

**LawCast BC podcast**  
**Meet Gigi Chen-Kuo, the Law Society's new CEO/Executive Director**  
**Law Society of British Columbia**

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**Vinnie Yuen:**

Welcome to LawCast BC, a podcast produced by the Law Society of British Columbia. The Law Society regulates lawyers in BC. Our mandate is to protect the public. I'm Vinnie Yuen, host and producer.

For today's episode, you'll have the chance to get to know a little bit more about the Law Society's new Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, Gigi Chen-Kuo. In our chat, Gigi speaks to her experience in leadership roles and what she believes to be qualities of an effective leader. She shares her thoughts on a healthy workplace, the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion and why it is necessary for organizations, the profession and the public, as well as her advice for anyone who is just starting in their careers. Gigi was appointed as CEO and Executive Director in 2025 and she's responsible for the overall strategy, key priorities and operation of the Law Society. Called to the bar in 1991, Gigi worked in private practice before becoming in house counsel for BC Transit and Translink. At Translink, she served in various leadership roles over 30 years including interim Chief Executive Officer and Chief Operating Officer. Gigi also brings extensive experience in governance and has served on many boards. Please check out the show notes for her full bio. Here's my chat with Gigi.

Welcome to our podcast Gigi, it's great to have you here.

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

Good morning Vinnie, very nice to be here. Thank you for having me.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your background?

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

I was born in Hong Kong but my family immigrated to Vancouver when I was about two years old so I've spent sort of the rest of my life here growing up in the Lower Mainland, everywhere from East Van, Burnaby, Port Coquitlam. I've also lived in Surrey as well.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

And can you tell us a little bit about what inspired you to pursue a career in law?

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

Well growing up you know with immigrant parents, they told me I could choose any profession I wanted but I knew that they were really only a handful that would meet their approval so for me it was a pretty simple process of elimination. You know math wasn't the love of my life, I didn't like the sight of blood and I was a total bookworm so I knew pretty early on that I was destined for law school. So I ended enrolling in commerce at UBC, you know staying local, and after three years of undergrad, I decided to jump straight into law school also at UBC.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

And I know that after law school you worked in private practice for a little bit before joining BC Transit and Translink where you worked as in house counsel. What first drew you to work as in house counsel?

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

I found that when I was in private practice I enjoyed the practice of law but being a bit of an introvert, I wasn't super comfortable with the self-promotion and the marketing that comes along with working in a law firm. So I decided that I wanted to try working in house and the only problem was that back in the early 90s there were very few in house positions available so I decided I would take on the role of executive assistant to the Chair at BC Transit but on the condition that about half my time could be spent providing legal advice in house. This eventually led to the creation of a full time Director Legal Services position at BC Transit. And then in the fall of 1998, the province decided to create a new public transportation authority which was known as Translink, and the plan was to transfer all of BC Transit's Metro Vancouver operations over to Translink and its subsidiaries in the following year. So those were actually difficult months for BC Transit

employees because we didn't know what was going to happen to our jobs, where we were going to end up working, and who our bosses were going to be. So at one point, I actually heard through the grapevine that I was going to be transferred to one of Translink's operating subsidiaries because the President wanted me to be on his team but I didn't think it was the right place for the legal function to be so I decided to pay the new CEO of Translink a personal visit at his offices, completely uninvited and I had the opportunity to share my views with him and ultimately change his mind, which is actually how I ended up at Translink. So I stayed in the public transportation sector for 30 years because I was energized by the public interest mandate because not everyone gets a chance to make a difference in the lives of so many people.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

So the Law Society fills an important role in regulating the legal profession and protecting the public. What aspects of the Law Society's work most interests you?

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

I was really drawn to this role because of our public interest mandate so in terms of bringing my own unique experience to bear in this role, you know in the public transportation sector we take a customer centered approach to providing essential public services. This means that we have to look at everything we do and we communicate through the lens of the customer. So at the Law Society, I'm particularly interested in supporting access to justice initiatives and I want to see what role the Law Society can play in making legal assistance and information accessible to everyone regardless of their background. I see there are a lot of great organizations doing really good work in terms of helping people with their legal questions and needs but the average person may not always know where to start looking so I'm really looking forward to partnering with other organizations to further access to justice in new ways.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

And having been here for a couple of months since January, what would you say your first impressions of the Law Society are so far and has anything surprised you since you've started here?

