

INSPIRATIONAL MESSAGE
from
Supreme Court Associate Justice Francis H. Jardeleza
Oath-Taking of Successful 2017 Bar Examinees
June 1, 2018, Pasay

Senior Associate Justice, my fellow Associates Justices, Chairman Justice Luc, thank you for the honor, and congratulations for the superbly managed bar exams, our dear law deans, parents, friends, relatives of our honorees today, the Bar Class of 2018, a pleasant good afternoon to all of you.

First off, congratulations to all of our new lawyers. This is your day, and what a great day for you. You have proven that you can make it. The bar examinations, for all its imperfections, is one of the great equalizers of life. As they say, wherever you come from, wherever or however you started, what counts is where you finish.

So while today is an important finish line you have crossed, your running (towards a meaningful life in the law) has only just begun. My task this afternoon is to try to impart words of advice which, I hope, will help you as you embark on your respective law careers.

I will tell you this: There is no magic formula for a successful career. Nevertheless, allow this card-carrying senior citizen to venture to share with you two tips which I found helpful when I was starting. (*Tips lang ha, hindi ito leakage*). These tips are not new. They were, in fact, distilled from lessons shared to me by mentors past.

The first tip: **Stay humble**. Frank, who recruited me as a new law graduate to join ACCRA, once told me: “Never forget your roots, and do not let success get in your head.” Whatever mind and talent you think you are born with, be humble enough to know that you do not, and cannot, know it all. But what little we know we can improve through hard work and dedication.

When I was a new associate, I was tasked by Edong, our dear and recently departed leader, to assist on an *amicus* brief on a labor case. I submitted what I thought at the time to be a *magnum opus*. Alas, by the time Edong was through rewriting it, I could barely recognize my draft. His finished product was awesome: well-organized, succinctly written, and direct to the point. The only things that survived from my draft were the case law I researched. Repeat that humbling experience many times over, under different partners and mentors, and these instilled in me a profound acceptance of how little I knew, and how much more I had to learn.

Remarkably, and despite their intellectual prowess, my bosses never let their success get into their heads. I remember our chief litigator, Joe, who was known to dictate almost perfect pleadings, call his elegantly lucid writing style “pedestrian.” Raul, another dear departed mentor, put this tip more brutally: “*Hindi pwede dito ang mayabang.*”

This brings me to the second tip: **Have empathy.** Each time you celebrate a success, pair your humility with a good dose of relating to, and understanding, the pain and disappointment of those less fortunate than you.

The work place will be very competitive. In the words of our former boss and corporate law head, Teddy: “Compete you must, but compete only against yourself.” Get ahead by putting in more hours. Maybe do with less sleep. Always make sure to bring in better quality work. His only rule: Never put down, speak or do ill of, a colleague. Teddy was the most quarrelsome of our bosses, but he was the kindest of heart. He was a successful task master because he was gifted with empathy. It is said that true empathy is rooted in humility. From him we learned to have the courage to relate to, and treat, work place colleagues as fellow humans.

In time, I got married, raised a family, became a partner in the firm and eventually, changed work places many times. My friends and I left our mother firm

to set up a small shop, I also went into solo practice, joined the firm of Senator Raul, left to be an in-house corporate counsel, and finally got recruited into public service. In all my work places, I have tried to abide by these two tips (humility and empathy). I have found that doing so has served me well as I think they will do the same for you.

How so? None of us are perfect. It is inevitable that we will make mistakes. A life lived with humility and empathy, however, creates for you a bank, a deep reservoir of goodwill, from which you can draw in the event you stumble and commit mistakes. People will be more forgiving if they know you to be humble and empathetic. They will be more inclined to throw you a lifeline and help you regain your footing.

You might say that I am recommending living the life of the good guy, but “don’t the good guys always finish last?” My answer to you is: Do not be fazed. There may be others who swear and live by other formulas. There will always be those who, to get ahead, will choose to be ruthless, to be Machiavellian, to be manipulative. Should these people get you in their crosshairs, I still say your best defense is a reservoir of goodwill brought about by a life lived with humility and empathy. Keep faith with humanity. There are more of the good guys than you think. The world is populated with more people of goodwill, who will give you aid and succor.

I would like to end by reiterating what I was told at the start of my law career: never let success get into your head. To this I add the words of Steve Jobs: “...[A]ll of us need to be on guard against arrogance, which knocks at the door whenever you’re successful.”

As I wish each of you all the roaring success you deserve, I pray only that you do not spoil your success with arrogance. The arrogant always fall, they always get their comeuppance. Always remember this day as your inspiration, the

day when you were starting, when you needed people, and had lots of room in your heart for empathy.

Years from now, when one, or hopefully some, of you have become members of this Court, please tell me whether the tips I share with you today were *havey* or *waley*, or whatever substitute expression you millennials would have invented by that time.

Again, to the successful 2018 bar examinees, my heartfelt congratulations.
Maraming salamat po.