



You Can Do This

"The important thing about tidying is not deciding what to discard, but rather what you want to keep in your life."

~ Marie Kondo, author of *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*

I absolutely love this time of year, don't you? We are one quarter in, winter is retreating, the sun is staying out longer, birds are chirping, flowers are blooming, and baseball is in full swing. It's the perfect time for spring cleaning. Stay with me.

I find this season's spirit of clarity and freshness wholly motivating to examine all areas of my life for opportunities to optimize. Drawers are decluttered, closets are cleaned out, and donation bags are packed to the very top. Rest assured though; this isn't all about letting go. In fact, I feel compelled to share with you a spring-cleaning curveball of sorts: I've kept every issue of the *Orange County Lawyer* magazine since I became a member of the Orange County Bar Association.

Now, I know what you're thinking – someone really needs to embrace the life-changing magic of tidying up. But for me, this personal archive marks so many key moments and brings me so much joy. Recently, in this seasonal quest, amongst my well-organized mementos, I came across the issue with then-President Lei Lei Wang Ekvall on the cover.

Early on in my legal career, the OC Lawyer magazine would hit my desk every month and feature such impressive, impactful attorneys. They were heavy hitters in their practice and seemed so far away from where I was. And then one day, the cover featured Lei Lei. She was female. She was Asian American. She even had a double last name.

There she was, President of the Orange County Bar.

In that moment, I remember saying

out loud "She's like me.

I can do this!"

Not long after that, Lei Lei became an inspiring mentor to me, encouraging me to always go for it, fueling my doggedness, and imparting to me the value of persistence with a smile.

A couple years ago, when the OCBA established the Lei Lei Wang Ekvall Award in her honor, it struck me as a home-run moment for the bar. As proposed, this award would recognize a member of our Orange County legal community who demonstrates the highest commitment to achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion in the legal profession, while also exemplifying professional excellence. Thus far, the bar has been set high: past honorees include Lei Lei herself (posthumously) and tremendous leader and current Presiding Judge Maria Hernandez.

I am elated to share with you that this year's honoree is none other than Joseph Chairez. Joe is a highly-sought after trial attorney and dedicated bar leader, having remarkably served as Past President of the OCBA, the OC Hispanic Bar Association, and the Celtic Bar Association. Joe is a personal champion of mine, an encouraging coach, and a dear friend. I know as lucky as I am to say Joe is on my home team, there are so many who at the same time consider Joe on their team, too. In other words, he's an all-star.

Given this incredible run, I would propose that there is another unspoken qualification for those individuals who are selected to receive this honor. In addition to all of their achievements, and their great work to evolve the profession, they all undoubtedly regularly tell people: "You can do this." This was Lei Lei, this is the Honorable Judge Hernandez, and this is most certainly Joe.

I am reminded of how true it is that spring cleaning is not merely a question of what to get rid of, but also what to keep. Even more, once we have put everything in its place, it is an opportunity to ask ourselves what we want to make room for, and what we want more of in our professional and personal lives. I encourage you to make room for bar service because the impact you can make is far more than you know. Wherever your practice takes you, consider this: right now, there is a rising attorney witnessing you and inspired to step up to the plate. 🏏

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 mark your calendars for June 6th and join her at the OCBA Summer Social Celebrating Diversity, where she will be cheering on Joe as he receives this year's Lei Lei Wang Ekvall Award. Her email is christina.zabat@lanvin-group.com.