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

Well my first impression is there's an excellent, extremely dedicated team of professionals who do amazing work here at the Law Society. Also, the benchers dedicate so many volunteer hours to providing guidance to the profession so clearly there's a very solid foundation of excellence in place here. I'm looking to build on this foundation by exploring new and innovative ways to further our public interest mandate. This is also a particularly critical time for the rule of law and the independence of the legal profession and its regulator. As you know, the Law Society's challenge to the constitutionality of the Legal Profession Act on the basis that the legislation fails to adequately ensure the independence of the legal profession and its regulator is going to be heard this fall. But at the same time, we are obligated to support the transitional planning process toward a single legal regulator under this legislation so as we navigate through these uncertain and uncharted waters, I do feel very privileged to be at the helm of this important organization at this particular time.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

What do you think makes an effective leader and what is your leadership style personally?

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

Well in my view, there's no one way to be an effective leader. I think an effective leader is a person of integrity who leans fearlessly into their own unique strengths rather than trying to emulate someone else. An effective leader works to build a high performing diverse team which has complementary strengths so I would also note that as the needs of an organization change over time, the characteristics of an ideal leader for that organization might change with it. I've personally worked under very different leadership styles over the years and each style has its own unique strengths so I've always tried to take away at least one positive learning from each leader I've worked with.

For my own leadership style, I would describe it as collaborative, people centered and purpose driven so the heart of an organization is its employees because nothing will get done without a strong team. That's why I think it's so important to have an inclusive

workplace culture where differences are genuinely celebrated and everyone feels comfortable contributing in their own unique way and to the best of their ability. As a leader, I'm not the smartest person in the room and I never purport to have all the answers. Instead I strive to build an executive table where we can openly debate issues. There's countless times where you know when I was thinking one thing you know getting into the meeting, you know I might well you know come out of the meeting with a different outcome you know in terms of my thought process so I really am energized by the debate that we can have around the boardroom table. So I take personally great pride in developing high potential team members by encouraging them to say yes to new things and taking reasonable risks. You know sometimes as lawyers we tend to be risk averse and so you know stepping out of our comfort zone and taking a risk can be a bit scary so I do think that you know in an organization it is important to take risks because that's what comes with trying new things.

Also, a part of my responsibility as a leader is to keep the organization focused on its purpose and mandate. You know during times of intense pressure and uncertainty, sometimes we have a complex problem. It can be really hard to know you know what's the right thing to do but I find that if I put a purpose driven lens on the problem that really helps provide clarity around what the right course of action is.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

How do you manage and deal with stresses and challenges that come with taking on leadership roles?

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

I think it's really important to take care of yourself and you know I'm talking about all aspects of ourselves, you know our physical wellbeing, our mental health as well as taking the time to do things that feed our souls. For myself personally, I try to carve out time to do things like go to the gym, I recently joined a running club and knowing that I've got a community of people that are sort of waiting there for me really does kind of get me out of bed and into doing things that I know are going to be good for me. And the problems that I might have before I start exercising always seem not as significant after, you know really separating, creating space where I'm not working, not looking at my

phone which I know is really hard to do and I'm probably one of the worst culprits but giving ourselves that time to separate, take vacation, you know have downtime, really be present in the moment with our families, you know that's also really, really important for renewal. I would also say that it's important to access counselling resources and professional help that are available through an employer for example, or for lawyers we have the Lawyer Wellbeing Hub on the Law Society website where those supports are available to you. And I would encourage everyone to access those resources sooner rather than later because I do think that you know just like with physical health, the earlier we can attend to our mental health I think that will lead to much better outcomes.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

And as you know, the Law Society's been named a top employer for the fourth year in a row; what are your thoughts about a healthy workplace and how does flexibility play a role in that?

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

I think a healthy workplace recognizes that our work and personal lives have an impact on each other and can't be looked at separately. So I think the best approach is one that gives flexibility to employees to address personal needs without compromising productivity and other work objectives. For example, I was the executive sponsor of the Caregivers Employee Resource Group at Translink. We talked about the everyday challenges of childcare and elder care and how there's various ways we can provide our employees with much needed support. I shared personally about my experiences with caring for my elderly parents while also ensuring that work was very well attended to.

At the Law Society, I'm really pleased to see we have hybrid and remote work, we have flex and alternate work arrangements, maternity and paternity leave top up, compassionate care leave and other progressive leave options in place so having this flexibility as well as health and wellness supports really do go a long way in making a welcome environment for employees that have diverse backgrounds and responsibilities.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

So you're our first Asian CEO and also the first woman CEO at the Law Society. In our current social climate, we're seeing equity, diversity and inclusion being questioned; how important do you think equity, diversity and inclusion are in the legal profession or just more generally?

