

Evelyn R. Singson: Great Mentor, Greater Friend

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My life's journey would have taken a very different path had I not been the fortunate recipient of mentoring by various individuals, mostly women. Unselfishly, they invested their time and affection on me to share their life's learnings. They guided me in my search for life's truths. They showed me the way to achieve my full potential. My life's tale offers proof that, indeed, we meet the mentors and friends we need at the particular time we need them. Seems like a grand divine plan.

In late 1972, just days after the declaration of martial law in our country, I returned from a three-year stay in Chicago, Illinois's University of Chicago, where I was a graduate student's wife. I left the country as a starry-eyed bride and returned as a wife and mother of a one-year old daughter. Fortuitously, at this juncture in my life, mulling whether to join the academe or the corporate world, I met Evelyn Reyes Singson. And the die was cast. I joined the corporate world instead of the academe. Evelyn became my mentor, my friend. And for the rest of the next three decades to the present, we have remained friends and mentor, mentor and friend.

Meeting Evelyn in the early 1970s was a defining moment for me. She showed me, and the other wide-eyed young women she was mentoring, that leadership in the male-dominated corporate world of business finance, could be within our reach, if we were willing to work for it. It meant relentlessly doing research, writing, reading, interviewing experts and working six-day weeks when necessary. We had to forget our bashfulness and insecurities and learned to speak our

minds out in public, because our thoughts and enlightened opinions mattered. We learned that it was not only important to know, it was just as important to advocate. Together with other women she nurtured, we focused on our careers, juggling our multiple roles of wife, mother and career person, in the process unwittingly breaking glass ceilings. Evelyn Singson showed us the way.

I first met Evelyn at her executive office at the Bancom Development Corporation, the company of choice in the 1970s. That meeting has been etched in my mind so vividly, as though it happened only a week ago instead of over three decades ago. I remember entering her room with some trepidation. I looked around and could only think of three words: power, power, power. I caught her sizing me up as I stood before her in, as I recall now, an outrageous outfit, more hippie than office. I met her “cold” stare with as much poise as I could muster, so aware that her presence, seated behind her formidable executive desk simply screamed: success, success, success.

Fortunately for me we quickly found some common ground, before I wilted before her. Her husband finished his MBA at the University of Chicago, where my husband had also gone for his graduate studies in economics. We spoke about Evanston where she did her MBA at the Northwestern University. And we discovered we lived in the same Makati neighborhood. After probing my stock of knowledge which I would need to perform in her team, to my great surprise, she offered me a job! I would be supervising analyst of her Credit and Research Department at a grand salary of P820 a month. I was overjoyed and overwhelmed!

Terrifying! That best describes my first day at work. Properly attired this time in my best serious outfit, I reported to Evelyn Singson in such a high state of nervous tension. I had expected to be assigned a desk somewhere in the staff’s office area. Instead she had a slim desk brought in to her executive room and had it set against the wall near the door. Pointing to the desk, she informed me that that would be my desk... for the meantime anyway, she promised. A supervising analyst enthroned in a makeshift desk facing the wall? I didn’t think it was an auspicious beginning.

Thus began my climb up the corporate ladder in the 1970s. Evelyn made sure we, her team, performed optimally at all times. (I met the rest of the team a few days later when Evelyn, true to her word, assigned

me my permanent desk in the staff area. She read our reports very carefully, corrected our mistakes and gave us more reports to write. She was relentless in ensuring that we gave our utmost to all our tasks.

In one of our mentoring moments over an industry report I had labored on for weeks, she mused that, for her to be a ranking government official was certainly a prestigious post. At that point in my career, I had no inkling what fate had in store for me. Working in government was not part of my planned life tapestry.

In the two years I worked with her, she completely changed my perspective about what careers were all about. Before she mentored me, my idea of a career was simply working in order to make use of one's education, be financially independent, and remain interesting to my husband as I was doing my own thing. I had the notion that women ought to work to keep up with their husbands and thus not become a boring wife. After being "Evelynified", I realized women are their own persons whose identity need not be tied down to that of their husbands. Women can achieve and contribute meaningfully in the workplace, breaking barriers in the process. Having It All was the title of the book she lent me over thirty years ago, which I haven't returned to her yet as I haven't finished reading it. That's because I simply went out following her footsteps and did it, that is, "have it all."

The hallmark of a true mentor is the pride she or he takes in the mentee's success. Evelyn never ceased showing me that she took pride in my achievements. When I became president of PagIBIG Fund, she was there cheering me on, attending even minor functions that celebrated the Fund's work in government service. And when she thought I had achieved enough to merit belonging to her sorority of women achievers, The Outstanding Women in the Nation's Service(TOWNS), she nominated me to be in the winning circle.

