

Bienvenido U. Juan: My Brother, My Mentor

PACITA JUAN



I had the good fortune of choosing to work with my older brother, Kuya Sonny, many years ago when my father asked us to manage the family business in a factory in Novaliches. Young people would probably think that the best place to work in was in the Central Business District of Makati with the skyscrapers and the malls. But I chose to report to the factory in Novaliches, at the boundary of Caloocan and Quezon City. It was not “sexy” to say you worked in Novaliches, much less in a steel fabrication business. At 20, you wanted to say you worked in an ad agency or in a bank.

He first told me when I asked him for a job at the family business, that he could do everything and that he did not need help. Ever my stubborn self, I chose to be assigned with him, the person who said he did not need me. Maybe at the time I already knew there was a lot to learn from him.

Kuya Sonny was “Dad” when Dad was away on business trips, which were very frequent, being in the export/import business. He would spend almost every other month traveling and Kuya Sonny would stand in as “Dad” to check on us younger siblings, Mom, and the household.

Our first trial partnerships were funny and full of experiences. As we would see each other everyday at work, we would find time to have coffee and discuss “sidelines” or other business away from the company. At 20-something I would invest with him in various businesses. He would look for the opportunity and I would do the math. Math was just a little notebook with all my notes on our monies and our profits. He taught me to always put money into play, and that money lying idle was not the best way to keep it.

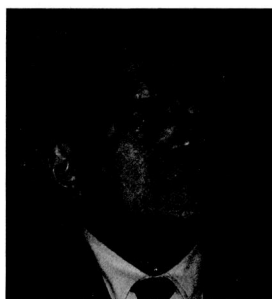
He also took me to the banks to meet senior bank officials and taught me how to talk to them, not to pay up, and just to show myself and keep the banks assured that I was a good client and credit risk. “A

business always has loans,” he said. “It is alright to borrow for as long as you put it in the business and you have no vices.”

He also showed me how to do business with suppliers by using our name alone. Much like my father who took me to steel yards in my teens, Kuya Sonny would introduce me to suppliers to whom we owed much money. He would show me how they would deliver materials even on just a phone call and no check. It was by pure relationship, no cash.

Best of all, he never admonished me for failure. If we did not make a go of one of our business ventures, we just closed the book and started a new one. We learned to brush our knees and stand up again. We had many ideas for our “sidelines” and not all of them would succeed but it never stopped us from trying another business again.

I think the best thing he ever taught me was to trust—to learn to trust people so that they could trust you. The next best thing I learned was to be humble and know that there is a Higher Being who watches over everything we do.



Sonny Juan



Pacita “Chit” Juan, a natural-born entrepreneur, founded many startups the most famous being Figaro Coffee Co., in 1993. She also founded ECHO store, a lifestyle retail store centered on organic, natural and community-based products sourced from all over the country. She continues to pursue her coffee advocacy as President of the Philippine Coffee Board Inc., an NGO tasked with revitalizing the Philippine coffee industry. She also serves as Trustee of the Peace and Equity Foundation.