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

The ultimate goal of DEI initiatives is to remove barriers and allow people to contribute fully in their own unique way. If there were no barriers, you would expect to see professions and workplaces reflect the diversity in our community but this is not the case, for example, within the legal profession, and I think the public is best served by a more representative and inclusive legal profession that does reflect the diversity of British Columbia. You know identifying and dismantling barriers is a multifaceted continuous process that requires true commitment, real resources, having people learn difficult truths, uncovering our own implicit biases, and the courage to acknowledge that you know the way we've always done things may not necessarily be the only way or the best way. So it's not a surprise to me that organizations that only give DEI lip service will be the first ones to fall away so in the context of workplaces.

DEI helps organizations make better decisions and have better outcomes. So for example, diverse perspectives should be represented around the decision making table and each participant should be able to contribute fully without feeling the need to have to hold back. And I just want to take a moment to talk about the importance of representation. Taking myself for example, as you've pointed out, I don't necessarily look and sound like the typical CEO. The impact of representation, especially in leadership roles I think is much greater than many people might realize. The other day, I was chatting with bencher Katrina Harry, KC and we were talking about the importance of representation and she referred to the definition that privilege is not being aware of the barriers that you don't have and how the rest of us will look for faces that look like ours in every aspect of our lives because we are few and far between. So representation can inspire people to reach for opportunities they might not otherwise have because when people see it then they can believe it.

So I've been approached numerous times over my career about how they appreciate seeing me in a leadership role and I think this also highlights the responsibility that comes with representation. I'm always conscious that my personal successes and failures may not just be a reflection of my own performance. I think I mentioned earlier that it's important to have the right CEO at the right time for a particular organization so you know for the Law Society for example, we are going through some uncertainty with the single legal regulator initiative and in terms of changes in society that are happening so rapidly so one of the strengths that I bring would be to provide steady leadership and guidance as we go through these challenging times ahead.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

What advice would you give to your younger self or legal professionals who are early in their career?

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

The first piece of advice I would give is to fearlessly lean into being yourself and not to try to be someone else. So early in my career, I was a bit hesitant to speak up in meetings, especially if there were a lot of senior people present, but after a while, with a lot of listening and learning, I realize I had a unique perspective that might be helpful for others to think about. So I started taking some personal risks by speaking up in meetings and putting up my hand to express interest in growth opportunities. At first, my contributions didn't always seem to gain traction but after some time and I, with some perseverance, I noticed that people started to pick up on some of the things I was saying and I could see how having a new idea can shape the direction of a discussion. So you know taking personal risk can mean that you, sometimes you'll make a mistake, and which I did, but the important thing is to learn from our mistakes and continue to move forward rather than sort of dwelling on you know what we could have done differently in the moment but really continue to move forward and focus on what's coming up.

In order to gain insights into your own strengths and opportunities for growth, I would encourage people to seek out meaningful feedback from others including through 360 degree reviews and executive coaching opportunities. You know I personally had, [inaudible 18:09] recall my first 360 review and I was quite anxious about it, you know



worried about what people were going to say and whether or not that would line up with you know my own views of my own strengths and opportunities. But I found after the first experience that it was really illuminating to get the feedback from the review, you know people put, invested time and attention into giving me honest feedback. I found the feedback was actually quite consistent with each other and so you know I really kind of leaned into improvement opportunities. And so then the next time I had a 360 review, I was really quite excited and eager to you know get some, some additional feedback and I tried to add as many reviewers on my list as I could fit in. So that's why I would encourage others to do the same thing. So you know growing and developing means doing things that are new and potentially uncomfortable so getting comfortable with the uncomfortable is also part of the learning process.

I think secondly I would say that when circumstances are challenging and you're faced with a dilemma, I would encourage people to take the long view. You know sometimes there's a lot of pressure to make decisions that might have short term benefits but they're not really the right decision in the long run. So one of the ways you can test this is to ask yourself whether you would make the same decision if you had a complete change in leadership and you had to justify your new decision to them. I think I first heard this advice from Anna Fung, KC, one of our former presidents of the Law Society.

And related to taking the long view, I would say try not to sweat the small stuff, you know focus on what really matters in the long run. And thirdly, I would encourage people to invest time in encouraging others to speak up, put up their hands for opportunities that come their way and you just never know what planting that seed will lead to. You know for this particular position that I have now at the Law Society, a colleague encouraged me to apply and it was certainly a factor in my decision to put my hand up for it.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Well we're very glad that you're here and I want to thank you so much for your time and this opportunity to get to know you.

**Gigi Chen-Kuo:**

Thank you so much.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Thank you for listening. If you want to find out more about the Law Society and its work and priorities, please visit our website [@lawsociety.bc.ca](http://lawsociety.bc.ca).