

Beethoven L. Rualo and Other Mentors in my Life

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I consider myself to be so blessed with having mentors from different walks of life, but because of the limitations of space, I will mention only the most significant in this article. Intentionally or unintentionally, I have become what I am today mainly because of the various influences these people had on me. To them, I owe my endless gratitude and appreciation.

My mother was my greatest mentor. A modest public school teacher, she inculcated in me the value of hard work, excellence, dignified living, and ambition. She was a strong-willed woman, and I was an independent and rebellious person by nature. Even as a child, I did not want to be controlled or be told what to do. I loved to argue and disobey orders. I picked fights whenever I saw an opportunity to cause one. While others despised me for this, my mother believed it was a strength that should be nurtured and developed. And capitalizing on these same traits, she molded me into the kind of person that I am today.

My husband, a kindhearted man with simple needs, is another influential figure in my life. He serves as my confidant and spiritual advisor. Although he is my extreme opposite, he complements my weaknesses. He teaches me the value of simplicity, fairness, patience and empathy. He believes that the best decision can be arrived at when one situates himself in the shoes of the other person. To him, a person's success is measured by the success of his family.

The late Beethoven L. Rualo, former Commissioner of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), helped a lot in shaping my career. I served as his technical assistant while he was the Deputy Commissioner for Operations, and then as the Commissioner of the BIR. He had so much faith and trust in me, pushing me to be my best, and always looking for

opportunities where I could show my capabilities. The trust he put in me was tremendous such that, even long after he has gone, I still keep trying my best to live up to his standards for me, trying to prove to myself and to everyone that I deserve such generous trust.

And I now come to realize that it was this trust that started it all; it ignited everything that happened thereafter. It gave me that confidence and stamina to compete, move up the corporate ladder, and pursue the career that was meant for me. It is this same trust which gave me the strength and the power to face difficulties and solve them successfully, the same one which empowered me to keep on going, the one that guided me in making decisions.

Mentoring was never a formal arrangement between Commissioner Rualo and me. It was not one where I intentionally chose him as my mentor or he chose me as his apprentice. Rather, it was more of a natural consequence that developed over time, perhaps because we found good chemistry in our personalities and style. There was mutual trust and we believed in each other's capability. Commissioner Rualo's way of mentoring was different from the rest. It was not like a theoretical lecture or a problem exercise. It was more of practical and situational—consistent, coherent and sustained. I felt his mentoring was always there.

Whenever I asked for his advice on a problem, he would throw back the question at me and ask, "How would you do it if you were to decide?" Once I gave my answer, he would respond by saying, "If you believe this is the right thing to do, then go for it and I will back you up. If something goes wrong, I will take full responsibility for it." How could I fail this man who was willing to take responsibility for my own mistakes? This taught me to be responsible, cautious and decisive so as not to cause him harm.

As I was fresh out of school and full of idealism, Comm. Rualo opened my eyes up to realities and made me understand that the real world is not the ideal but should still be embraced and considered especially in making policy decisions that would affect the lives of others. He taught me to be pragmatic and flexible. He once said, "Ilagay mo ang tenga mo sa lupa at dinggin mo ang yapak ng nakakarami." (Put your ears to the ground and hear the voice of the people.)

Comm. Rualo was my best marketing agent. In meeting important people, he would make me tag along and proudly introduce me to

them as “This is Dick, a CPA-Lawyer, a Harvard graduate and a writer. She was responsible for this and that...” One time, he was in a table of dignitaries coming from different countries, and I approached him to give him some documents. He suddenly stood up and proudly introduced me to the group, and all the rest followed him, stood up and shook my hand. At that time, I felt I didn’t deserve what he did. But looking back now, these were the same events that pushed me to work harder and prove to him that I was worthy of those praises after all.

Not everyone is blessed with meeting someone like Comm. Rualo. It was a coincidence but perhaps it was also a destiny. When I was young, I used to believe that each one of us has a destiny and that whatever I would become as an adult was what I was destined and born to be. As Paolo Coelho, the Portuguese writer would say, “all the forces in the universe would conspire to lead me to that destiny.” Until now, I still believe this is how it is going to be.



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