

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN
LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

APALI **25** YEARS OF
LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP LESSONS

Edited by
Michael Chang, Ph.D.
Dennis Chiu, Esq.

Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute is a
California 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit public
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INTRODUCTION

APALI has trained leaders for a quarter century. One of our mottos is, “Be mindful of a teachable moment.” So to commemorate APALI’s 25th anniversary, we reached out to active alumni serving in leadership positions to share “a leadership lesson that I learned that I want to pass on.” This book is a compilation of their responses, and we could not be prouder of our leadership program graduates. Their wisdom shines on each page.

We wish to thank all of our book contributors, alumni, past and current instructors, every guest speaker who has graced our class panels, and our past and current staff. We are especially grateful to all of our funders, sponsors, and supporters—for without their participation and support, APALI would not be possible.

Hon. Michael Chang, Ph.D.

Founder Executive Director

Hon. Dennis Chiu, Esq.

Co-Executive Director



“Successful leadership is not based on titles, compensation, or accolades. The true measure of success as a leader is impact. Impactful leadership sometimes involves stepping back and letting others shine, sharing or forgoing the credit altogether, or simply working behind the scenes, so that few will ever know your contributions. Seek opportunities that allow you to maximize impact throughout your career journey, which may require taking roles that push you to your physical, mental, and emotional heights. These experiences—marked with victories and defeats, coupled with empathy and a commitment to probing the possible—will enable you to be leaders of consequence.”

Charisse Ma Lebron
 Chief Operating Officer and Chief of Staff
 Fahr LLC and Office of Kat Taylor
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2014



“From wise AAPI women I have learned: When elected you are given the title ‘Honorable.’ ‘Honorable’ is not a title, but a way of being. Be mentored and then turn around and be a mentor. Remember whose shoulders you stand on. Remember where you come from. Finally, *Gaman* (persevere), stand tall, walk with grace and humility and understand gratitude and compassion.”

Hon. Naomi Nakano-Matsumoto
 President, Board of Trustees
 Fremont Union High School District
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2019



“Being a leader is less about skill set and more about mindset. Successfully leading an organization is less about what education and training you’ve received, and more about how you process information and whose advice you take when making strategic decisions. There is a difference between managers—who typically only provide technical assistance and supervision—and leaders, who take a more active role in growing the whole person, rather than just a specific skill set.”

Vaughn Villaverde
 Director of Advocacy
 Asian Americans for Community Involvement
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2022



“Leadership comes to those who undeniably work hard, but sometimes it is sprinkled with a little bit of luck. Sometimes opportunities present themselves because you happen to be at the right place at the right time. So when you find yourself lucky enough to be in front of a great opportunity, make sure that you are ready with the skills, knowledge, and experience to run through those doors before they shut. It might be a while before the next door opens.”

Hanh Mo
 Community & Government Relations Manager
 Kaiser Permanente
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2011



“Through APALI, I’ve learnt that leadership is situational, yet strategic; visionary, yet tactical in application. Good leadership requires many skills, knowledge, insights, tools, social capital, coalition building, and agency. More importantly, it requires individuals to know themselves, be grounded in their mission, and acknowledge areas of growth and self-reflection. Leadership is not going it alone. It is inspiring and empowering others to take action and lifting up a greater social consciousness to build coalition and co-partners for change. APALI will provide the foundation, knowledge and training. It’s up to you to take the next step.”

Don Long
 Social Services Program Manager III
 Santa Clara County Social Services Agency
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2022



“We are all stewards of the present. At any given moment, leadership is both a practice and a prompt. It’s an opportunity to strengthen, and sometimes transform, teams, institutions, and communities while stretching one’s own capacity to grow in awareness, empathy, and humility. Be positive. Stay focused. Keep promises to yourself and others.”

Julius Paras

*Partner & Parent
The Parenting Asian America Project
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2010*



“Leadership is not about having all of the answers or knowing exactly what to do, rather, it’s about having a growth mindset. It’s a constant journey of listening, learning, and improving. It involves bringing people in and bringing out the best in others so that they can lead. Then together, we imagine a better future and strive to create what does not yet exist.”

