



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

On the Occasion of the Annual Leadership Seminar, "SELAMS Emerging Leaders Seminar"

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CENTRO ESCOLAR UNIVERSITY

SPEECH

"Passion and Integrity in Leadership Towards Global Competence"

by

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Friends, ladies and gentlemen:

Good morning!

It is an honor and a privilege to speak before you today, as a resource speaker for this very timely Leadership Seminar being held by the Centro Escolar University School of Education, Liberal Arts, Music, and Social Work (SELAMS). This event is so close to my heart that, although I was informed that the topic assigned to me has been changed to "Excellent Leadership towards Global Governance" I would still like to touch on the original topic assigned to me, which is "Passion and Integrity in Leadership".

As you were told earlier, yes, I am an alumna of the school across the street.

It's Saturday and an alumna of San Beda is here at CEU.

May tawag diyan sa Filipino. Simple lang: si Leila de Lima ... nangangapit-bahay.

I am sure you would prefer the more elegant translation of that word into English : “reaching out”.

Come to think of it, I spent years studying law at the school across the street. Yet, I believe this is probably the first time CEU has reached out to me. I wonder why I did not get this chance to come here and visit while I was still a student.

Maybe, it was because the ladies of CEU then only had their eyes on the handsome Bedans at the building across the street.

(Seriously now, let's get on with the serious stuff)

Merriam-Webster of dictionary fame defines “leadership” as “the capacity to lead”; “the act or an instance of leading”; “the power or ability to lead other people”. “Lead”, on the other hand, is “to direct on a course or in a direction”.

Leadership, therefore, presupposes that a leader has a sense of direction, or an idea where to take those whom he leads. It might be a specific destination, or perhaps more of a vision or a general idea on where they are headed.

I know that many, if not all, of you, being the Millennials that you are, are familiar with “apps”. Some of you, especially those who drive, are perhaps familiar with the navigation sub-category of utility apps, the basic purpose for which is to get you from point A to point B.

Now, there are many available apps to fulfill that purpose. One of the first I became familiar with was the navigation app for Google. For a while, it was my go-to navigation app. As far as geographical accuracy, it is a fairly reliable app. It can show you the shortest route from point A to point B in terms of distance or the shortest route.

But, as those navigating the tricky and heavily congested streets of Metro Manila are keenly and painfully aware, the shortest route is not necessarily the fastest route. There are so many things to consider besides pure distance; hence, a clamor for an app that provides options that take into consider time rather than just the mileage.

Someone suggested the app “Waze” to me. It is a pretty nifty piece of software: the routes are based on calculated quickest travel time, which takes into consideration live user-generated traffic updates, obstacles along the route, and what routes are known to be single- or two-way traffic. It not only gave turn-by-turn directions, it also automatically recalculates the quickest route and suggests the same to you, even in the middle of the drive. It is dynamic. It isn’t perfect, but it is one of the better alternatives among available apps.

But I didn’t immediately jump on the bandwagon. Because, like any responsible person, I check app permissions and privacy terms and conditions before I download an app, and I noticed that the application asked for permission to access various other functions of the phone, files and personal information. Of course, they will always have a good explanation for why they want to access your identity or your phone book, your chat messages, search queries, calendar information, camera, microphone, and even integration with other social network accounts. But the all-or-nothing approach, the lack of freedom to opt-out of certain features even if it means lesser functionality, *added* to the fact that the app is, quote-unquote”, available to users for “free” – are enough, or should be enough, to give a responsible and reasonably cautious person pause before they click the “Agree” button.

You have to consider just how much you trust this developer, who is now asking for access to so much sensitive and personal information – and, indeed, accessing it without you completely understanding the how, what, when, how much, why and what now of it all. One wrong decision and it could ruin your life by making you vulnerable to identity theft and the like.

We are all adults and young adults here: we know better than to truly believe that anything is ever given a way for free.

Choosing a navigation app, in many ways, therefore, is no different from choosing a “leader”.

You have to ask yourself: Do you trust this person? Even if you trust this person, do you blindly follow everything they tell you, give up everything they ask for, turn a blind eye when something does not seem right? They make so many promises, but what do they expect to get back in return? They promise to lead us to our destination, but what standards and principles do they apply when choosing the route? Do they suggest going the wrong way on a one-way street, just because it will

cut down travel time by five minutes? They ask you to report if there is a police officer up ahead – have you considered that they could just as well be mapping out the position of law enforcers for illicit as much as legitimate reasons?