In the three decades since we met, Evelyn Singson has become an institution in business finance and more importantly in the empowerment of women. She ran commercial banks without missing a beat, she packaged megadeals whose products can be seen in our skyline. She built the most modern tertiary hospital in the country and recently she became the first elected president of the Management Association of the Philippines, a bastion of male dominance in Philippine business. To us, the women she mentored, nothing surprised us. She was born to be a leader ahead of her times, a total woman, a

complete person. Thank you, Evelyn, for enabling me to find myself.

Zorayda Amelia Alonzo



I worked from 1975 to 1980 in Bancom Development Corporation's Financial Engineering Department headed by Evelyn R. Singson (ERS). I was three years into building my career in economic and business research after doing my graduate studies in industrial economics from 1969 to 1972 at the Center for Research and Communication Graduate School of Industrial Economics, now University of Asia and the Pacific. ERS hired me for Industry Research, which was to provide the economic, market, and industry perspectives for the project and credit evaluation to be done by her department. It was, I daresay, click at first encounter at work with ERS because of her emphasis on making sure the research outputs were written well for easy and pleasant reading by the target audience. "Research work is for reading and not simply for the library shelves," this ERS communicated very well, and this was one of the many lessons one got from her.

Communicating what I learned from her, recalling these thirty or so years after, is a singular privilege I can use to express my gratitude for having had the opportunity to encounter ERS. I remember how one could see her complete love for her work and what she was doing. Her constancy and consistency, her discipline and hard work, her objectivity and fairness, were all totally present in the way she handled her responsibilities. She obviously was leading her group by example and that is one great lesson, indeed, from a mentor.

ERS's ability to facilitate productively the work of different people with various expertise, background and personalities reflected how she knew herself, how she projected her self-confidence. In the many times and years I worked with ERS, I never sensed any manifestation of insecurity. This is a trait essential in a positive group interaction and in successfully assuming a leadership role in a group. She knew her strengths and made everyone realize that those are all available for the group to use. She knew how each one complemented one another and got things done for the common objective. She was sensitive to how everyone was and this set the basic frame for the working environment

in the group she led. Any situation would be under control under her watch. It was interesting to see someone giving life to principles of leadership of which we only read. Watching ERS handle a group was an active lesson in the application of leadership principles.

Leadership, competence, focus, discipline, hard work, creativity, dedication, prudence, fairness, sensitivity, team player, organization, perspective: there are many traits one can learn working with ERS. Being a mentor for her comes naturally to her while working with her staff. It is not a defined job description she has to accomplish. An ideal mentor-mentee relationship is one where the mentor does not have to go out of her way mentoring the mentee. The process can flow naturally on the job while getting the work done. I remember how many reports done with questions from ERS written on the margins, asking for clarifications on statements made. As the questions find answers, the reports are finalized and the group becomes ready to present the final report. The process is efficient. One knows that ERS has read the report and has contributed her observations. She is thorough in how she reviews reports submitted to her.

The working relationship I had with ERS in Bancom lasted five years. A friendship started then, and this friendship is ongoing. A great mentor, I believe, can develop friendship with the mentees that she encounters along the way. I am sure that there are many professionals whose lives ERS had the chance to touch in their careers. And I am sure that many of them have been her true friends to this day. The most precious lesson a mentor can give a mentee is the ability to make real friends where the learning experience is going on. In many work settings and environments, stiff competition goes on that can be counterproductive to real friendship developing. It is a challenge to a mentor to be able to make everyone get to transcend competition that obstructs friendship. The fact that ERS has kept many true friends from her years in Bancom is testimony to her own ability to transcend obstacles to developing real friendship at work.

In 1997, I had a chance to work with ERS again, in getting Asian Hospital and Medical Center, in Alabang, Muntinlupa City started. This was seventeen years since we went our separate ways after I left Bancom. The effort was pioneering in a way because for almost thirty years during that time, no new major hospital had been built in the country, not even in the Metro Manila area. We got the project

completed, and our working relationship as friends got to be validated. No adjustments to work ethics and performance were needed despite the long absence from doing things together. With everyone involved in the project, we were able to raise the standards that new major hospitals in the country must satisfy. If I had not learned from ERS ways of doing things in the late 1970s, it would not have been easy to join efforts again in a significant project and get things done in the late 1990s. Asian Hospital and Medical Center opened in 2002.