Anne Im

*Director, Community Investment
Silicon Valley Community Foundation
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2007*



“Leadership is an empathetic service to your fellow human. Recognize the humanity and the struggle of all people—not just those who agree with you or whose experiences you share. Diversity representation doesn’t necessitate values alignment. It’s critical that in times of great strain, we listen to ALL parties for it is only with compassion that we can create bridges between all those inside and outside of our community. A leader is of and from the people. Leadership is holding up a mirror to yourself and others in power. Be unafraid to take risks even if it may jeopardize your standing. Keep yourself humble and agile to the changing needs of this world and look at the bigger picture. These are the hallmarks of a great leader. Be an ever-present voice for hope and collaboratively bring forward a vision for a better future.”

Neesha Atul Tambe

*Startup Battlefield Editor and Head of
Community at TechCrunch
Commissioner, Parks and Recreation
Commission, City of Cupertino
APALI Youth Leadership Academy 2010,
Civic Leadership Program 2011*



“Be authentic in the face of increasing pressure to conform.”

Hon. Evan Low
 California State Assembly Member
 APALI Youth Leadership Academy 2002
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2007



“Be an emotionally adept leader who cultivates a culture of trust and connection where people feel valued. Invest in your self-awareness and embrace empathy, vulnerability, and forgiveness as leadership strengths, and the health of your organization will skyrocket.”

Dr. Rene Alvarez
 Dean of Academic Success and Student Equity
 San Jose City College
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2022



“A successful leader is a good listener, collaborative, promotes strategic thinking and believes in inclusion of all stakeholders. A leader needs the willingness to accept diverse thinking and ideas as well as an open mind to respect all individuals with different cultural backgrounds.”

Hon. Satheesh Madhathil
 President, Board of Trustees
 Cupertino Union School District
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2019



“Failure is never fatal. Success is never final. Courage is always crucial. I have learned that no matter what challenges you face, you will always need courage and hard work to get you to where you need to go.”

Nicole Sato, Esq.
 Deputy District Attorney
 San Mateo County District Attorney's Office
 APALI Youth Leadership Academy 1999



“Leadership requires deep, intentional, and ongoing introspection, and taking the time to assess (and reassess) your purpose and core values and make professional and personal decisions that are aligned. When you are guided by this foundational core, it allows you to show up, clearly and boldly in leadership spaces, taking stances and advocating with conviction. It is also important to build out a core network of trusted friends with mutual support in the work. Engage people who will be honest with you, even when it's hard, but who will also always have your back, and in return, you would do the same. This is how leadership solidarity advances, trusted relationship by relationship.”

Camille Llanes-Fontanilla
 Vice President, Silicon Valley Programs
 Sobrato Philanthropies
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2011



“Always be open to new ideas. Try not to be a follower just because the majority is advocating a certain way. Always have the courage to stick to your convictions. Too many times I have seen others jump on the bandwagon. Be yourself. But most of all, be true to yourself. Let the foundation of your moral values and ethics drive your decisions to do the right thing.”

Hon. Carmen Montano

*Vice Mayor
City of Milpitas
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2009*



“People like the idea of empowering each other, which is also my belief, but following through on this takes awareness and dedication. There was a lot I needed to learn about living in America in a short amount of time, and many people have supported me. I want to do the same for others. I’ve had to check in with myself daily and live my values through my community-building work. I am many things, not only a lesbian and Chinese immigrant. Sticking to my core values without getting pulled into different directions means I need to be more courageous and stand up for what I believe in. I encourage you to do the same.”

Michelle Zhang

*Founder
Society of Heart’s Delight
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2022*



“Never shy away from being authentic and defending your true self. It is only a strength to lead with heart. Be comfortable with who you are, where you are from and how you are becoming.”

Dr. Elvin T. Ramos

*Dean of Social Sciences and Humanities
De Anza College
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2022*



“Know and continue to know who you are. This means knowing your history and where you come from, being authentic in what you want for your life, and unapologetically going after what is right for you. You will not be an imposter. Your happiness will be contagious. You will uplift and inspire people around you to reach their own greatness.”

Anthony Lê

*Leadership Coach and Consultant
PVTL Moments
APALI Youth Leadership Academy 2009
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2010*



“Acknowledge who you are, rather than ignoring or undermining your intersectionalities. It’s more expansive to Accept who you are, rather than trying to be someone else or who others want you to be. It’s more powerful to Adapt as you are, rather than trying to resist and holding on to what’s not real. Only you can prevent stagnation in your career and personal life. Only you know how worthy you are of joy and liberation. Friends, tap into gratitude and know the APALI family is now part of your greater, bolder ecosystem. Seek out mentors, ask for help, and walk your path authentically, resourced, and supported.”