You may know where you want to go, but the devil is in the details. When it comes to leadership, it is not just the destination that counts. The character as much as the competence of a leader, as well as the manner by which they lead counts even more.

That is what sets apart haphazard leadership, and the type of leadership that is capable of leading our nation to Global Competence.

That is why the PNoy administration was not built on promises about how great and inviting the destination is, or how fast we will reach that destination. It was built on a commitment about the *quality* of the leadership; the principles it adheres to, which is, coincidentally, described as the “Tuwid Na Daan”.

Perhaps the term “Tuwid Na Daan” is a bit misleading. People think “Tuwid” means it is the shortest distance between two points, which is mathematically, the textbook definition of straight line. But we are not speaking of geometry, but of the complexities of life, of Statehood, of the terms and conditions of the Social Contract, the fact that leadership requires a leader to make difficult decisions that are not cast in black and white. Sometimes, going the straight lines means committing trespasses against the law and the trampling of the general welfare and people’s rights.

“Tuwid” means doing the right thing, going the right way, reaching the destination without violating traffic rules or flouting authority; it means patiently waiting in your lane instead of recklessly zipping in out of other people’s lane, and showing healthy respect for the safety and welfare of others by not overtaking in a no-overtaking zone and resisting the urge to press the pedal to the metal in order to beat the red signal.

“Tuwid Na Daan”, often, means the hard way, rather than the easy way.

Not many potential leaders are wise enough to see the wisdom behind promising the “Tuwid Na Daan” because they think that the electorate is immature, naïve and lacking intelligence and emotional quotient. They want to take advantage of the tendency to want instant

gratification. Thus, they would rather promise, for instance, immediate housing, which they hope to achieve, perhaps, by cutting corners and bastardizing the procurement process and the other safety measures that law has put in place. What you get are substandard, overpriced and, worse, potentially fatally defective end results.

They grossly underestimate the capacity of the people they hope to lead to see through lies and machinations.

That is not what the Aquino administration stands for, and that is not how it had committed to lead the Filipino people and, in fact, did lead the Filipino people.

It served and led the Filipino people these past five years with integrity. With honesty, and with strong moral principles and moral uprightness – the very definition of integrity.

Honesty. Moral principles. Moral uprightness. These are words that have been my personal guideposts these last roller-coaster ride of five years in the Department of Justice.

Being with the Commission on Human Rights was pretty straightforward. We know what human rights are, and we monitored and evaluated other people's actions against those standards.

In the DOJ, it was about accomplishing difficult tasks *while* respecting human rights and abiding by the stringent provisions of the Constitution and the laws. Sometimes, the job is made even more difficult because we were investigating officials in key government posts – including high ranking posts within our very own institution – or locking horns with moneyed, influential and powerful forces, such as criminal syndicates like drug-trafficking organizations.

Thus I have not been a stranger to facing difficult leadership decisions: do we forge ahead with our investigations or do we succumb to pressure; do we play it safe, or do we follow where our instincts lead us in our quest for truth and justice?

I would say that my strong commitment to honesty, moral principles and moral uprightness – integrity for short – is what helped me survive and even thrive in this high pressure job. It made decision easy to make because all I had to think of is what actions could I be proud of when I look back?

I merely followed my late father's wisdom and guidance: "Just do the right thing. You may err or fail at times, but for as long as your intentions are pure and your mind is set on what is good for many, just do what you have to do."

That's what I have always tried to do.

From being put in charge as Chairperson of the Incident Investigation and Review Committee (IIRC) on the August 23rd Quirino Grandstand hostage-taking two months into my tenure; to investigating sensitive cases that implicate members of the PNP and the Philippine Coast Guard, such the Atimonan Massacre and the Balintang Channel Incident; to uncovering the motherlode of all corruption investigations or the so-called PDAF and Malampaya Scams that implicated sitting members of the Senate; to the present controversies involving the Vice-President of the Philippines, members of his family and the machinations they have resorted to in order to obfuscate the issues and undermine the legitimate efforts of authorities to shed light on the Truth – these are all but some of the challenges that I and this administration have faced in the past five years; and that we did not cower facing them is our testament to our commitment to leadership with integrity.

But Trust borne of Integrity is only one half of the equation. Passion is the other.

Where Integrity is the steering mechanism; passion is the fuel that powers it.

Without passion, the burden of leading and, more importantly, *leading with integrity*, can be too much for a person. Because leadership truly is a burden. Anyone who attempts to run for office thinking otherwise is probably someone who wants to be served, rather than to serve.

