

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
The Affiliate

Spotlight on Affiliate Leaders: Roger Tsai

By Carl N. Frazier

Ask Roger Tsai how the son of first-generation Americans, who grew up in Dallas, found himself settled into a successful career in Salt Lake City, and he will tell you that he took “a roundabout way.” After just a few minutes of speaking with this 2010 “Utah Young Lawyer of the Year,” you quickly realize that much of Tsai’s energies are focused on building bridges to connect the seemingly disparate and to find common ground among those with whom he interacts.

Building Bridges for Clients

Roger Tsai, an associate with Parsons Behle & Latimer in Salt Lake City, Utah, has practiced law since 2006. Roger completed his undergraduate studies in political science and economics at the University of Michigan and law school at the University of Houston Law Center. Participating in the UH Law Center Immigration Clinic confirmed his passion for immigration law. At Parsons Behle & Latimer, Tsai concentrates his practice on employment and family-based immigration. Approximately 70% of his practice is devoted to assisting employers navigate the maze of what Roger calls “archaic” immigration laws. The remaining 30% involves advising individuals and families who wish to lawfully bring their loved ones into the United States. Recalling the profound effect permanent residency had on his father, Roger relishes the opportunity to work with these individuals on a regular basis “where gratification is instant.” Tsai regularly takes on pro bono cases and matters at significantly reduced rates. For example, he has represented four clients seeking asylum because of persecution in their home countries, winning every one.

Building Bridges in the Bar

Tsai serves as co-chair of the Events Committee of the Utah Young Lawyers Division, an ABA YLD Affiliate. In this position, Tsai developed a speed-networking event for recently admitted lawyers. This exciting event brings together approximately forty to fifty young lawyers with a variety of more experienced practitioners. Young lawyer attendees network with one senior attorney for five minutes before rotating to another. The format facilitates a large number of networking contacts and builds young lawyers’ communication skills.

Tsai was involved in coordinating a mentoring marathon, another program sponsored by the Utah Young Lawyers Division. The program targets 1L and 2L law students and seeks to provide some of the benefits of having a practitioner mentor but at a more immediate pace. Practitioners from a variety of backgrounds—judges and attorneys from small and large firms and government entities—are divided into panels addressing a number of topics. Topics range from how to interview, networking skills, and how to start and manage a solo practice. A highlight of the event is a one-on-one resume review during which a lawyer provides feedback on the student’s resume and application materials.

Building Bridges in the Community

Although Roger is committed to the zealous representation of his clients and service to the bar, his passion is perhaps most evident in his dedicated community service. Much of Tsai’s community service involves fostering understanding and dialogue among individuals of different backgrounds. He is a tireless advocate for reform of American’s immigration laws. Within Utah, he has testified on the topic before the state legislature and presented seminars to various industry and community groups. Tsai was the first non-Hispanic member appointed to the Governor’s Hispanic Advisory Council, where he helped to develop common ground on divisive immigration issues. Nationally, Roger has shared his immigration expertise by speaking to the American Immigration Lawyers Association and Federal Bar Association.

Tsai’s community service is not limited to immigration advocacy, however. While serving as president of the Utah Asian Chamber of Commerce, he led a “get out the vote” effort that identified and registered over 200 new minority voters and coordinated one of the first debates for mayoral candidates geared toward the minority community. During service as a board member of the Salt Lake City chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management, Tsai helped establish the Utah Employer Diversity Award to recognize employers that make extraordinary progress in developing a diverse workforce.

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Roger has participated in the Utah Young Lawyers Division's "Tuesday Night Bar," a once a month session at which attorneys assist indigent citizens identify and access various public and legal resources. In addition, he has been a leader and promoter of a weekly religious discussion group known as Brewed Awakenings. According to Roger, the group is made up of dozens of individuals from a variety of religious and nonreligious backgrounds that engage a different topic each week in "a thoughtful, non-antagonistic way." In what is perceived as a religiously homogenous state, the group has an important role to encourage individuals of different faiths to find common ground and mutual understanding. With his unwavering dedication to his clients, the bar, and his community, Roger Tsai is truly a model young lawyer.

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