Meredith Curry

*Executive Director
Northern California College Promise Coalition
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2019*



“Lead with LOVE and love what you do. With love comes empathy, passion, compassion, respect, and the grace to allow vulnerability and forgiveness of yourself and others.”

Diane Nguyen

*Former Vice President
Silicon Valley Community Foundation
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2018*



“Understand the cultural differences in our community. Time and time again, people that don’t experience obstacles and barriers tend not to address those most oppressed and disadvantaged. Leadership is not determined by the programs you attend or the groups you roll in. It’s determined by the work you have done to help ALL PEOPLE advance in a community, district or space in which you want to lead.”

Hon. Shay Franco-Clausen

*Former Vice Chair
Santa Clara County Open Space Authority
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2016*



“We all have the power to drive positive change in any position that we hold. We don’t need to wait until we reach some fabled top position in order to lead. With clarity about who we are and the community we serve, we can move the needle today regardless of what station we occupy.”

HaNhi Tran, Esq.
Deputy District Attorney
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2022



“Build relationships across sectors. So many of the issues that our communities face require engagement across public, private, and non-profit sectors. To build coalitions that drive change, we need to work towards trust, affinity, and open lines of communication in relationships. As we seek to better understand and communicate with one another, we will build a stronger foundation to move forward together.”

Daniel Cedeño
Chief of Staff to Regional Vice President
Pacific Gas & Electric Company
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2019



“Always open doors and lift up others as you climb. We must always create opportunities for one another.”

Dr. Mike Hoa Nguyen
Vice President, Silicon Valley Programs
Sobrato Philanthropies
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2011



“Leadership requires studying our history in the U.S. Learn that our ancestors made great contributions to this country, even though they were treated unfairly during the Chinese Exclusion Act and placed into Internment Camps during World War II. History will inform your community activism when fighting for API representation.”

Hon. Andy Li
Trustee, Governing Board
Contra Costa Community College District
President, Civic Leadership USA
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2015



“Share what you’ve learned. The success of our community is built on the shoulders of generations upon generations of advocates. Remember to find time to mentor the next generation.”

Zekun Li
Director of Campaign Operations
CliffordMoss
APALI Youth Leadership Academy 2009,
Internship Program 2011, Civic Leadership
Program 2014



“Great leaders develop other leaders.”

Eric J. Chang, Esq.
Deputy Attorney General
California Department of Justice
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2021



“**P**roblems make leaders, not titles. We are presented with opportunities to lead every day, in challenges to overcome and problems to solve. Sometimes our role is to listen, to study, to follow, to share. A good leader is okay with stepping back or stepping up, and always being in step with what’s right, even if it is the harder path to take.”

Betty K. Duong, Esq.

Chief of Staff

Office of Santa Clara County Supervisor

Cindy Chavez

APALI Youth Leadership Academy 2001, APALI

Internship Program 2002-2004, APALI Civic

Leadership Program 2012



“**I** credit colleagues and mentors who invested themselves in my leadership development and professional growth for all I have and will achieve. In turn, it is my responsibility to invest myself in the success of leaders of color so that we can all celebrate our collective wins together.”

Andrew Knaack

Associate Director, Individual Giving

Ronald McDonald House Charities Bay Area

APALI Civic Leadership Program 2015



“I have learned that a good plan with well-meaning intentions often requires a great deal of patience to realize. I have found that the road to hell is not truly paved with good intentions. It is paved with incomplete work. Those good intentions have a tendency to emerge and prevail eventually, if we have patience and do the work. Practically, it’s useful to know that you have partners everywhere, if even and maybe especially just to talk. A good conversation, not just with allies but often with people on the other side of an issue, often mends and paves the way for understanding another perspective and is often the key to how being patient leads to mutual success.”

Hon. Darcy Paul
 Mayor
 City of Cupertino
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2014



“Don’t be afraid to ask for the help and mentorship necessary to reach your goals. Be sure to listen to your instincts and pay it forward to the next generation of leaders.”

Hon. Ellen Kamei
 Former Mayor & Current City Councilmember
 City of Mountain View
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2012



“Share your purpose with the people you work with so that they understand you. You can achieve something only when your colleagues support your ideas.”

