



## Reflections on Leadership: Victoria Wei



*[Victoria Wei \(https://myprofile.faa.gov/eis/sp/pub/socialprofile?emailId=victoria.wei@faa.gov\)](https://myprofile.faa.gov/eis/sp/pub/socialprofile?emailId=victoria.wei@faa.gov) is the Deputy Vice President of Management Services in the Air Traffic Organization (ATO). Prior to her current position, she held several key roles at the agency, including Legislative Counsel, the first Chief of Staff in NextGen and Deputy Director of Airport Planning and Programming. Her significant agency-wide work has included creating and overseeing numerous business, employee engagement and communication processes for NextGen as well as providing oversight for multiple ATO*



*offices such as Diversity, Administrative Services, Technical Labor, Organizational Effectiveness, Employee Development and Business Solutions.*

*For [Asian American/Pacific Islander \(AAPI\) Heritage Month](https://my.faa.gov/focus/article-search.html) (<https://my.faa.gov/focus/article-search.html>)*

*Victoria Wei*

*[q=myfaa:focus/Campaigns/2017 Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month](https://my.faa.gov/focus/Campaigns/2017%20Asian%20American%20Pacific%20Islander%20Heritage%20Month), Ms. Wei – in her own upbeat and uplifting words – offers employees a glimpse of her background and journey in federal service. Read more [Reflections on Leadership](https://my.faa.gov/content/myfaa/en/focus/article-search.html?omni=FocusCategory&q=Reflections+on+Leadership) (<https://my.faa.gov/content/myfaa/en/focus/article-search.html?omni=FocusCategory&q=Reflections+on+Leadership>) feature articles with personal stories from FAA executives.*

## **Childhood years**

I was born in Queens, New York (go Mets!), and grew up in New Jersey (mostly just outside of Princeton). My parents were immigrants (from China and Taiwan) who didn't think they could have kids, so when they had my sister and me, they really cherished us, which I think was essential to how I treat others now. I know what it's like to be cherished, and I strive to make others feel that way when I can.

My father was very much a scholar – with a master's degree and Ph.D. in Political Science – and my mother was a teacher in Taiwan. They valued a good education and did whatever they could to provide us with the best education possible. They had an incredible work ethic – working in restaurants and retail and other service professions to ensure that we had the best opportunities. I am so grateful for their sacrifices. The flip side was that there was pressure to succeed: I remember being in the fourth grade, and my mom started to say, "When you go to Har..., I mean, college....". I knew from a very early age that their goal was for me to go to Harvard, and I strove to meet that expectation. I guess you could say I'm very driven, especially once I find out what is expected of me.

When I think about my childhood, I remember always being asked to take charge in the games I played with my friends and cousins even though I was frequently the youngest child



*Victoria's parents, Titus and Lillian Wei,*

present. In reflecting on that, I think I had a calling for leadership even then. While I trained as a lawyer, I thought of it as a profession, rather than a calling; the law was a vocation, not an avocation. Leadership, on the other hand, is something that fits me and my personality. One of my dear friends and colleagues, Jessica Sypniewski, once described me as "bold," and I think that's what makes me a good leader. Either that, or remarkably foolhardy...

*who shaped her identity.*

## **Earlier years of service**

I am an extremely lucky person, who manages to recognize opportunities when they present themselves. I started out in the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Honors Attorney Program, which receives over 6,000 applicants on average. Once selected, eight newly graduated attorneys rotate throughout the General Counsel's office in the Office of the Secretary and the different modal administrations. What's really interesting is that when I interviewed, I randomly mentioned to my interviewer *Adarand vs. Pena* (a seminal civil rights case that was specific to DOT programs and ultimately changed how the federal government approached Disadvantaged Business Enterprise/Minority Business Enterprise issues). He was so thrilled that I even mentioned it that he advocated for me to enter the program. Talk about dumb luck!

This has become a bit of a trend in my life: I bump into an opportunity purely by accident, and it turns out to be a great step for my career. I happened to be in the right place at the right time when Vicki Cox was looking for a special assistant, which led to my branching out from the Office of Chief Counsel. Beth Mack and I happened to serve on a couple of panels together (for the FAA Awards and the Senior Leadership Development Program). She gave me an opportunity to serve as Acting Deputy Vice President, and I had no idea I would love it so much that I would want to apply for the job!

