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Between People and the Law that Serves Them

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How did a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) from India end up as a big-shot Immigration attorney in the U.S.? It was 1981, and Navneet S. Chugh arrived in the U.S., with his "American Dream." Joining a law school, his dream was to get into the corporate sector and provide good-will services to the society. However, ambitious Chugh didn't want to waste his prior education and kept his CPA practice alive. By the time he cleared the bar exam, Chugh had a pile of legal cases on his desk and soon, it was time to put his theoretical practice to reality. Chugh's very first trial won, against all odds to everyone's surprise, including his client's.

Incorporating the Chugh Firm in 1985, Chugh utilized his CPA expertise to initially provide only tax and litigation services. He recalls the unexpected opportunity he got 20 years ago, which successfully turned him into a fulltime immigration attorney: "A CEO of a big client of ours approached me during lunch and asked me 'Hey, how come you don't do our immigration work but do everything else?' I responded saying that I never got into it and don't know how to do it. The CEO was so confident with my work that he wouldn't take no for an answer. And the next day, I received a box full of files with 50 H1s to go." Today, with ten offices and a staff of 250 including 114 lawyers and CPAs, the Chugh Firm not only handles tax, but also legal services for immigration, corporate, mergers & acquisitions, and employment law, family law, real estate, criminal law and various other practice areas.

Unpredictable Challenges

The U.S. immigration landscape has always been a very edgy and competitive field. In the past few years, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services started to enforce stricter policies, making the entire immigration process a cumbersome task for the immigrant community. Although the rules have not changed drastically, the scrutiny under which the rules are reviewed and enforced has increased substantially. One of the reasons for this is to prevent fraudulent practices. For example, although the H-1B Visa rules have not changed much, the interpretation of the rules under the regulations has explicitly changed. This has made it a daunting and challenging task for immigration attorneys to handle their clients' cases well. In order to reduce clients' frustration, as they need to jump through many loops to receive an approval, the attorneys at the Chugh firm observe trends and formulate strategies that eliminate client hardships and reduce cost. They provide clients with a clear understanding of what is being filed on their behalf and why certain personal or confidential documents are being submitted to USCIS, making them aware of the importance of providing complete and accurate information upon initiation of a case.

Uncertain Landscape

The global financial crisis and terrorism concerns have made the U.S. immigration policy more insular and enforcement, more aggressive. More than anything else, uncertainty is currently plaguing the immigration law. The immigration reform bill, sitting with Congress, has made advising clients, who look to attorneys for clarity, a daunting task. "It is one thing to advise clients on how to deal with the law, but it is a whole another beast to counsel clients on how to approach what may or may not be the law soon, without sounding incompetent," says Chugh.

Additionally, there is a huge backlog with the Department of Labor and USCIS. As the Permanent Labor Certification Program application processing time is approximately one year, it has a huge effect on

those under non-immigrant visas. "We had instances where our clients got stuck in the administrative processing or securities check stage due to name or birth issues. Consulates took longer in visa processing and issued request for additional documents which delayed the whole process," says Chugh.

Unwavering Commitment

Given any day, Chugh prefers to handle complicated and challenging cases, especially those that other attorneys have not had success with. "Million dollar green card EB5 cases are fun to do since it requires experience in corporate and tax matters in addition to immigration, and we have had a 100 percent success rate with them," says Chugh. For him, cases that involve corporate, tax, litigation and immigration matters-all rolled into one, are the most satisfying. It shows the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to legal cases since those are a true reflection of life.

With over 25 years of experience in immigration law, the one aspect of practice which Chugh constantly likes to imbibe at his firm, is connecting with the clients and making the relationship more personal, to take off the business edge. "If lawyers focus on doing good work, and treating every piece of work as if it is their 'personal' work and not focus on 'making money' nothing is difficult," says Chugh. He believes that an Immigration lawyer's role is very unique as they become general counselor for foreign citizens and act as mediator between clients and government immigration authorities. "We provide clients advice and guidance for matters such as visa applications, green cards, citizenship and naturalization, deportation issues, and employment for non-citizens. By doing so, we help in contributing to the immigrating population growth and adding vibrant cultures in America. We are a valued friend," he adds. The Chugh firm's staff comprises of highly motivated, knowledgeable and academically qualified lawyers and paralegals. They take pride in the quality of work and attention to detail. Since the attorneys are well-versed in other areas of law such as criminal, family and corporate law, which often have an impact on immigration cases, they provide a comprehensive solution to various needs of immigration clients.

Urbanized Business Approach

With the advent of social media and blogs, clients' access to information and ability to compare cases has increased. In terms of expectations, clients are looking for insight and expertise that they cannot easily find from the internet. There is an open line of communication between employers and their competitors as well as employees and others in the immigration process. This constant flow of communication allows clients to compare and contrast the firm's services and strategies over others. "The visibility of our services and strategies raises the expectation of our clients; leading clients to desire exceptional service that is available and affordable. Thankfully our firm has always had a policy of replying to clients within 24 hours (if not sooner) at an affordable price," inputs Chugh. With Chugh firm's popularity growing to new heights, they look forward to certain qualities in clients in order to carry forward most productive relationships. "Best clients are those who maintain integrity and clear communications throughout the legal process. We expect them to treat us as partners in their business and not just vendors providing a service and lastly they must show commitment to quality work and upkeep on-time monetary transactions with our firm," says Chugh.

Uphill Roadmap

In the coming years, Immigration sector will continue its journey towards complex protocols. Chugh says that there is a dire need for competent immigration attorneys. "I will welcome our young generation into this area of law. Their work will directly affect people's lives. So they need to be detailed, patient, efficient and updated on the changes in immigration laws, policies, and practice trends of different government agencies. There is a lot of work to be done in this area and they will be an added value to this area of practice."

As the firm continues to face the rough road, one model idea remains at its core-the four A's of assurance: Able, Available, Affordable, and Affable. This core is driving them in whatever they do, providing quality assistance and success in every case the Chugh Firm attends.
