For many of you who don’t probably know him, Mayor Jesse Robredo is the multiawarded incumbent city mayor of Naga City, which is currently the main commercial area of the Bicol Region. Aside from this, Mayor Robredo was also one of the first Filipino winners of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Government Service which is equivalent to Asia’s Nobel Prize. He won the award because he was able to transform Naga City from a third-class municipality to a first-class city and uplift the quality of life of his constituents. Moreover, he was able to develop systems that would enable government processes to be more transparent and accountable to his constituents. As a prime example of this, when one visits the website of Naga City, you would be able to see all the expenses and purchases of the city government.

In the more than sixteen years of being the mayor of Naga, the city has received accolades from national and international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations. I met Mayor Robredo in 2001 at an event organized by Synergeia Foundation, one of the country’s more effective institutions in improving our public education system. Since then, Mayor Robredo has been one of the people I have looked up to for advice and his effective brand of leadership has been a constant source of inspiration for me. As such, I wanted to share the things that I have learned through these years that I have worked with him.

Firstly, I have learned that there are still people like him who continue to remain ethical despite being in government service for the past sixteen years. Many people have dissuaded me from entering government service since they say that no one actually survives the current system of pervasive graft and corruption. Mayor Robredo has shown that one need not compromise his or her values and principles.
to be able to govern and deliver basic services to the people in an effective manner.

When I asked him what his secret was for being steadfast in his values, he told me that his faith in God and his family are his main foundations, and this is the second lesson that I learned from him. In a society where we hear of politicians having several wives and families, we have someone like Mayor Robredo who continues to put premium on his being a loyal husband and a loving father who devotes time to his three daughters. I remember a time wherein he failed to attend one of our Kaya Natin! Caravan of Good Governance events in the province because his daughter sought his help with her school project. Many politicians would often jump at the chance just to be able to speak before thousands of students but Mayor Robredo chose to be with his daughter who needed him during that time.

Aside from this, Mayor Robredo has also shown that he is a man that can stand up for what he believes in even if he already knows that the majority are no longer with him. This can be seen when in the last two presidential elections, wherein he chose to support the late Senator Raul Roco because he believed that he would make a good president for our country even if he already knew that surveys had shown that Senator Roco would have a slim chance of winning and even if he already knew that if Senator Roco loses he may not be able to get the support of the winning candidate. Standing up and holding on to your own principles is something that is clearly lacking in many of our leaders today. Our present-day leaders will often support issues or people that will help propagate their own self-interests without necessarily thinking if what they are supporting will be for the common good.

Finally, one of the most important lessons I learned from Mayor Robredo is the simplicity of his way of life. When one thinks of Filipino politicians, large houses and expensive cars always comes to mind but when one visits Naga, you will see that despite being on his sixth term as mayor of a first-class city, he continues to live in a very simple home. I remember one time when we met in my office in Quezon City and I saw him just taking a cab without any bodyguards to reach our office. Back then, I was quite surprised since I was used to seeing politicians with their big cars, blaring sirens and their throngs of bodyguards. Among all of these lessons, I think what Mayor Robredo has shown
me is that there is still much to hope for in our country if we have more principled leaders like him who will continue to deliver proper services to the people and will always put the interests of our country above his or her own interests.

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