

Diversity Dialogue Interview: Helen Zhu

- John Caher: Welcome to Amici, News and Insight from the New York Judiciary and Unified Court System. I'm John Caher. Today we have another episode of Diversity Dialogues with Susan Goodman, who today will interview Helen Zhu, a network system technology expert at the Queens Supreme Court.
- Susan Goodman: Helen, if you could just introduce yourself and tell us what your position is first.
- Helen Zhu: My name is Helen Zhu. I work in Queens Supreme Civil Term. I have been working at this office for over two years. My current title is Network Systems Technician Level 3.
- Susan Goodman: Okay. So, just to begin with, since this is primarily to talk about diversity and how it affects one's job and workplace, how would you describe your cultural background and how does it, if it does, influence your current position or your current role?
- Helen Zhu: I'm Asian. I'm a Chinese born American. I came to America when I was 16. I was an exchange student from China. I traveled here all by myself and I started a new life here alone which means I don't really have any family to seek help from. My parents always tell me not to give up, always try your best. So all I have to do is not to give up and keep trying. I know I need a college degree, so this way I could pay for my own rent and live a life, which I did. I was in the second year of high school when I came over. So I completed high school and then I went to Queens College. After I finished college, I worked in the court system. I was very, very lucky that I was able to go through many difficult challenges. I was very fortunate with my career.
- Susan Goodman: And how would you define diversity and how would you say you getting your role will encourage others to honor their diversity, their uniqueness?
- Helen Zhu: New York is a very big melting pot, and in the court system I worked with all kinds of people. Uniqueness is not only from their ethnic background it is also who they are. I always try to encourage other people just like I encourage my kids at home. It's okay to fail because that's how you're going to get up and keep going. It's okay to fail. I tell my kids all the time and in school they try to teach kids always be the best, always get up there. But sometimes I tell my kids that failing is not a bad thing because that's how you learn your lesson.
- I would see people that I work with, people in my life that had failed but I found out after that they actually move up better and higher, and achieve better in their life than people who never failed.
- Susan Goodman: That's a lovely answer, thank you. What three words would you use to describe your current role?
- Helen Zhu: Three words? "Help is coming."

Susan Goodman: Right. That's very good. What title did you start with and when?

Helen Zhu: I started working for UCS in the year 2006. My first title was Assistant Network Technician, now I am a Network System Technician Level 3. I started at OCA 13 years ago. I actually started as a Temp and then five months later when they had positions, I got an interview and after that I got hired.

Susan Goodman: There's been a lot of discussion about women in STEM careers and maybe you can touch upon a little bit women in the field of technology and how it may have affected your journey to where you are now?

Helen Zhu: I am working with all guys in the IT department. All guys, I am the only technician who is a female. It's a little tough. I guess it's because of men and women are built a little differently, like technical-wise.

Susan Goodman: But it didn't deter you as a woman coming into this field.

Helen Zhu: Never.

Susan Goodman: Never. That's wonderful.

Helen Zhu: And I learned a lot from working with the guys.

Susan Goodman: What do you like most about what you do?

Helen Zhu: I'm a people person. So, I go visit people and help them, not only help them but offer support. I find solutions for them and I also tell them what to do so they don't have the problem again. I get to know the people.

Susan Goodman: And what would you say if you had to pinpoint the biggest achievement to date? You could specify personal or professional or both.

Helen Zhu: I have two kids, I always ask them what I can do to help them because I cannot change their lives, they are the ones that changes their lives. So, I always try to set up a good image to influence them. I showed them how as a new immigrant who came to a foreign country with little language skill and went through a lot of challenges to finally settle down and had an American dream come true. Because I'm a mother, that's why my big achievement is to ensure my kids have a good life, succeed when they grow up in their own way. My two kids are still little now, but I try to encourage them rather than push them.

Susan Goodman: How would you describe a typical day in your professional life?

Helen Zhu: My typical day basically comes from three big areas, the help desk ticket system, phone calls, and projects. When users have problems, they will open a ticket via the Help Desk System and I will get assigned to the ticket and there are phone calls from users requesting for IT support, also we have ongoing projects.

Susan Goodman: So, when you get in in the morning, what is the first thing that you usually do, in terms of addressing any issue or problem people may have with technical support?

Helen Zhu: We have a help desk ticket system so that's what we rely on the most.

Susan Goodman: So, you really go there first?

Helen Zhu: Yeah, that's where I always check first. The system connected us with the user and we can communicate with the users from this platform. The problem will get solved easily.