As a young attorney, I saw many women who made sacrifices to become successful, forgoing marriage and children in favor of their careers, but not many Asian American women (or even a lot of Asian American men). That actually wasn't very unusual for me since I was used to being the only Asian American and only AAPI girl/woman in a lot of places I found myself. It occurred to me that one of my callings was to continue to carry that torch and carry it forward: my job was to make progress for people who looked like me and could have the life I wanted to have. There were successful women to model myself after, but I had to model that I could be a successful AAPI woman who had a happy partnership and children.





*Wedding photo of Victoria with her husband, Scott Allen, on the Hawaiian island of Maui.*

As a female AAPI sports announcer...well...let's just say, I was in a distinct minority there! There were so few female announcers to begin with, and I don't think I ever ran across another AAPI announcer – male or female! But again, I tried not to dwell on not having role models who looked like me and instead find the value in the role models that were available: Vin Scully, Joe Morgan – those guys are the platinum standard! My technical challenge was to be the best that I could be, and studying those guys might as well have been an advanced university course! I knew that those coming behind me would look to me as that role model, so in the meantime, I had to strive to be the best that I could be as an announcer.

In retrospect, I recall incidents of discrimination that I either didn't recognize at the time or simply ignored. Frequently, it was a waste of my time to deal directly with those people, and it was easier to just be myself. I mean, who else could I really be, if not me? And frankly, it was a little surprising. I always believed in that great Zora Neale Hurston quote: "Sometimes, I feel

discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me." I think I'm a pretty nice person who has a decent sense of humor and a diverse set of interests. If you don't want to hang with me, that's cool. But if you do, I bet we'll have a great time!

I have confronted discrimination when necessary. As a former litigator, I have what I would consider a high degree of tolerance for conflict (Translation: I like a good fight, as one of my friends in law enforcement once said about me.). It's always amazing to me that people tend to scurry away when you confront them on their bigotry. Sometimes, they "double down" and that's when you have to stand your ground, too. It's simple, though not at all easy, to say, "That's bigotry and that's wrong, and I won't tolerate it."

But, frequently, I've found there are often less aggravating and more effective ways to get your point across. I've learned over the years that discrimination and bigotry come from fear, and education and kindness can really go a long way to combating that. In my recent career, I have really learned the value of collaboration, rather than confrontation, and I've tried to apply those lessons in confronting discrimination as well.

## **Current career efforts and milestones**

I want people to know that I love my work. I love leaving it at work too, but I love what I do. I love to solve problems and interact with people. I'm definitely an extrovert, and being at work – with others, around others, working together to find solutions to problems – is so energizing to me.

I'm also deeply committed to public service and my country. In this day and age, when government employees are so derided, I am so proud to serve my country in this capacity. My parents came here with almost nothing; they worked hard and sent two daughters to the Ivy League, created a comfortable and loving home and modeled an amazing set of ethics. This country and its principles enabled that. I love working for the FAA; I love serving the mission of ensuring the safest, most efficient airspace in the world, in my own little way. And, I love that I am serving my country by doing that.

My daughter, who is seven, really hates it when I travel for work because, of course, she'd rather have mommy at home. But I've explained to her that I took an oath of office to serve this country and faithfully defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic. I'm striving to teach her the important lessons of keeping your promises and striving to reach higher goals that are outside of yourself. I can't think of anything higher than the defense of our nation's highest law – the Constitution.



*Victoria with her daughter, Layla Allen-Wei, enjoying spring break at Fort Walton Beach, Florida.*

## **Advice to FAA employees**



*Victoria Wei recognizes several colleagues at a NextGen event for their leadership in advancing*

For new employees: Soak it all in. Keep your ear to the ground, and learn to separate idle gossip from news that really matters. Recognize that the politics around us can affect our future, but tune it out when you need to accomplish our important mission. We keep people safe – Every. Single. Moment. Our skies are the safest in the world because of the dedicated people here.

For aspiring leaders: Answer the call to the higher purpose. Don't let your ambition cloud the mission. We're here to keep the skies safe. Never forget that.

