The Human Side of Leadership



How Evan Loh came to see excellence as the art of being human

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When Evan Loh entered a patient's hospital room, he was often accompanied by fellows, residents, and medical students—sometimes as many as ten people.

But rather than stand over the patient, Evan would pull up a chair and sit at eye level.

"You have to understand that patients are scared when they meet you," he explains.

A frightened patient may not be ready to absorb a diagnosis or understand a treatment plan. Before medicine could do its work, Evan believed he needed to establish trust.

> "The art of medicine is completely wrapped up into your ability to be human."

That belief would guide his career as a physician and, eventually, shape his leadership as CEO of Paratek Pharmaceuticals.

Raised to Excel

Evan grew up in New Haven, Connecticut, surrounded by a close-knit community of first-generation Chinese immigrants. His parents had arrived from China in the 1950s, and without extended family nearby, other immigrant families became their support system.

Education was paramount. Nearly every adult Evan knew held an MD or PhD, and his peers were exceptional achievers—attending Harvard and Yale, entering MIT at 16, or winning national music competitions.

Was he compared to them?

"Every day, all day long."

As the firstborn son and grandson in a traditional Chinese family, Evan understood the expectations. His mother's family included two Confucian scholars, and academic excellence was nonnegotiable.

"I better be studying," he recalls. "And I better get good grades."

Even his talent as a violinist offered no alternative career path. When he suggested becoming a professional musician, his mother quickly redirected him toward something more practical—like medicine.

But alongside those demanding expectations, his mother taught him lessons about empathy and fairness. When Evan questioned why others didn't work as hard or achieve as much, she reminded him that he couldn't know their circumstances or the support they had received. His responsibility was to do his own best, not judge someone else's results.

She also prepared him for the realities of being Chinese in America.

"Just remember, you have yellow skin," she told him, explaining that he would need to be twice as good to receive the same recognition as someone who was white.

"That was my metric that I lived with," Evan says.

Together, those lessons shaped a lifelong philosophy: demand excellence of yourself, but approach others with humility and an understanding that everyone starts from a different place.

Rediscovering His Roots

Evan's mother also wanted her children to assimilate into American life. They played baseball and tennis, excelled academically, and learned to speak English without an accent.

But by college, Evan realized that assimilation had come at a cost. Mandarin had been his first language, yet he could no longer speak it.

Surrounded by bilingual Asian classmates who moved comfortably between cultures, Evan felt disconnected from his own heritage. Determined to reclaim it, he spent three years studying Mandarin and Chinese culture alongside his pre-med coursework.

The experience transformed how he understood people.

Becoming comfortable "toggling between two very different cultures," he says, made him better able to support people from different backgrounds.

"With language comes culture," Evan explains. Understanding someone's language means understanding something about their upbringing, experiences, and worldview.

It was a lesson that would prove invaluable in medicine, where treating an illness and understanding the person living with it are two very different things.

When Every Decision Matters

Evan specialized in advanced heart failure and heart transplantation, caring for patients whose cardiologists had exhausted other options. Sometimes he could offer a lifesaving intervention or transplant. Other times, all he could offer was compassion.

The responsibility was enormous, particularly when decisions had to be made without complete information.

He remembers one night at 2 a.m., caring for a critically ill 20-year-old patient. With only a nurse beside him and no clear roadmap, Evan focused on what he could control.

His approach was simple: get the patient to 6 a.m.

What three things could kill this patient in the next four hours?

Address those first. By morning, new information might guide the next decisions.

> "You never have a complete data set."

That discipline—prioritizing immediate threats, making the best decision possible, and adapting as new information emerged—became central to how Evan managed pressure.

Equally important was the willingness to examine his decisions afterward.

When a patient died despite his efforts, Evan returned to the questions he taught his students: What did I learn? What didn't I do? What could I have done differently?

Sometimes the answer was that everything possible had been done. Sometimes it wasn't.

Humility, Evan believed, was essential to becoming a better physician.

"If you're humble when you walk into a patient's room, you'll never miss anything," he says. Arrogance, on the other hand, could cause a physician to overlook something critical.

His understanding of that responsibility began long before medical school.

Evan's father was an anesthesiologist who never hesitated when patients needed him. Family plans were interrupted by hospital calls, and once, during a snowstorm, he walked two miles to the hospital because driving was impossible.

"If I don't go, someone might die," his father explained.

But showing up was only part of the lesson. Evan also watched how his father treated people, putting frightened patients at ease and earning the respect of colleagues.

Technical excellence mattered. So did kindness.

From the Bedside to the Boardroom

Today, as CEO of Paratek Pharmaceuticals, Evan draws on those same principles to lead an organization developing medicines that improve patients' lives.

The pressures of business are real, but Evan keeps them in perspective.

"No one's going to die," he says, comparing the stakes of corporate decisions with those he faced as a physician.

Still, leadership requires many of the same skills: making decisions without complete information, adjusting to changing circumstances, and remaining calm when others are looking for direction.

"One of my jobs as the leader here is to project equipoise," Evan explains. "Because if I'm vibrating, guess what? The organization is vibrating."

When he's uncertain, he allows himself to worry privately rather than transfer that anxiety to his team.

But his medical background influences more than his decision-making. It shapes the company's purpose.

"Patients are the center and the focus of what we do," Evan says.

He recognizes that Paratek must operate as a successful business. But behind every business decision is a patient—someone's mother, father, sibling, or grandparent.

"If the business goes well, our patients do well."

For Evan, the work is about more than financial performance. It's about employees who care deeply about doing their jobs well because they understand the people who ultimately benefit.

Although he no longer practices medicine at the bedside, he sees his role as an extension of that responsibility.

"We are actually creating incredibly innovative medicines that help patients live better lives," he says.

> "I'm functionally at the bedside because of that innovation."

A Legacy of Human Connection

Evan's commitment to helping others extends beyond Paratek.

He and his wife recognize the opportunities their hard work has created and believe those advantages bring a responsibility to support others.

Their philanthropy focuses on immigrant families and first-generation students, including a Chinatown charter school his wife helped establish, scholarships, and the Welcoming Center for New Philadelphians.

The work reflects a lesson Evan learned from his mother decades earlier: people begin life with different opportunities, and the support they receive can change everything.

It also reflects the example set by his father.

During medical school, Evan completed a rotation alongside him. He witnessed firsthand not only his father's technical abilities but also his extraordinary gift for connecting with patients and colleagues.

"I got to see that," Evan remembers. "I got to see that."

Years later, he understands what he was witnessing.

"It's a legacy, right? And when you see that in action, it's like, 'Oh, that's good.'"

> The greatest impact of leadership isn't always measured by what we accomplish, but by the difference we make in the lives of others.

At 67, Evan has experienced what might seem like two professional lifetimes—first as a physician, then as a pharmaceutical CEO. But he isn't finished.

"My journey's not done yet," he says.

As he has grown older, Evan has become increasingly aware of the impact of everyday interactions and the relationships he builds.

His definition of success is no longer simply about professional accomplishments, innovative medicines, or business results. It is about how people feel after an encounter with him.

"My legacy is pretty simple," Evan says. He hopes people leave every personal interaction feeling respected and having experienced a meaningful human connection.

From a hospital bedside to the CEO's office, that has remained his guiding principle.