“Loyd, it could have been for a purpose...” -Hans Sy, SM Prime Holdings President

I’m going to introduce one of my mentors who have influenced my life in such an amazing way. He has taught me some of the wisdom that he got while he was still a teenager. Meeting him was one of the most wonderful things that happened in my life. Without this person, I couldn’t have made it to where I am now.

If you’ve been to any of the SM malls, you’ve probably been amazed by its unstoppable development. The first mentor that I have today is Mr. Hans Sy, son of the legendary Henry Sy. Here’s a brief story.

One day while I was delivering my books to the National Bookstore at the Mall of Asia, he saw me and waived his hand. I wasn’t sure if he was calling me but I came to him anyway. He gave his business card and he asked me to see him in his office. Without any questions asked, I said “Ok, sir. I will definitely do that.”

I was there doing the delivery because I was working in my company all by myself. I had literally zero staff. I recall I was wearing t-shirt, jeans, and I think slippers. I appeared like a delivery boy, and I believe I was one during that time.

But prior to meeting Mr. Hans there, he first saw me at the launching of IMAX. After the first movie showing, I approached Mr. Henry Sy, who was two seats behind me, and I personally gave him a copy of my book, _Is There A Job Waiting For You?_.

Meeting him, I brought a framed copy of my _Manila Times_ column that narrated my experience of meeting his father. We sat and started...
to talk more about his personal experience.

The wisdom is, "When someone wise asked you to do something, it could have been for a purpose." This is the very first lesson I got from him.

Mr. Hans recalled going to his father's office to help for the first time. He thought he was going to be a little boss so he dressed up very neatly, had his tie, black pants, and black shoes. He arrived at the office and the first thing that his father asked him to do was "to throw the trash outside and clean the trash can."

It seemed to be unfair. For a very young mind, it was absurd. You're a son of the owner of an SM Mall and you had to do that. What for? It was just a start for later on he would become a salesman, a cashier, a supervisor, and a manager before becoming SM Prime Holdings president.

He told me, "I had to follow what my father asked me to do as tradition tells us to follow our parents." At first, he said, it's uncomfortable but soon I'd realize it was for a purpose. Now, no one in the rank-and-file can complain in about our policy, not even about their jobs, simply because I was once there and, several times, one of them.

Listen to your mentor or coach. If they're asking you to do one thing, it could have been for a purpose!

"Lloyd, if you can no longer chart the course of your team's direction, better quit..." - Johnlu Koa, The French Baker

That's right. We're talking about leadership—one's ability to take a group of people to a place that has never existed before.

Because I was able to involve myself in Go Negosyo affairs, I managed to meet several mentors that I always consult whenever something is unclear to me. This isn't only about business but most of the time about life.

Meet Johnlu Koa, the founder and CEO of The French Baker. He has taught me a lot but I decided to pick up the advice that he gave me on leadership.

He said: "If you can no longer chart the course of direction of your organization, better quit."

My business doesn't operate on a big scale. I only have two people working for me and we don't have a big capital and operational expenses.
But there are times when we run short of our financial targets.

When this happens, the very first person that I constructively confront is myself. Whatever happens in my company can easily be traced to the way I lead it.

Some time in the past, I could have quit. I was already thinking of going back to the corporate world as a regular employee and just forget that I was able to start a company. I was thinking of abandoning my ship—the company I founded in 2005.

But Johnlu’s advice made me realize one thing. The worst situation can start the best opportunity. I had a self-talk with myself. After some serious thinking, I go back to my home office and tell myself, I’d rather do it again.

I understood that it takes a very personal commitment if I were to lead a team. It doesn’t matter who I am in my team. What matters is how I keep the company going in a direction that can improve my team players lives on the basis of my discernment.

If your leadership is being challenged right now, do your homework. Have a conversation with yourself and ask yourself if you can still chart the course of direction of your organization. Otherwise, you can quit and do something else.

“It’s not always being white or black. Sometimes you need to be ‘gray’...” – Jose Magsaysay, Potato Corner

When I first heard about this “being gray thing,” I thought Jomag (as people call him) was only kidding me. All our lives, we’re told to be black or to be white. The world advises us that there’s no in-between.

I was commissioned to write the book that is to tell the entire story of Potato Corner. I must admit that it’s not often that a person can actually have this kind of opportunity.

I first met Jomag at the Manila Polo Club last year during the planning session of the Philippine Franchise Association. We were on the same table during lunch.

But what is “being gray” all about? Well, it’s simply about flexibility. You have to adjust to the changing times, changing needs, changing market, changing world.

