

## **Success in the FBI and Founding a FAPAC Chapter**

A Conversation with FAPAC FBI Chapter President Lan Caohuy-Rifkin

The key to success is working hard, according to Lan Caohuy-Rifkin, the President of the FAPAC-FBI Chapter and a current Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) employee. Her life is a first-hand example of how hard work can pay off in your career. "It's about how you conduct the business and how you project yourself with other people; that counts for a lot in the Bureau," Caohuy-Rifkin said.

As a teenager, Caohuy-Rifkin immigrated from Vietnam in 1981. She attended the University of Maryland Global Campus, where she majored in Information Systems Management, a new area of study at the time. From 1984-2010, she worked her way up as a contractor data technician to working at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). One of her many projects included supporting the development of the Hubble Space Telescope.

At the FBI, Caohuy-Rifkin currently serves as the Program Manager under Information Security Workforce Development. She leads a technical team specialized in technical writing, software developing and strategic business operations to enhance the cyber security of the Bureau. Caohuy-Rifkin states that she finds a lot of pleasure in doing her job. "I've been in this position for about a couple years and am still learning," she said.

Caohuy-Rifkin got her start at the FBI from a combination of two things: simple genuine networking and spontaneous luck. "I was networking with one of the unit chiefs at the FBI and just had casual conversations in the hallway. I got to know him and his work and he got to know me and what I do. When the position opened in the FBI, he reached out to me and he asked if I [was] interested," she said.

Neither positively nor negatively, she doesn't feel that her intersectional identity as an Asian American woman affects her career in the Bureau. "It doesn't matter what race and gender you are as long as you perform, as long as you set the standards for yourself high, and you do what you are supposed to do," she said.

Instead, Caohuy-Rifkin attributes her success to her work ethic. "I strive for success. If I get a project I want to do my best --nothing but the best. It's not so much about my identity as an Asian, and I don't look at myself that way. I look at my performance," Caohuy-Rifkin said.

She has learned that working in the FBI requires being able to adapt to constant change: "I was shipped from one branch to a different branch about four times in four positions, but every time there's a change in the position and new environment."

At each transition, she embraced the change and used it to her advantage. "I learned about new technologies, new environments, and new people," Caohuy-Rifkin said, "Every day is a different situation. The beauty about the Bureau is that nothing is the same."

Through FAPAC, she has gained unique opportunities and built many essential skills for her career: “[FAPAC] helped me to be a stronger leader. The most important things I learned from FAPAC were communication, saying what you have in your mind, and networking,” she said.

When Caohuy-Rifkin recognized a large AAPI community within the Bureau, but no FAPAC chapter in the agency to bring community members together, she founded one. Now she’s able to share what she learned from FAPAC with other AAPI FBI employees. “I feel more comfortable sharing with others what I learned as a leader. This draws their interests, so they join,” she said.

Caohuy-Rifkin believes community groups like FAPAC are invaluable to making a cohesive workspace. “Once you share knowledge and share cultures with other people, other people understand you more and respect you more. It makes it easier for you to communicate,” she said. “It is important so we can have a harmonious environment and community that works well together.”

For those who are interested in opportunities at the Bureau, there are many types of careers in the FBI: “We have different divisions doing different things. We have Forensics, Cybersecurity, Information Technology, Special Agents, Intelligence Analysts, Language Analysts, and professional support staff, so it's not just one thing that we specialize in.” Because of the abundance of opportunities and places to find them, such as [FBIjobs.gov](https://www.fbi.gov/jobs), she encourages young people to explore different career possibilities.

To those who want a job in the FBI or in the federal government, Caohuy-Rifkin has this advice: “Just get yourself out there marketing yourself. Work hard, explore the area that you’re interested in, and follow through. You can find a place for yourself as long as you are open minded and willing to learn.”