For everyone: No one is successful alone. Other people are always key to our successes whether they support us or give us opportunities. I had so many mentors who looked out for

collaboration and promoting teamwork.

me and helped me with my career. And, I could never have been successful as an executive, woman, wife or mother without my husband's unwavering support. He's my sounding board, my advisor and my comic relief. None of this is possible without him.

## Other insights

I love action films. I'm a huge fan of almost every iconic action film ever. I've seen every James Bond film multiple times (including "On Her Majesty's Secret Service," which really wasn't very good) and all the "Taken" films. I thought Denzel Washington was absolutely brilliant in "The Equalizer." Yeah...don't get me started on these. I could talk about this for hours...

I love to sing, too. I was a classically trained singer throughout high school and college and performed semi-professionally (opera, pop and jazz) for a while. I occasionally still sing opera on my commute in. Other than lullabies for my daughter, I don't have much opportunity to sing now, but I would welcome any other FAAers who want to get a group together!

Oh...wait...you probably want insights on leadership! Ali McDermott, a very wise woman at FAA, perfectly articulated something I'd been thinking about; she said, "Watch the leadership *behaviors*, and model that." That really resonated with me. I could give people all the specific advice in the world, but what it comes down to is that **I live my ethics as best as I can as much as I can**. I believe in treating people fairly and with kindness. I believe in having realistic expectations of people, including that they can stretch and do their best work almost all of the time, whatever that may be. I believe in playing to win, not playing not to lose. I believe you can't cross a chasm in two small steps. I believe in doing the next right thing. And, I believe in hugging your loved ones as much as possible and telling them that you love them as frequently as you can. You'll never regret that.



Harry Potter, Victoria's cat, another member of the family.

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This is a wonderful focus on one of our most dedicated and talented women in the FAA. I am proud to have you as a colleague. You always provide great insight and council. And, you so so with grace and compassion. Jodi

Jodi McCarthy  
5 days ago



Victoria Wei  
5 days ago

Thank you so much, Jodi! It's an honor to serve with you!



Lisbeth Mack  
5 days ago

What wonderful leadership lessons, Victoria! And so simple (you know I love simple) - truly care about others, believe the best of them and they will deliver. As a mother, I probably learned one of my most important leadership lessons by watching how others approached their children in public. The parent who told a child that s/he was stupid and lazy and bad actually encouraged the child to be exactly that. The parent who told a child s/he was smart and capable and good likely got those expectations met too!

You have been a source of inspiration to me as well in the few months that we have worked closely together. I am delighted that you decided to bid for the DVP position here in Management Services, and that we were able to get the executive reassignment approved. Accidental assignments are great but we hope that none better come along, at least for a few years....so that we can all learn from you.



Victoria Wei  
5 days ago

Thank you, Beth! You are so right about motherhood being great preparation for leadership! It has been wonderful learning from you and I'm thrilled to be working with you and the rest of the Management Services team. I am so lucky to have had all the experiences I've had here at the FAA and am looking forward to continuing to learn with ATO.



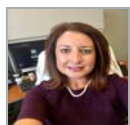
Rebecca Henry  
5 days ago

Great article! I only had the pleasure of meeting Victoria once and I really enjoyed it (and not just because she brought donuts to the office)! What a dedicated civil servant and genuine person! Hope our paths cross again soon!



Victoria Wei  
5 days ago

Hi Rebecca! Thank you so much for your kind words! I definitely would love to see you all again! Hope you and the rest of the Orlando ADO family are doing well!



Suzanne Styc  
5 days ago

Love that you shared these things about yourself AND you have a cat named Harry Potter!!!! So glad to have your leadership behaviors in the ATO!

Suzanne





Victoria Wei  
5 days ago

Thank you, Suzanne! (Guess who named the cat?!)



Christine  
Demnianskyk  
5 days ago

I met Victoria briefly while assisting in the Director's Office at the William J. Hughes Technical Center during some of her visits there. I distinctly remember Victoria's lovely smile, kindness to everyone she encountered, wicked knowledge of sports, and I do believe she was singing in the office one day. It is wonderful to learn about her work process, her leadership methods, and her strong belief in what we do. With visible leaders like Victoria walking ahead of us and making way for better aviation, I am also VERY PROUD to work for the FAA/ATO. So much of Victoria's philosophy is practical wisdom.



