

Daily Journal

SEPTEMBER 19, 2018

TOP 100 LAWYERS IN CALIFORNIA 2018

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Debra Wong Yang

GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER LLP | LOS ANGELES

SPECIALTY: WHITE COLLAR CRIMINAL DEFENSE, INVESTIGATIONS

Yang is the go-to attorney for crises that make headlines and those highly confidential in nature. She made headlines herself as the first Asian-American woman to serve as a U.S. attorney, and brings to the table her experience as a Los Angeles County superior court judge. Now, Yang serves as chair of Gibson Dunn's firmwide crisis management practice group.

"The case that has had the most impact on me was one I prosecuted as an assistant United States attorney," Yang said. "The victim was a real estate agent who was kidnapped and raped across state lines. It let me see the power from being a lawyer which allows you to be the voice for those who cannot speak or articulate for themselves. This is the tremendous power of being a lawyer."

In July 2017, the Los Angeles Times disclosed Carmen Puliafito, former dean of the Keck School of Medicine's drug and alcohol abuse as well as a second life involved with criminals

and other drug users. Puliafito left his position at USC in March 2016.

Yang led a review of the university's procedures and response for the executive committee of the USC Board of Trustees.

"What has changed over time is the amount of scrutiny placed on a board," Yang said. "There isn't the luxury of time because the demands can be pressing. You need to be quick yet factual and conduct a thorough investigation."

Like the USC matter, many of Yang's clients are dealing with fast-moving crises and significant media coverage.

"There is a limitation as to what a lawyer is allowed to say," Yang remarked. "You need to be respectful of the privilege, mindful of competing needs, and relay to the public that an adequate response is being marshaled."

Yang also represents MGM Resorts International in response to the Oct. 1, 2017 mass shooting that killed 58 people and left hundreds injured.

"There was a need to respond to the



human aspect of it, trying to find and help guide the client to a good solution while dealing with a tragic event," Yang said.

— Sean Kagan