I find my passion whenever we expose criminal activities and bring to justice those responsible, especially cases of child abuse online, drug trafficking and corruption.

I find my passion whenever I speak to the people I encounter on weekends, as I do my weekly errands and trips to the market.

I find my passion when I am faced with an audience filled with future leaders, who are trying to grasp the concept and discipline of true Leadership.

I even find my passion whenever forces try to intimidate and undermine our efforts. It only makes fight harder.

When people attempt to muddle the issue, I fight even harder to make the Truth come out.

When certain elements display their penchant for misquoting me, I do not back down and work even harder to expose their duplicity.

In fact, while I was at The Hague, I have had to set straight certain reports that claim that I have said that the Vice President, like the President, is immune from suit!

To be clear, it has always been my position that impeachability is different from immunity. Except for the President, all impeachable officials are not immune from suit. While they may be protected from certain actions that would violate their impeachability, which is nothing more or less than the principle that they cannot be removed from office except by impeachment, I have never suggested that they are immune from suit. In fact, my statement even pointed to cases where the Supreme Court had ruled that certain impeachable officials, such as COMELEC Commissioners, may still be subject to criminal suits, such as citation for criminal contempt.

I am no longer surprised at the absurd and crooked ways that people on the wrong end of criminal investigations resort to in order to curtail these investigations and, ultimately, declaw the Filipino people's effort to fight corruption and protect its interests.

Apparently, lessons on integrity are not only meant for future leaders, but also for those who disseminate information to the public, and those who use them to obscure the truth.

I am, of course and in all honesty, not claiming that we have had a perfect run – far from it. I would be the first to admit that there were lessons that were learned the hard way; and there remains room for improvement. Yet, we cannot dismiss the importance of what we have achieved just because there are still some ways to go before we reach our destination.

The improvement of our credit ratings are real and concrete.

That the whole world presently is presently watching us as we fight for our navigational, law enforcement, exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and other related rights over disputed territories in the West Philippine Sea, under the auspices of the UN Arbitral Tribunal – even in the face of blatant display of brute force and intimidation by the other party to the dispute – is testament to how we are, today, a global example of leadership with integrity, pride and dignity; a leadership for whom “principles trump over power; law triumphs over force; right prevails over might.” (Secretary Del Rosario’s Opening Statement before the Arbitral Tribunal, 7 July 2015)

Does it mean that we have solved all our problems? No. Of course not.

What it means, though, is that this is a crucial time for us. We are entering a time when we have to make crucial choices about the future leadership of our country.

Which is why I value events such as this, for it gives me a glimpse at a very positive future, wherein Philippine elections will no longer revolve around such terms as “charisma” or zarzuela-like contrivances, with candidates singing, dancing and catering to the entertainment whims of the masses, but rather be focused on engaging in substantive information campaign and debates about candidates’ policies, programs, track record and concrete plans for the next several years and, yes, the quality of leadership they have to offer.

With an event such as this and an audience such as those present here today, I harbor a real hope that elections will not be about who can build around themselves the most compelling Cult of Personality.

We have to be more deliberative than that. We have to be smarter than that.

Both in the leaders we hope to become, and the leaders we hope will continue leading us down the “Tuwid Na Daan” in the next several years.

Be leaders who are upright, who lead with integrity. And to guide you, there is another definition of “integrity” that fits this context: that is, the state of being whole and undivided.

Be whole. Be undivided. Unbent. Unbowed. Unbroken.

It may be strange to be quoting the words of House Martell from George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire series. After all, real life politics is or, rather, *should be* nothing like the bloody Game of Thrones, right? But I think those are nonetheless fitting.

Stay unbent in the face of challenges.

Stay unbowed in the face of pressure, threats and influence.

Stay unbroken in spirit and in your passion.

My dear Escolarians, you are being educated in a university with a tradition of leadership. The founder of your school rose to lead her generation at a time when people still thought that women's roles must be confined to homemaking and child-bearing.

So, live up to that tradition.

One of the ways to do that is to make sure you remember the advice of Madame Librada Avelino.

I am sure you have heard or read these words of hers before.

I quote: "Be ready to offer all you have to the service of humanity ... and of our country".

Madame Librada Avelino did not just say those words to us. She lived by them.

We can do no less.

All the best to you, Escolarian leaders, and to our Filipino nation as a whole.

God bless you all!