Hon. Yan Zhao
 Former Mayor & Current City Councilmember
 City of Saratoga
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2014



“No one can tell your story better than you. Your lived experience is valuable. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. Your story and your experiences are the soul of your leadership. Embrace them and let your truths lead.”

Hon. Wendy Ho
 Trustee, Governing Board
 San Jose-Evergreen Community College
 District
 Chief of Staff, Office of Santa Clara County
 Supervisor Otto Lee
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2010



“Check your ego and understand your core values. The position isn’t about you. It’s about the people you serve and what their needs are. Understanding your core values and who you serve will help guide you to make decisions that will benefit them without compromising your integrity and beliefs. Be a servant leader who fosters empathy, healing, and stewardship to inspire, restore, and advance.”

Hon. Tuyen Fiack
 Trustee, Governing Board
 Gilroy Unified School District
 APALI Civic Leadership Program 2018



“Lead by listening. Try to seek out people to hear their perspectives, so you’re not limited by hearing one view or nothing at all.”

Hon. Laura Martinez
Former Mayor
City of East Palo Alto
Vice Chair of the Board for Canopy
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2011



“Leadership requires understanding that symbolism is substance, but substance isn’t always symbolism. A substantive list of issue positions isn’t the best way to show a leader’s heart. A symbolic, personal story of how a leader overcame a challenge demonstrates a leader’s values intimately, authentically, and memorably.”

Hon. Dennis Chiu
Trustee, Governing Board
Co-Executive Director
Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute
Former Director, El Camino Healthcare District
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2012



“Always remember that we represent the AAPI community and that we are stronger when we all work together.”

Hon. Jerry Liu
Trustee, Governing Board
Cupertino Union School District
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2016



“Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Asking questions has helped me to learn more about the issues or uncover things that have helped me be a better leader.”

Hon. Gilbert Wong
Trustee, Governing Board
Foothill-De Anza Community College Trustee
Former Mayor of Cupertino
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2007



“Be an ally. I learned about the significance of allies when I came out as a lesbian in high school. The support of people around me changed my life forever. I set out to be a strong ally too, by listening to other people share their stories. Later, I lived in China for over six years. Living abroad as an outsider and connecting meaningfully despite cultural differences made me a better ally and a better leader. Get out there to meet every kind of person, then listen with your whole heart and share a meal. On the other side of discomfort is a better world.”

Pat Tietgens
Cofounder
Ren Connection and
Society of Heart’s Delight
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2022



“Leaders look for something that needs to be changed and try to solve problems by working together with others. Leaders must never view a problem as a distraction, but rather as an opportunity for continuous improvement. Be the leader that shows maturity, acts courageously, and requires accountability. These will help you become a master problem solver.”

Hon. Rosa Kim
Trustee, Governing Board
Fremont Union High School District
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2019



“Leadership is not only about deepening your existing circle in which you and those like you might find common purpose. Rather, leadership is about widening that circle, where we build solidarity across divisions that were created by the very systems we seek to change.”

Son Chau

Senior Philanthropic Advisor
East Bay Community Foundation
APALI Youth Leadership Academy 2007,
Internship Program 2009, Civic Leadership
Program 2014



“Protect your time so you can take on important tasks with long-term impact.”

Wei-ting Chen, Ph.D.

Associate Director of Community Partnerships
Stanford Medicine Office of Community
Engagement
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2022



“Perceived setbacks are always opportunities to create new possibilities with others. Setbacks, whether they come in the form of failure, loss of resources, stagnancy, or some other form of disappointment, can give leaders of teams the moment needed to refocus efforts on what matters most, reviving the team’s “why.” Improvement Science points to problems being an obvious step in the continuous improvement cycle: Plan-Do-Check-Act. The way a leader frames a problem orients their team’s visualization of likely outcomes. Frame positively!”

Vivian Rhone-Lay, Ph.D.

Founding Principal
MacDonald High School
Santa Clara Unified School District
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2016



“Don’t be afraid to ask for help and reach out to find the right mentor/femtor for you. They will save you so much time and get you on the right track towards achieving your goals.”

Mason Fong

NorCal Deputy Director of External Affairs
Office of Governor Newsom
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2016



“Be intentional about your leadership goals and don’t be afraid to say them aloud to yourself and others. Having clear goals can provide structure and purpose for the steps that lead you to your destination. But it’s in sharing your aspirations, with your friends, peers, colleagues, and mentors that you get a push in the right direction, where doors can open, or where you find the inspiration to keep moving forward and not give up.”

