Gliceria Tantoco: Mommy’s Ways

ZENAIDA TANTOCO

Glecya Tantoco, my mother, is the dynamic, hardworking, and talented lady who pioneered luxury retail in the Philippines in the 1970s. Armed with her impeccable good taste and unparalleled marketing savvy, she built Rustan’s into a retail giant, in the Top 100 Corporations of the Philippines. Tying up with the most prestigious international fashion houses, she transformed her personal hobby into a business that was the country’s exclusive door to world-class elegance. In 1994, she passed away at 70 years old, but still at Rustan’s, her spirit is palpable and very much alive. Working with her until the end as my mentor, I felt prepared to face the challenge. And I know she is very much with me every step of the way until now.

In the year 1990, I resigned as President of Rustan’s Commercial Corporation (RCC) to join my mother in New York City. She called for me because she wanted me to take care of her. She was going to undergo treatment for colon cancer. It was not until July 2008 that I would resume the position of President of RCC. On my return to the helm of the company after a good twenty years, I realized that it was categorically necessary for me to ensure that my mother’s vision was operative in all aspects of the company so that our staff would be continually reminded of their duty to institutionalize this vision and embrace it as their own. Most of all, I was also prompted to make the pertinent decisions and design action plans that would guarantee that Rustan’s would be able to keep and maintain its unique reputation as the most elegant shopping destination in the country.

Indeed, the “Gleyc touch” is all over Rustan’s. During the holidays, shoppers would flock to the store, if only to catch a glimpse of the ever fabulous Christmas display. As has been Mommy’s tradition, there
will be a beautiful set of luncheon table and chairs, draped in exquisite piña cloth and styled festively in Christmas décor. Across will be the Galicano portraits of her and my father, Ambassador Bienvenido Tantoco, as if inviting the shopper to partake in the family feast. Adorning the walls of the corridor would be drawings of Philippine flora created by Filipino artists—the fruits of an art competition my mother hosted in the 70s. The wonderful mix of effortless elegance, the eye for beauty, and her personal charm are all what I like to call that “Gleyce touch”. Much to my gratitude, my mother inculcated this touch in me, as I literally grew up in the store that she started in San Marcelino, Malate in the early 1960s.

Mommy always had a great eye for detail—this, I believe, is what I inherited. This now-renowned meticulous attention to detail is evident throughout the store. She would pay close attention even to the seemingly insignificant elements. Here and there, flowers would stylishly adorn the interiors. The cosmetic counters, most especially, would always have flowers as, like Mommy would always say, these lovely things of nature remind the shopper about beauty. Even with the store’s scent, she was very particular. The store must always smell good, she would say, because it is the scent that welcomes and captivates the shopper as he enters the store. The merchandise would be displayed in their cases very tastefully, as if they were works of art sitting atop their pedestals. And the store aisles she made extra spacious, highlighting every piece of merchandise. Mommy treated everything as a work of art, and gave everything a sense of purpose. This became my philosophy in visual merchandising.

“Retailing is detail,” Mommy would always tell me. True enough, her attention to detail extended beyond visual merchandising to include the physical appearance of the store’s every staff member, to anticipating the customer’s every need. She would display bags alongside pieces of clothing, providing the shoppers with invaluable stylish tips on accessorizing. Mommy’s energy and passion to attend to the business’ every nitty-gritty was simply contagious, that it was inevitable that I acquire it. For this, I am thankful.

For so many years, until the year 1983 when my father assumed the position of Philippine Ambassador to the Vatican, and my mother went with him to be his hostess, (the Italians had a word for it: Ambassatrice), I served as Mommy and Daddy’s eager apprentice. When I finally made
My mark in the industry as Philippine Retail’s well-rounded manager, I knew that I made them the proudest of parents. With their relentless mentorship, I have acquired their marketing savvy, strong impulse of the market, and skillful reign of the organization—gifts that I intend to pass onto the next generation of Tantocos who are interested and gifted in retailing.

My mother’s tried and tested programs such as the “customer first” policy, the Bridal Registry, the Baby Registry, the Personal Shoppers Service, Gift-wrapping, Shipping, Printing and Engraving, the store’s creative ambience, collection of exclusive merchandise, Purchase Assembly Counter, generous rewards program, and even the valet parking service has put Rustan’s at the forefront of the local retail industry. As her successor, I intend to carry these on with great passion and efficiency. Through her legacy, Mommy’s spirit is very much alive in every nook and cranny of Rustan’s—in me, and in everyone who works for the company. With “Mommy’s Ways,” the beautiful legacy of Gleyce Tantoco, I am confident that Rustan’s is geared for its ultimate destiny—to prosper and to remain the leader in Philippine retail.

Gliceria “Gleycy” Tantoco

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