A great mentor is one whose personal values are lasting and can naturally make these values overflow for everyone to share in any work setting. There can be no dichotomy between the personal part of the mentor and the professional part. A great mentor will be an integrated person. She or he must be able to preserve the human wholeness and be able to naturally project it. Success is an important end no doubt but more important than success is the process by which the success was achieved. ERS seems to have been very conscious of this principle and this is a necessary element in how things are to be done in a project she is working on. In the process, everyone involved in it will have to consider the framework. Where there are participants resisting, of course, there will be tension. Managing the tension and getting to tension and conflict resolution become the challenge to be hurdled without compromising the principles the mentor believes in. There will be outcomes that are favorable and there will be others that may seem failures. But as long as the absolute principles one believes in do not get violated, there will be no failure no matter the outcome. In my working with ERS, I have experienced seeing her hold her footing to the principles of righteousness against big odds. What better lesson can one learn from a mentor than being able to know and experience that it is possible to stay grounded on values that last forever. This may not be conventional wisdom, this is ultimate wisdom.

As we look back and count who among the persons we encountered in our years had a deep impact in our lives, it is heartening to know that there are a number who helped lead us by how they were rather than by what they seemed to have taught us. Mentorship is a special responsibility. The wholeness of the person of the mentor is the best gift she or he can offer the mentee in whatever learning experience that transpires. Everyone struggles to be whole: mentor and mentee. That is the real challenge. There are no simple formulae, however. There can

be no short cuts. The learning process is where the beauty of learning lies.

Finally, as my thank you to ERS for being my mentor, I will say: she has been a great mentor, but an even greater friend.

Danilo S. Venida



I have known Evelyn Singson since 1999 when I first worked with her in Philcom Money Services, Inc. Evelyn was the President of the company and was the one who gave me the break in the remittance industry. She hired me as the General Manager. I worked closely with Evelyn in growing the company from having just three branches in 1999 to 162 by 2007 and in the process learned much from her.

What I admire most about Evelyn is her passion and energy for anything and everything that she does. Her passion and energy inspire the people around her to work harder for her and the company. I remember those days in 1999–2000 when Evelyn was busy not only with running our company, but also with other big endeavors, most prominent at that time was the arduous task of building what would be the most modern hospital south of Manila. She was busy raising funds for the hospital, marketing the hospital to doctors and overseeing its construction as well. Still, in spite of her busy work day with numerous meetings and the shuttling from Quezon City to Makati to Alabang and back, Evelyn adeptly guided our company to be recognized as the year 2000 Western Union Agent of the Year for Asia Pacific and the Best in Marketing as well. Our collective hard work fueled by Evelyn's passion and drive to succeed paid off handsomely. We were the first to offer call-time rewards and other consumer promos. We were also the first to introduce a host of improvements in our stores to drive consumer convenience—air conditioning, cable TV, water, coffee, juice, and candies. We pioneered in what would be the typical look of a Western Union branch. While busy making profits, we did not forget our corporate social responsibilities. We were the first to conduct a medical mission to give back to our largest market at that time (Olongapo City). Evelyn never lost focus in running the company in spite of her numerous other undertakings.

Another very notable trait of Evelyn as a business leader is that she takes good care of her employees. Our company is one of the few that give bonuses (not simple tokens) to the janitors, messengers and security guards even if they are agency employees and not our own. She sees to it that the employees are well trained, properly compensated and that they will have a career with the company. No wonder we attained a 91 percent employee satisfaction rating in 2007—the first time we even measured it (note: we left the company in January 2008). No small feat for a company with over 500 employees and 162 branches all over Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. And with a highly engaged workforce, our company would naturally always get high marks during Point-of-Sale Audits by Western Union.

Evelyn's people management skills are surely something to emulate. She is easily accessible to her employees and is very supportive and not one to steer clear of you when the going gets tough. So long as you work closely with her and you keep her informed—no surprises, she will be your ally and will be behind you all the way.

It has always been a pleasure to work for and with Evelyn. She is not one to dominate with her position but rather one who would allow you to grow. She is not one who would dwell on the negative but one who would ask us to learn from it. Most of all, Evelyn is not one to maltreat or insult her employees, rather she is one who treats everyone with dignity and respect—even those who have done her or the company wrong.

Roy Fernandez



Evelyn R. Singson



Zorayda Amelia "Mel" C. Alonzo is former Pag-IBIG Fund President and DTI Undersecretary. A member of the world-renowned Bayanihan dance group in the 1960s, Mel has rediscovered the innate artist in her and has been designing one-of-a-kind jewelries made of semiprecious stones and metals.



Danilo S. Venida holds a master's degree in Industrial Economics at the Center for Research and Communication Graduate School of Industrial Economics, now University of Asia and the Pacific. His career spans involvement in diversified businesses: investment banking and finance, newspaper publishing, agri-business, environment protection, international money remittance and real estate-hotel-hospital development.



Roy Fernandez is currently the Operations Director of Western Union for the Pacific and Indochina region. He worked with Evelyn Singson in Philcom Money Services, Inc. /eBusiness Services, Inc. (an agent of Western Union) and in Asian Hospital.