Theresa Chinte

Chief of Staff to the CEO
Valley Water
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2019



“I learned that everyone should have a civic roadmap in parallel to their career roadmap in whatever area they choose to pursue. Civic engagement is not something one takes on only when one has the spare time or when one retires. It is an essential part of our being in this democratic society. At APALI, I was able to meet civic leaders of all personality types. Some charismatic speakers are in fact introverts, like me, in private, but their passion for public service drives them to become civic leaders. I learned that there are different leadership styles, from detail-oriented to big picture thinkers. For a successful project, we need leaders with diverse styles and backgrounds to appreciate our differences and collaborate together. By accident, I joined the inspirational APALI class in 2017, but it will forever have a special place in my heart.”

Liang Chao

Vice Mayor of Cupertino
APALI Civic Leadership Program 2017



About APALI

Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute (APALI) is a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit public benefit corporation. Its roots began with Founder Executive Director Dr. Michael Chang. In 1995, Cupertino had no AAPI city council members despite a growing AAPI population. Like most Silicon Valley communities, Cupertino's registered electorate was overwhelmingly White. Immigrant communities, such as those from Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong, focused on school, family, and work, not voting. Partnering with political science professor Paul Fong, Dr. Chang set out to mobilize Cupertino's Chinese American residents to shatter the bamboo ceiling.

Paul Fong and Dr. Chang understood that if the AAPI population registered in large numbers, a pathway for AAPI elected officials would be protected forever. With Fong as campaign manager, Dr. Chang ran for city council with a massive voter registration drive, fundraising campaign, and a large voter mobilization volunteer team. Dr. Chang was elected to city council, surprising the establishment by receiving the highest vote, more than the then sitting Mayor running for re-election, and establishing that the AAPI community could elect well-funded candidates from their own community. After Dr. Chang served two terms as Mayor of Cupertino, the legacy of his 1995 campaign continued.

In 1997, two years after Dr. Chang's Cupertino election, APALI was born to ensure that the civic leadership ladder would continue to exist for future generations. At APALI, Dr. Chang grounded leadership training in Asian American community history and political science. He knew that unless new leaders understood their community's struggle, they would not fulfill their moral responsibility to those who went before and those who came after. Offering civic leadership programs that taught the history of minority struggles and trained community leaders in civic engagement, APALI created a revolution that thrived and graduated 1,757 socially-conscious and committed leaders, including 518 Civic Leadership Program alumni, 129 College Internship Program alumni, and 882 Youth Leadership Academy alumni.

As APALI celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2022, it has an active civic network of over five hundred leaders, composed of 108 public official fellows and over 400 civically engaged alumni. The APALI civic network contributes their leadership talent and is an integral part of the civic leadership ecology where they reside and work.

Editors

Dr. Michael Chang is the Founder and Executive Director of the Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute and former Mayor of Cupertino. He served in public office for almost 20 years and is a well-recognized civic leader in Silicon Valley. In 1997, Dr. Chang became the first Asian American to serve as Mayor of Cupertino. In the same year, he founded APALI and has led it for over two decades, building a strong pipeline and community of Asian American civic leaders. Dr. Chang is also De Anza College emeritus professor of civic leadership and retired Chair of the Asian American Studies Department. Dr. Chang earned undergraduate degrees in both philosophy & religion and business administration from San Francisco State University. He also earned a Ph.D. in education, as well as master's degrees in East Asian Studies and political science, all from Stanford University.

Dennis Chiu serves on the Board of Directors and is Co-Executive Director of APALI. He is a former elected director and former board vice chair of the El Camino Healthcare District, the largest healthcare district in California. In addition to serving on the District board, he served as vice chair on the board of directors of El Camino Health, a two campus 450 bed community hospital. He is a senior government relations representative and amicus coordinator for The Doctors Company where he works on healthcare public policy and appellate issues. Dennis was a principal consultant and senior district representative at the California Assembly. He served 13 years on the Santa Clara County Planning Commission and four years on the Sunnyvale Housing and Human Services Commission. Dennis has practiced law for 25 years at law firms and as in-house counsel. Dennis received his bachelor's degree from UCLA and juris doctor from Santa Clara University.



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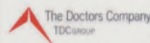
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