing that story. And I want to be mindful of our time, but I had a couple other things I wanted to ask you.

Galen Yu:

Sure.

Alexis Robertson:

Before I ask you the final question, first, is there anything else you wanted to share that we haven't gotten to? I know last time we talked, you told me you were gardening and you were

growing tomatoes and you've learned how to make them so they didn't burst. So I found that super interesting, and as you can see, and the listeners can hear, I'm a bit of a random person, but if there's anything else to share about Galen, you, that we haven't touched on, please take a few minutes to share.

Galen Yu:

Sure. As the pandemic ranges on and there's no imminent plan to return to the office, I have taken up gardening, which is the last thing I thought I was going to do. I hire somebody to do my garden, but now I felt like there was just nothing else to do.

Alexis Robertson:

And I want to pause you for one second to share for those who'll listen to this in the future, it is now July 2020. So we are, I guess, four-ish months into coronavirus quarantine and all that, but go on. So you've started doing your own gardening.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. My aunt did my gardening before actually. She grew a lot of tomatoes, different types, cherry, heirloom, and the large ones. I like biology, so I'd taken the best tasting tomatoes and I've kept them and then I've replanted them. And then when they sprouted out, I separated them out, I relocated them. So now I have about 100 some tomatoes.

Alexis Robertson:

Wow.

Galen Yu:

Yeah. It's a lot. My neighbor who is also really into gardening, she always gives me tomatoes. She gives me like five a day. And then yesterday, she in fact came to my backyard for the first time. She's like, "Oh, you have 100 tomatoes." And she thought I did a better job than she did. I don't think that's true, but I do have a lot and they're all going to be very plumped very soon.

Alexis Robertson:

Wow. Okay. Before I ask the final question, you told me when we last spoke that, and I can't garden anything, everything I plant dies, but I just thought that was a really interesting fact to not cause tomatoes to explode, it was all about when you watered them.

Galen Yu:

That's right. Because sometimes when you don't water a tomato for a while, and then you water a lot of water and then the plant sucks up so much water, that the tomato actually bursts from taking in too much water because it thinks it's not going to get water for a long time.

Alexis Robertson:

Thank you for sharing that. That's something that those listening do not know, we've touched on, it's really important information. But in wrapping things up, the last thing I wanted to ask you was general advice you have. My hope is that people beyond attorneys at Foley & Lardner listen to this, maybe it'll be law students or somebody in college, and maybe they're an immigrant, maybe they're not, but advice for someone. What would your advice have been to your 16-year-old self when considering being a patent attorney? Any tips.

Galen Yu:

I just think that life, there's going to be a lot of obstacles and difficulties, but it just depends on how you face them. If you want to achieve something, there's going to be a lot of difficulties, every day you're just going to move the ball forward a little bit. And even though sometimes it feels like it's going really, really bad, I think as long as you just move the ball forward a little bit every day, you'll be okay.

Alexis Robertson:

That's really great advice. Well, with that, I just want to ask you, if people wanted to get in touch with you, where's the best place to find you? I'm guessing Foley & Lardner's website?

Galen Yu:

Yeah. Foley website, and it has my email, it has my phone number. Feel free to drop me an email or call me or message me on Skype.

Alexis Robertson:

Perfect. Thank you so much, Galen. It was a pleasure having you on the podcast today.

Galen Yu:

Pleasure's all mine.

Alexis Robertson:

Thank you for listening to the Path & The Practice. I hope you enjoyed the conversation and join us again next time. And if you did enjoy it, please share it. Subscribe and leave us a review, because your feedback on the podcast is important to us. Also, please know that this podcast

may be considered attorney advertising and is made available by Foley & Lardner LLP for informational purposes only. This podcast does not create an attorney-client relationship.

Alexis Robertson:

Any opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of Foley & Lardner LLP, its partners or its clients. Additionally, this podcast is not meant to convey the firm's legal position on behalf of any client, nor is it intended to convey specific legal advice.