Milagros Cuesta, Flor Tarriela, Rene Concepcion, Bayani & Marides Fernando: What They Taught Me

MARIA DOLORES BUENAFLOR

There are several persons who have influenced me and have contributed to what I am today. The first was my late mother Dr. Milagros L. Cuesta. She died at the young age of 68 from an aneurism caused by a heat stroke when she attended Mass during the feast of the Santo Niño at the church in Tondo.

There was nothing that Mama would not embark on if it needed to be done. She was known for her being matiyaga or for her patience and consistency while being a mother. Mama wanted to get ahead in her career. She would enroll for her Ph.D. at the University of Santo Tomas every summer. Many of our summers were spent in Manila. You see, when we were kids, we lived in Baguio City. We stayed with Mom’s sister Auntie Lourdes Dijamco and we got close to our cousins. Mama would not leave my two brothers and me behind with the maids. She finally finished her Ph. D. with honors, Benemeritus.

I remember when I would call our mama “Mrs. SWA”. SWA was for Social Welfare Administration. Every Christmas, she would buy sacks of rice, dusters, canned goods etc. and put these in separate boxes. She also gave to her poor relations year after year. My brothers inherited the next generation of these relatives after she passed away. I recall one time when I resented the fact that she gave money for the fianza (bail money) of a black sheep relative who was caught violating the law and was too poor to pay for it. When we were small, I recalled some occasions when Mama invited one or two priests to our Sunday lunch at home. She and Papa took time out to assist the St. Louis priests, and the late Archbishop William Brasseur of Baguio in investing money in...
the stock exchange. Mama did not only help poor far removed relatives (I didn’t even know the degree of their kinship) but also anyone who approached her. But before she gave help, she did a lot of verbal moralizing and preaching but by the end of it, she would still give.

My Mama did not spend on anything that she judged to be not essential. Our baon (allowance) was exact—just enough for the purpose. She always emphasized that money is hard to earn and easy to lose. Her frugality, however was never a hindrance to her generosity. Papa once related that she bought a lot of dusters and kitchen utensils at Divisoria and visited her old friends (some classmates and some coprofessors) who had less fortunate and were poor. Papa at that time did not understand why they had to look out for these people and why my Mama wanted to visit them. She even took the initiative of searching for them when friends related to her their hard luck.

If my brothers and I have confidence in our selves, it is because Mama always praised our endeavors and achievements. Nothing to her was unachievable provided you liked it and got focused on getting it. She praised us to our relatives and friends—most of the time to our embarrassment. Everything we did was noticed, beefed up and encouraged. Whether it was only learning how to skate, ride a horse, recite a declamation piece, participate in a school play or playing sports. She had our pictures published in the national newspapers when we got medals and honors and really, we felt like heroes because of it.

After Mama, I met other people whom I also considered to be my mentors. The lessons I picked up are both from the positive and the negative models. I learned to turn the negative into positive and more importantly, to adopt the positive ones. Let me share what I learned from these individuals who have become good friends.

One such person is Mrs. Flor Gozon Tarriela. Back when she was my boss at Citibank, she taught me to look at options even if there seemed to be a very good proposal already. She would say, “Why don’t you see if...” or “Why don’t you try this?” or “Baka puede pa like this...” (Maybe you can also do it like this...) Options, thereafter, were part of all my decision-making processes since then. It helped me as a CFO, a COO and CEO.

Next is the late Rene A. Concepcion or “RAC”. Under him, I witnessed that for a business to succeed you have to hire good and qualified people and I learned that you have to compensate and treat
people well. You also have to closely monitor each person’s output and that one has to inspire and lead to get the best out of people. Loyalty and dedication cannot be demanded; they can only be earned. Furthermore, if turnover is high, your business will not prosper. I also learned from Rene to keep tab of all the latest market developments and see if the good ones can be incorporated or adopted into the business.

Finally, there are Bayani F. Fernando or “BF” and Marides C. Fernando. These two dynamic people have a lot to share such as the following: focus and drive are essential to the business. It goes top-down; clarity of goals make things easier to deliver; ensuring understanding and comprehension through good communication is crucial; trust and confidence given to a capable person makes for long-lasting relationship and draws out positive results; do things right the first time, every time.

Ma. Dolores “Maridol” Cuesta Buenaflor, a retired banker and a retired CEO of the Construction and Service Industries, continues to help friends run their business as a financial consultant. An active soroptimist, she serves in the board of her community association.