When Potato Corner started, there was no dead serious motivation to one day become a household name in terms of how fries are made
and flavored. One partner wanted to buy a new cellular phone, one more wanted to give more to his family. They had to be gray to see what best road to take.

After fifteen years since it started, their being gray paid off. They had a lot of adjustments on how the business is made and managed and Potato Corner maintained its prestige as the “mother of the Philippine food cart business.”

How flexible are you? Do you adapt with the changing times? How frequent do you upgrade your skills and harness your talent? How do you prepare for the next bend of the road? Are you really working on something or you just go with the flow?

Jomag is right. If you want to succeed, you need to be gray—be open to more partnerships, opportunities, and options. Don’t settle for what is available. Instead, identify what you want and be open about its unlimited possibility.

You can change the way you’re living your life and you can start changing it now...

“Lloyd, in real life once your sales drop, you have to take action...”
-Author Unknown

It’s not always that I’m able to meet great people whose reputation is one of the highest that I can imagine.

More than two years ago, I had a chance of helping out Go Negosyo by spearheading its original website. We’ve created the system so that any registered member can ask our mentors directly through web forms. We also made a classified ads section where members can promote their businesses.

I am thankful for that rare opportunity. I must admit that I’ve learned a lot while I was on the project. These are the words of wisdom that have helped me in my business and personal life as well. Nothing beats first-hand information.

Several times I was asked to report to his office and at other times in his house in Forbes Park. It has always been an inspiring, motivating, and enriching experience. And the more I learned from him, the more humble I’ve become. Listening to him is more than taking a four-year course in business.

In one meeting, I recalled something about sales. We were
discussing how the Go Negosyo book was selling and it seemed that at the time, it was selling but not as good as the first three months.

“In real life, when your sales drop, you have to take action,” he said. Months after that, they did far better and recently in March 2008, they came up with his second book which will soon hit the bestselling list again.

I’m into selling, too. And his words of wisdom sink in to me. When I noticed that the sales of my book, Is There A Job Waiting For You?, was not doing well sometime in 2007, I simply had to take action. There was no time to waste.

I had to offer free seminars, bring books directly to the people, and sell the books 40 percent off the retail price. I had to make several bundles: 2 books for P501, 4 for P991, 1 book with a mug, 1 book with a pin, and so much more.

The sales went up. Why? By simply taking creative action.

In life there’s a wait-and-see. But when you see something wrong and something can still be made better, you must take necessary, creative action. Remember, thoughts can get you going but action can get you there!

There’s power in connecting with people, Lloyd. –Les Reyes, Reyes Haircutters

In 2008, I had a chance to be given a commissioned work. I wrote a book entitled “Believe in Yourself,” the story that made Reyes Haircutters. It was an experience I miss but I must admit that I’ve learn a lot from it—more than I could ever learn in business school.

It took me eight months to finally finish the book. I’m going to share one—just one—thought that I can never forget about Les. As the maker of his own success, he has something to tell us.

I first met the guy in a business affair. After he learned that I’m an author, he asked me if I can write the story of his business. I said sure.

Doing such book wasn’t a walk in the park. Or, if it’s a place to walk, I think it was more of a jungle rather than a park. I had to shadow Les in his daily itinerary—observing how he does business, how he treats people, how he works, how he speaks, and how he plays golf, among others.

I played ghost—as if he’s followed by no one. He would work
normally as if I didn’t exist. I had to ask him several questions, mostly related to my job as the author of his book. I had to interview a lot of people, including his close competitors in the business.

But if there’s one thing that I can share now about Les, he taught me the idea of “connections.” Les is a marketing guy. No wonder, I’d always be surprised when he’d introduce me to different people, most of them, celebrities.

“There’s power in connecting with people, Lloyd.”

This statement kept playing in my mind and eventually became part of my personal philosophy. I think one key ingredient of the success of this salon chain is the idea that Les is a person who knows how to connect and establish that connection to strengthen his business and brand.

Connecting with people means knowing how to crack a joke, what joke to say, and handling the after-joke effect. This is the hard part by the way. Not too many people can do this but I must say this is doable.

If you want to succeed in your business, connection is very, very important. Connection is more important than a business done within this connection. In other words, entrepreneurial success lies in not only what you know—or even who you know—but who knows you.

Lloyd A. Luna, author of Is There A Job Waiting For You? and seven other books on career and personal development, is a motivational speaker, business consultant to start-up and seasoned corporations, internet marketing guru, and President and CEO of The LLOYDLUNA Communications. He writes a column for The Manila Times as well as for newspapers abroad such as Kabayan Star in Hong Kong and Planet Philippines in Canada.