Susan Goodman: Do you travel quite a bit around Queens or do you mostly stay where you are?

Helen Zhu: We have three locations. We have this building in Jamaica, and County Clerk Office right across the street. On Queens Boulevard, we have the criminal court, and Long island City in downtown Queens, which is a smaller court house. Me and the four other colleagues, we take turns to go so I have to work in Long Island City once a month.

Susan Goodman: Have you had any mentors in your life? And if so, can you talk about them and why they have been mentors to you?

Helen Zhu: Mentor is very important and I'm very lucky I always have one when I need it. Mentor doesn't have to be one person for your whole entire life. Mentor for me is when I am in different stages of my life, I needed somebody and that somebody appeared and helped me. For example, when I came to this country I was 16 years old, my mentor was my father's business partner. He helped me a lot. He had his own company in the city. I see that as a first-generation immigrant, he worked very hard. He's always trying for any kind of opportunity to teach me. He's retired now, but he still tries to work, trying to find things to do to fulfill himself and to help people. I ran into him one day in the court house, he was helping his friend doing translating in the courtroom. He was my mentor when I came to the States. If I had any kind of problem, life problem, tax problem, house problem, he was always my go-to person.

Susan Goodman: And that's basically the main mentor in your life or do you want to talk about anyone else?

Helen Zhu: I just started another side business, and in this business, majorities are women. This is an anti-aging/beauty business. There's a lot of women involved than men. What I see is women are unique, when they work as a team they are strong, they are tough, they make things happen. These women are IT or financial professionals, there are PhDs, there are school principals, business owners, entrepreneurs, etc. They are already very successful in their current careers, but they still want to do this business because they want to change life, they want to help people. They all have a good heart and I learned a lot from

them. The most important is the encouragement I got from them. I am very happy that because of what I am doing I was able to be with this group of woman and work as a team with them.

Susan Goodman: That's wonderful.

If you had to advise prospective applicants to the court system, people who are not in the court system yet, how would you advise them? The men also, how would you advise people who are in the court system looking to rise in this system. So the first one is for people who are not yet in the system but the second part of the question is addressing the people who are looking for that next step.

Helen Zhu: I am very grateful that I am working with a group of very talented people who always challenge themselves. In the court system, people who are outside and don't know us, I would tell them it's a government job but it's not what you think, it's not just that kind of government job where people work and waiting for their retirement, waiting for their pensions. People here really do their work and they are very, very skilled because they are serving the public, they are helping the citizens. Doesn't matter if it's IT or clerk or the judge or the attorney, everybody is very professional here.

I came from in OCA so I don't deal with a lot of people in the local court. Since I moved to the Queens Supreme Court I am very touched by how professional

People are in local courts. I work with a lot of judges and attorneys and they have very busy cases. They are doing a great job, they are really serving the people.

So for people who are already in the court system, I have heard of this clerk test and colleagues around me are always trying to take this test. This test is not easy, it requires a good amount of study to pass and to get a good score. The test only happens once or sometime twice a year, and this is a very good opportunity to move up in the career in the court system.

Susan Goodman: Do you see any other routes for them or ways that they can be prepared to take a test or prepare to know about opportunities?

Helen Zhu: The courts offer classes, so during lunch I see my colleagues give up their lunch time and go to these classes instead. And I was told they learned a lot but still need to study more using personal spare time. These classes are free, just sign up and go. Obviously, the courts are encouraging the staffs to take the test to move up.

Susan Goodman: So, there are classes that are offered within the court system that would be helpful?

Helen Zhu: Yes, and I believe OCA also offer a wide range of classes for employees who work in the court system.

Susan Goodman: Okay. Just a last question before you leave your job, which hopefully will be a long time, what would you like your greatest achievement to have been?

Helen Zhu: I studied computer science in college and I am glad I can use my knowledge to apply to my work environment as a career. I have worked here for 13 years and I have already seen technology help so much with the court functions and benefiting the public, which are serving people in a fast and convenient way. Last week I was sent to Albany for the CMI training. The CMI training is a court room modernization project.

So, we plan to get a lot done, not only learning the new technology but also promote this new technology to serve the court. In the next six years, all 1,400 courtrooms will be modernized with high speed WIFI, a functional audio system, electrical outlets, charging stations for the counsel tables, and additionally a mobile transportation system with video conferencing capability. Also, there will be barcodes where you could scan using your phone and you will get the details on each courtroom and the information about the judge, the layout of the courtroom. So this is something I'm really looking forward to, to help modernize the court room and court room technology. I'm so happy to be a part of it.

John Caher:

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