

## Work-Life Balance and the Secret to Beating Stress: **IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCCESS**



A 2003 graduate of UC Berkeley School of Law, Quyen Ta is a partner at Keker & Van Nest, litigating complex commercial cases. The former diversity director on the board of the Barristers Club, Ta now cochairs BASF's Equality Committee. A San Jose native, Ta has two-and-a-half-year-old twin boys with her husband Demian Pay, senior counsel of Chevron Corporation.

### *WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT YOU?*

I have a pretty optimistic outlook. That was passed on from my parents. They were boat people who fled Vietnam in their twenties with two kids. They had an immense sense of possibility and tenacity and I carry that in my DNA. It definitely helps me in terms of my work. I know it's important to be invested and work hard to seek positive change.

### *WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?*

I worked at Great America [the amusement park in Santa Clara]. It was the only place that would hire kids under sixteen. I made \$3.25 an hour. I worked in stores, in merchandising. It taught me responsibility and a work ethic.

### *WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT WORKING?*

I like reading. I was an English literature major. It's harder

to read long books these days because I'm constantly interrupted. But I'm in a book club. I also enjoy spending time with friends from college and high school. We have a big extended family nearby. And my husband is an avid Giants fan.

### WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE BOOK?

One book that I read four or five years ago that's stayed with me is *The God of Small Things*. It's tragic, but beautifully written.

### WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN PRESSURE AND STRESS BUILD UP?

I'm pretty organized. I have a task list and I take it one step at a time. If I have a deadline and I'm feeling overwhelmed, I do what my mom taught me: just sit, take a deep breath, imagine what it takes to be successful, and then do it. It's a blend of quiet meditation and imagining the possibility of success.

### WHO WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO MEET, LIVING OR DEAD?

Michelle Obama or Oprah Winfrey. They're both very strong women who have a strong sense of themselves.

### IF YOU COULDN'T BE A LAWYER, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

I almost became this: I'd be an English literature professor. When I worked on my honors thesis, the job seemed really isolating to me even though I liked the teaching aspect. I took a year off after college and worked at the Asian Law Caucus. That's what led me to law school.



### WHAT HAS BEEN A HIGHLIGHT OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

In 2008, I second-chaired a trial with Jon Streeter, one of my mentors. We represented the plaintiff, a widow suing her late husband's employer for breach of contract. The trial was very much about her life with him. I learned that law is about real people. It made me see what my role could be. Not many women of color are law firm partners, which can be isolating. But Jon

told me that it also makes me more sensitive about how people feel and that could influence how I relate to jurors. There were eight Asian Americans on that panel. I learned that juries do want to see diverse lawyers. It confirmed to me that I'm in the right profession and I'm at the right firm because we do more trials than most.

### DESCRIBE THE WORK YOU'VE DONE WITH BASF.

I'd been involved in minority bars, including the Vietnamese American Bar Association of Northern California where I mentored and was mentored. I felt it was really important early in my career to work on issues of diversity and access. There aren't many people in the law with my background and I wanted to be sure not to close the doors behind me. I also feel very strongly it's important for diverse lawyers to get involved in the mainstream bar. So I joined the Barristers Club and worked on the diversity committee, an active, robust group. I'm now cochairing the Equality Committee, working on the goals and time-tables report.