Victoria Wei  
5 days ago

Thank you for the very kind words, Christine! I hope you and the rest of the Tech Center family are doing well. Hope to see you again soon!



Ronisca  
Chambers  
5 days ago

This is a wonderful article about an amazing leader that we are fortunate to have in the ATO!! Your quote from Zora Neale Hurston really spoke to me and provided a different perspective on how to deal with challenges. Thank you, Victoria, for taking the time to share a part of your personal and professional journey with us!



Victoria Wei  
5 days ago

Thanks, Ronisca! As we've talked about, it's an important lesson for our children too! Let me know how it goes!



Sail Min  
5 days ago

Wonderful lessons from an exceptional leader, a role model, and a true patriot. It truly has been an honor and privilege to work under Victoria's leadership.



Victoria Wei  
5 days ago

Thank you, Sail! I hope we get to work together again soon!





Robert Jaffe  
5 days ago

Victoria,

Your comments on treating bigotry with kindness and education made me think of the words of the great Lao Tzu...to paraphrase:

Every good person is a bad person's teacher; Every bad person is a good person's job. If you don't see this, you will eventually get lost, however intelligent you are. It is the Great Secret.

Thanks for the inspiring article.

Rob Jaffe



Victoria Wei  
5 days ago

Thank you, Rob. What a beautiful quotation; thank you for sharing it with us!



Ali McDermott  
5 days ago

Victoria, you certainly demonstrate leadership behaviors we can all aspire to have. Thank you for joining our Management Services team - we are learning so much from you.



Victoria Wei  
5 days ago

Thanks, Ali! It has been great learning from you as well and I look forward to learning more!



Thea Graham  
5 days ago

Victoria,

Thank you for sharing! My favorite takeaway from your story is "gratitude". Truly the best and most satisfying way to live. We need more gratitude these days!

Thank you again,

Thea



Victoria Wei

3 days ago

Thank you for your kind words, Thea! Hope to see you again soon!



Edie Parish

4 days ago

Victoria - Thank you for sharing your story. I have always enjoyed working with you and it is exciting to know we have similar tastes in movies. Who knew? I have the privilege of working with great women throughout my career. You are definitely one of them!



Victoria Wei

3 days ago

Back atcha, Edie! I've learned a great deal from watching you and how gracious you are!



Constance

White

4 days ago

OH-MY-GOSH; I never knew.... Outstanding article and when I see you; you will get a sincere, warm, loving embrace!! We became friends early mornings at the FAA Fitness Center!! I can attest to her personality, humble, consistent kindness and genuine, relational behavior/characteristics--consistent, as Victoria stated, are all very true!!

You saw me recently at Station4 after a long absence of seeing you in 10A--you were the same, you recognized me first with a brilliant, warm and genuine smile--I loved that and my daughter noticed your initial greeting extended to me first!

Thank you for being you... truly; I loved reading your journey from Queens, NY; it's inspiring, encouraging, insightful and "I will always cherish you, your heritage and boldness! Connie



Victoria Wei  
3 days ago

Hi Connie! Thank you for your kind words! It is always a pleasure to run into you and I never would have made it through some of those days at the gym without your inspiration! Hope you are well!



Gaynell Dudley  
2 days ago

Thank you for "wowing" us with your career and life story. Telling us about your upbringing, achievements, insights, values, and beliefs is so authentic and inspirational.



Victoria Wei  
10 hours ago

Thank you for the kind words, Gaynell!



Kesha Lynn  
1 hour ago

Victoria,

I haven't met you yet formally, but I truly enjoyed your story. I enjoy your openness and honesty and your overall leadership behaviors. In reading your story, you seem to have passion for people and the work that you do, and while politics are always present, you don't allow it to color or change your beliefs, goals and try to deter you from doing the right thing. That is truly a rare gift and very much needed.

I truly believe you embody the new AJG mission statement, "we care about our customers; we care about each other" and look forward to the direction your leadership and inspiration will take Management Services. Welcome and thank you for all you do!

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