

## ***District 12***

### ***Ansen Zhi-Han Lai, San Francisco 2026***

#### **How do you work with or lead a team?**

My philosophy is that leading a team and working within one should be fundamentally similar – the only difference is that as a leader, I’m given the platform to share my beliefs and inspire others. This philosophy has guided me as the California District 11 Events Director, where I led a team of six to raise \$150,000+ for a dental conference in Los Angeles for 230 participants. Whether leading or working in a team, I focus on setting a strategic direction, creating actionable plans and fostering a thriving team environment.

I emphasize aligning tasks with passions, which boosts productivity and morale. For example, I assigned social and outgoing members to connect with vendors, creative individuals to manage marketing, and confident speakers to emcee breakout rooms. This approach lets team members pursue what excites them while ensuring the work is productive.

I prioritize open communication, favoring voice messages or video updates that allow team members to engage when convenient, with monthly team meetings to adjust strategies and support those facing work or personal challenges. When a team member could no longer commit due to personal challenges, I redistributed tasks thoughtfully to ensure progress and avoid overwhelming others.

Finally, I encourage team members to both give and receive feedback, creating a collaborative work dynamic. I balance accountability with autonomy by setting reasonable, agreed-upon deadlines. By staying positive and supportive, I make it easier for my team to seek help, ensuring we grow together as a cohesive unit.

#### **What leadership experiences have equipped you for the District Trustee role?**

My leadership experiences have equipped me well for the District Trustee role by demonstrating my ability to organize large-scale events, advocate for students, and foster professional connections. As ASDA District 11 Events Director, I successfully raised over \$160,000 and led a team of eight to plan a major conference with 230 attendees, handling logistics, speaker invitations, marketing, and social events. This experience refined my ability to collaborate across institutions and manage high-stakes projects.

Additionally, my role as President of UCSF’s Taiwanese American Student Association highlights my ability to build and sustain student organizations. As the chapter founder, I expanded membership to over 100 students across multiple UCSF schools and organized six networking events, strengthening interprofessional connections.

In my leadership roles with the Pediatric Dentistry Club and Practice Management Club, I facilitated guest speaker events and discussions, ensuring students had access to valuable mentorship and career guidance.

Beyond UCSF, my tenure as President of the NYU Abu Dhabi Pre-Health Advisory Board demonstrates my advocacy for student success, as I established a professional network, moderated career panels, and provided mentorship for students navigating applications.

Through these experiences, I have honed my ability to lead teams, communicate effectively, and drive initiatives that benefit students—skills that will allow me to represent and support ASDA members as a District Trustee.

**Why are you interested in the District Trustee role and what do you hope to accomplish in this position?**

- 1 Build a sense of community through events - using my firsthand experience as District 11 Events Director, I plan to elevate the Western Regional Conference by focusing on mentorship and networking opportunities that bring us closer as a district. Additionally, I plan to sponsor 25 District 12 students for a week-long dental volunteer trip to Montego Bay, Jamaica, bringing people together through service.
- 2 Enhanced funding for school chapters - drawing from my experience raising over \$130,000 from 25+ companies and leveraging strong connections with dental societies and national leaders, I will create a transparent district-wide sponsor database, supporting chapters to expand their funding sources. This initiative will empower school chapters to scale events, boost engagement, and nurture student passion projects.
- 3 Amplify each school's voice within ASDA - people often forget District ASDA exists to serve its school chapters. Whether inviting a speaker to inspire students interested in community dentistry or supporting flight costs for Northern California attendees after a canceled conference, I've always prioritized the needs of the students I represent. As trustee, I'll personally visit schools to actively listen and address the unique challenges of each chapter. Every school's voice deserves to be heard, and I'm committed to being a proactive advocate for all.

**What are 2-3 issues important to dental students?**

Transition from Preclinical to Clinical Training

One of the biggest challenges for dental students is the shift from simulation labs to treating real patients. While preclinical training builds foundational skills, nothing fully prepares students for managing patient expectations, handling complications, and making clinical decisions under

pressure. The learning curve is steep, and students often struggle with confidence and efficiency in their early clinical experiences.

#### Debt and Financial Pressure

The cost of dental school is a major concern, with tuition and living expenses often leading to six-figure debt. Many students worry about loan repayment, particularly when deciding between specialty training, practice ownership, or associate positions. The financial burden can also limit opportunities for externships, research, or volunteering, which are important for career development.

#### Work-Life Balance and Mental Health

Dental school is intense, with long hours of studying, patient care, and exams. The pressure to perform well academically while also gaining clinical experience can lead to burnout. Many students struggle to find time for self-care, relationships, and personal interests. Support systems, including faculty mentorship and mental health resources, play a crucial role in helping students navigate these challenges.