

Fernando & Evangeline Alberto, Manuel Vicente Pangilinan: On Mentors and Protégées

ERNESTO ALBERTO



Everyone profits by listening to their mentors, really listening to them. But first it is important to determine exactly who deserves the title “mentor” in one’s life. They will not necessarily be the barking, fast-burning tyrants. My own experience has revealed mentors as caring, sensitive, and unselfish, bereft of malice, ultimately with only the best intentions for me, and for the rest of the world they leave behind. They generally preach less and exist more as living examples for their outstanding ideals.

I was fortunate enough to have all of the above in the crucial stages of my life and career. In my young formative years there was of course my father, the late Atty. Fernando “Ding” Alberto, who insisted without fail that I get up literally at the crack of dawn or 5:30 a.m. to join him for coffee. Dad laid out for me this unshakeable rule, that at first was difficult (to say the least), given the time and place in which I was growing up.

It was after all the late 1970s to mid-1980s, the heyday of Manila nightlife. It was a herculean task, just as it would be in any decade, for anyone to remain awake the rest of the day after a night of earnest disco-hopping. It felt like boot camp. But this was something I simply had to do, and just like any young person with a hang-over would, I had to ask him WHY, even on a blessed Sunday I still had to show for reveille.

Presenting logic as practicing lawyers like him inevitably do, he explained to me that it was best to jump-start a mind, to get its essential juices flowing, early in the morning. Today this is proven as a biological fact. Humans are diurnal organisms, daylight creatures. We

are activated by the rising sun and deactivated by the lack of light once the sun sets. No matter how work or play disrupts our ingrained body clocks, nothing alters this natural tendency. Hard as we try otherwise, we simply have not evolved fast enough.

Dad's uncompromising rule had a subtler and deeper message. That rule ultimately described the responsibility and unwavering resolve required to face obligations. Later on, I found out that I needed that rule in dealing with any conflict, problem, or situation. Dad's rule outlined a lesson in courage.

When I think of the fundamentals of courage I think of my father. Courage makes it easier to understand and live the values of hard work and honesty, to stand for the right things. "Never run away from a problem. Face it," he would tell me. "Don't play games by hiding. By doing so you're simply fooling yourself, and that's the last person to fool".

As always he was right. I sleep very soundly at night because I always seek to confront and resolve problems during the day. Otherwise there is the fitful tossing and turning when unresolved problems gnaw at the back of your mind.

My mother, Evangeline Rosario Alberto, "Lynn" to her friends, taught me the virtues of honesty, frugality, patience, true love, and sacrifice. Mom taught me just about everything one ought to know to be able to live as a bona fide respectable citizen of this world. She also taught my brothers and me how to be gentlemen by being sensitive to others' needs and comforts. My mother was the secret power that held the family together. An assertive professional lawyer in her own right, she was the one who was prepared to sacrifice everything selflessly for love of my father and her brood.

So with such parental guidance, I felt I had the best twin foundations upon entering my twenty-one-year banking career. After all the years I have served in banking, I still view the timeless role of a banker as a sacred trust; the fiduciary role is built on trust that engenders confidence. This commands bankers not only to safeguard other people's money, but also to ensure that they enjoy a sure and fair return.

Trust and confidence also dictate the quality of relationships you have in your career. And for me, relationships are everything. They reflect the kind of person you are, and as integrity and honesty are valuable to you, so will your relationships prosper. I mean what I say

and say what I mean to the people I deal with, and because they can sense my sincerity (people are not unperceptive) they accept or at least understand my position. Every relationship experiences bumps and ruts, but with this hard-earned trust we are closer to resolving anything that comes our way.

It is one thing to know or even abide by the right ideals, quite another to see them lived out in their full potential. And perhaps this was how I felt when I first met Philippine Long Distance Co. (PLDT) Chairman Manuel V. Pangilinan (or MVP as he is often referred to in business circles). Back to those barking tyrants: how often do people shut their ears and minds once the shouting starts? The audience leans back and winces.

In direct contrast, MVP speaks in hushed underplayed tones, but because he speaks with real authority, with a well-documented life of leadership and accomplishment, each murmur is a peal of thunder. You trust him and are confident in him. The audience leans forward. They are definitely listening.

That is not to say that he is perfect. MVP embraces his mistakes as valuable because only these could have led him to the heights he occupies today. The bigger blunder would be not to learn from our mistakes, he would tell us. And he was absolutely right. I once had an expatriate boss in banking of a similar mind telling me, "I will allow you to commit mistakes, as long as you commit them only once." Only by learning the root cause of a mistake can we ensure this one-strike policy.

With all that he has accomplished and conquered, I once had to ask MVP exactly what I first asked my father many years ago: WHY? He's at Olympus' summit, why does he still work so hard?

"Eric," he patiently intoned, "if you do not belong to the less than 1 percent of the global population that's pedigreed or born of royalty, you have to work, and work hard we must."

MVP, my father, and self-made men have always been proud of their humble beginnings, lending an even more admirable perspective to their accomplishments. Work has become their true calling, their "default living". And it has naturally dawned on me to accept the same calling as my own.

Dad and Mom taught me to be a man. My great bosses including MVP shaped me to be the professional I am today. I needed both

to keep growing and to keep learning. Change brought about by technology can be overwhelming to the unprepared. We live and work continuously in the modern connected world, where time and distance matter little. I only stop working when my head hits the pillow, and start again when my eyes open. Way ahead of their time, Dad and MVP were always like this, long before smartphones and WIFI.



Manuel Vicente Pangilinan



Eric R. Alberto is currently PLDT's Senior Vice President and Head of Customer Sales and Marketing. He is also Chairman of key PLDT subsidiaries. Eric has over 28 years professional work experience having served with top tier local and multinational banks and corporations.