



# Next Gen



This week's Q&A with

**Charles Wu**

*Charles Wu is a Partner in Locke Lord's Corporate Practice Group based in the Chicago office. Over the past several years, Charles has been "forced" by his clients to transform from a corporate and M&A authority to a "generalist." Trust relationships established from Charles' handling of corporate matters for many of his China-based clients making investments in the United States often lead to additional work in other non-corporate matters. Thanks to Locke Lord's collaborative culture and full-service platform, Charles has been busy serving clients' broad legal needs with the help of other lawyers. Proactively identifying potential legal risks before clients even realize them and knowing when to bring in which experts/specialists to provide clients with the most effective legal advice are where Charles sees himself adding the most value.*



## More About Charles

### What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career?

Every day, I struggle with how to effectively and efficiently communicate with clients. While communicating with any client can be difficult, cultural differences and language barriers faced by Chinese clients make communication even more challenging and yet critically important. For example, I have tried very hard over the years to avoid writing long legal memos or emails because clients simply have no time to read them. I have also learned that it is a big mistake to tell Chinese clients that their questions are business questions, not legal ones, because that fine line usually does not exist in the minds of Chinese executives and communicating in that manner often undermines the trust relationship. How to effectively manage clients' expectations is also a constant challenge in my practice.

### What has helped you to become successful in your field?

I think the combination of strong legal skills after more than 15 years of practice in the United States and the ability to effectively communicate with clients and understand their needs really sets me apart. Chinese clients love to directly seek advice from someone like me who can provide solutions to their problems in real time, as a one-stop shop and in a way that they can easily understand. Locke Lord's platform and culture are ideal for making the most out of my skill sets and really brought the entrepreneurial qualities out of me.

### What drives or motivates you on your hardest days/during your most difficult matters?

For thousands of years, the Chinese called their country the "Middle Kingdom." However, in the eyes of the Europeans it is the "Far East." That is just an example of how people from different backgrounds may have different perspectives on things. Too many transactions have failed, too many opportunities have been lost and too many disputes have arisen because of the inability and/

or unwillingness of parties to move away from their oftentimes self-centered views. I believe that people with my background could and should help bridge those different views and perspectives. That is what keeps me going on the most difficult days of my practice.

### **What do you do to relax and reset?**

With two young kids, two careers between myself and my wife and two time zones to manage, there is always a shortage of time in our household. I have found that watching my kids playing sports games on weekends, cheering for them and chatting with other parents are very relaxing ways to unwind. I highly recommend it to anyone who has a demanding job, because going to those games often reminds me that there is a whole different world out there and really puts the stress of work into perspective.

### **What do you do to give back to the community?**

The Chinese business community in the Midwest for years did not have a strong and coordinated voice to express their needs or to effectively communicate with the local communities and various interest groups. Locke Lord is proud to be the founding law firm of the Chicago Chapter of the China General Chamber of Commerce – USA, which now includes all major Chinese businesses operating in Illinois and the eight surrounding states. Together with my colleagues, I have contributed many hours of time to give presentations and free training seminars to members of the organization and helped with its incorporation, corporate governance and other day-to-day legal matters. In addition, my wife and I are also very active in our kids' school and the community we have called home for almost 20 years since we migrated to the United States.

### **What is your favorite thing to do in Chicago?**

I love riding a bicycle to and from work, especially in winter. Obviously, it provides good exercise and makes good use of my commute time. More importantly, it gives me an opportunity to clear my head and plan for the day both physically and mentally. Because many of my clients are based in China, I usually spend two or three hours on the phone with them every night/early morning. Having grown up in the Northeast region of China, I often feel guilty that I actually enjoy what the Windy City has to offer in winter (well, OK, except for when it is below minus 30 degrees).

### **What would be your fantasy career if you weren't a lawyer?**

In my prior life, I was an architect in China. Today if you go to the main commercial district of Shanghai, you can see a skyscraper that looks like a twisted pencil pointing to the sky. The design of that building was actually based on the proposal I and a few college classmates submitted in a student competition in our senior year in college. We won that competition but only received a cash prize equal to roughly \$7 (at that time we didn't know that we should have hired Locke Lord to protect our intellectual property rights). I kept my interest in architecture ever since. Architecture Digest is probably the only paper material I read nowadays on a regular basis besides The Wall Street Journal. I find the habits I acquired from training in architecture actually help a lot in my legal career, such as attention to details and the never-ending quest to find creative and elegant solutions to clients' needs based on their unique circumstances.



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