



The Spirit of Bayanihan

“Leaders become great not because of their power,
but because of their ability to empower others.”

~ John Maxwell

This month's *Orange County Lawyer* magazine highlights the many attorneys who have stepped up and answered the call to serve in various leadership roles for the Orange County Bar Association this year. It is truly thanks to the tireless work of all bar leaders and volunteers that the OCBA is able to serve our members and community in such an impactful way.

As I stepped into the role as president at the beginning of this year, I, like so many of my predecessors, looked forward to leading the charge, making a difference, and propelling the organization forward. Having witnessed incredible leadership qualities in the presidents before me, I was ready to steward a well-run board meeting, serve as key spokesperson, and help members make connections. And at the outset, I shared with you my own leadership path and laid out my presidential priorities: Let's be the very best we can be, help a lot of people, and have a lot of fun.

While these all still ring true, in these first few months, I am learning that one of the most rewarding aspects of serving as president is the exceptional opportunity to empower others on their own bar leadership paths.


For example, in February, the OCBA hosted the annual orientation luncheons for the leadership of the sections, committees, task forces, and working groups. As a past section leader, I know the importance of this kickoff to help set great plans for the year ahead. It was so fulfilling with each kickoff to see the room so full and teeming with great ideas. I noticed many leaders stayed at the conclusion of the luncheons to chat, brainstorm, and discuss potential collaborations.

I want to express my gratitude to all of the section, committee, task force, and working group leaders for embracing your roles with such dedication, passion, and commitment.

I am reminded of the same energy we shared at OCBA Judges' Night in January, where a sold-out room of upwards of 800 attendees came together to celebrate our esteemed judiciary, the OCBA, and our extraordinary Orange County legal community. It was a remarkable evening and spirits were high. Thank you to everyone who was able to join. As I watched the OCBA board of directors and officers get installed by the inimitable Honorable Adrienne Marshack, I could not help but feel profound gratitude for each of these individuals and their service to the bar in such a big way. I am also most grateful for Judge Marshack's tremendous support and friendship, having first met each other through bar service many years ago. Already, the board members have quickly gotten to work on numerous projects, and I am honored to be in a position to help each leader have great success.

As those of you who were there might recall, I shared some stories of my family and my Filipino Canadian heritage at Judges' Night during my presidential remarks after being installed. In my family, the spirit of generosity, inclusivity, and loyalty runs deep—I am confident this rings true for many of you as well. At the very core of Filipino culture is what we call the spirit of “Bayanihan.” This is the embodiment of our community, and it is the spirit of unity, compassion, and collective action. Bayanihan at its timeless essence is being part of something bigger than oneself. I want to offer this to you.

As an attorney, and in my role as a general counsel, I can easily get pulled into the daily throes of life—maybe you can relate. But it is through answering the call to serve the bar that I know I am part of something bigger than myself. This keeps me moving forward.

For each of you in your professional and personal lives, you have so much to bring to the table, so much to lead, so much impact to make. I ask myself often, and I invite you to do the same: how can we embody the spirit of Bayanihan every day, this spirit of community, uplifting one another, supporting the advancement of our colleagues, and championing the cause of justice for all, and how can we carry it forward? The bar needs leaders, and needs you. Together, let us march ahead, guided by these noble ideals. I know we can. 

Christina M. Zabat-Fran, the 2024 President of the OCBA, serves as General Counsel and a Corporate Executive for a global luxury fashion group. Christina invites you to reach out for support on your own bar leadership path. Her email is christina.zabat@lanvin-group.com.



The Honorable Adrienne Marshack installing OCBA President Christina Zabat-Fran at 2024 OCBA Judges' Night.