

**Paper on
Ethics and Accountability in the Public Service
Center for Local and Regional Governance
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by
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Good Afternoon!

I am indeed grateful for this opportunity to be with you to talk about Ethics and Accountability in the Public Service as part of your Basic Course on Local Governance and Administration. It is always fulfilling to be able to advocate for the practice of ethical and accountable governance among all public servants – specially with a group composed of new entrants to the public service. Your group, though, is extra special being first-term mayors. I do hope that this short meeting would indeed provide value – added - in helping you prepare for your respective jobs as local chief executives - in ensuring your delivery of an efficient and effective public management and governance as your group could very well provide the role models that the society need to improve the families, the communities, the workplaces, till these reach out to the entire nation - and the world.

Records show that the Local Government Units or LGUs have scored a string of victories on high-profile issues.

In a book on Decentralized Capacity Building that has been prepared by the Development Academy of the Philippines, it was written that the LGUs are winning the battle over how best to run economic enterprises, create peace zones, protect sanctuaries and manage waste disposal. It reported that they have sparked the public's imagination over innovative approaches to resolving disputes and generating community consensus. And, one of the local officials in the past that I got to work with stated that this country may fall because of our national government, but this nation will rise only because of our local governments – for it is the LGUs – the small republics - actually composed of 79 provincesm 117 cities, 1,497 barangays - where the future of this nation - our great republic lies.

And why not?

The term itself – Local Government – refers to the level of government whereby everyday face-to-face interaction between citizens/beneficiaries and government takes place.

And since local governments are closer to the people they serve, they are in a better location to perceive the preferences of their communities and respond to their needs. At the top, there are a number of preferences that are extreme, and thus, cannot be aggregated.

At the regional level, variations still exist. But as the level goes down, in your areas of jurisdiction, needs and preferences become more homogenous.

There can be better accountability on the part of the government officials, more willingness to pay for services on the part of consumers, and growth and progress from below. However, there are instances when despite of these advantages, LGUs are unable to respond fully and are pulled down by procedural, resource and governance constraints. These can be addressed though by collective action marked by a high degree of local political participation and self determination, after all, all sectors of society are called upon to contribute to nation-building – a sacred task whose concept encompasses the social, economic, political, cultural and spiritual forces of a nation.

A daunting task requiring tremendous roles to play.

A very crucial and hard task that the Filipino people committed to undertake as they solemnly proclaimed this responsibility in the preamble of the Constitution, which says:

“We, the sovereign Filipino people, imploring the aid of the Almighty God, in order to build a just and humane society and establish a Government that shall embody our ideals and aspirations, promote the common good, conserve and develop our patrimony, and secure to ourselves and posterity the blessings of independence and democracy under the rule of law and a regime of truth, justice, freedom, love, equality, and peace, do ordain and promulgate this Constitution.”

As ordinary citizens then, we bound ourselves to ensuring that the kind of society, the kind of nation that we then pictured to have shall be met.

Today, the same Philippine Constitution poses to you a bigger challenge – not just as ordinary citizens – but as your respective localities Mayors – public servants who I would like to consider as heroic leaders. Heroic Leaders in the public office.

And what does our 1987 Philippine Constitution say of public office?

Towards these ends, we made a pro-GOD, pro-family, pro-people, and pro-poor Constitution that is more than political in character and one that exacts from the Government and its governors or our public officials -accountability to the people at all times. If we check on Section 1, Article XI of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, it explicitly ordains that:

“A Public Office is a public trust. Public officers and employees must at all times be accountable to the people, serve them with utmost responsibility, integrity, loyalty and efficiency, act with patriotism and justice and lead modest lives.”

Coming from these mandates, it becomes a glaring reality that our Constitution envisions a just and dynamic social order that will ensure the prosperity and independence of the nation and free the people from poverty through policies that provide adequate social services, promote full employment, a rising standard of living, and an improved quality of life (Sec 9, Art II); and directs the State to promote social justice in all phases of national development (Sec 10, Art II)

Tall order indeed! But for heroic leaders, these challenges can easily be internalized and operationalized – guided by what Chris Lowney once wrote on Heroic Leadership as he said:

“Leaders thrive by understanding who they are and what they value, by becoming aware of unhealthy blind spots or weaknesses that can derail them and by cultivating the habit of continuous self – reflection and learning.”

If this is so, then, it becomes imperative for a leader to really prepare himself or herself for the kind of job that he or she is to embrace – in your case, for the next three years or could even go up to the next six or nine more years or for one’s lifetime..

The preparation should cover an understanding of the needs, patterns and tools for public management or governance with emphasis on the roles and responsibilities and the attendant accountabilities for such.

The preparation should touch on ethics as a basic component of the day to day living not just during working hours but this goes beyond working hours as this shall cover even one’s personal life.

The preparation should look into relevant ethics and accountability issues –

- **the ones that could lead the leader to failure because of mismanagement, graft and corruption,**
- **those that could lead a leader to success, making an impact as regards steering respective jurisdiction into progress because of leadership attitudes and work culture that talk about the basic requirements expected of public service...**

To be able to address these requirements, the study and application of ethics at all times is therefore of paramount interest.

WHY is this so?

It is simply because, anyone in the public service must have full awareness on the importance of ethics, social responsibility and accountability in one's way of life particularly as this applies to the leaders' role in the pursuit of the welfare of both the family and the common good of the larger society that they govern, so that, the society can, in turn, look after the common good and well-being of the other members of the society –

- a means that will ensure unique participation of every individual in giving respective share in helping shape a strong republic through a strengthened “family which serves as the foundation of the nation”(Art XV Sec 1) and a basic autonomous social institution (Art II Sec 12)

To do these would necessitate exhibition of one’s love for country. Probably not the kind of love for country that our forefathers hundreds of years ago exhibited – nor the kind of love for country that our heroes have shown us – that is by dying for the country. This time though, the challenge could be for us to experience death – not physical death but death to one’s desires that do not contribute to the welfare of the greater majority – desires that don’t contribute to shaping a strong republic through a strengthened family which serves as the foundation of the nation and a basic autonomous social institution.

Examples could be death of relationships – kinship and friendship – something that is given so much premium by us – Filipinos. But we are aware also that these can both be an advantage or a liability in good governance.

Interpersonal relationships are ideal if they result in greater cooperation between the government and the general public. But the same strengths of relationships may serve as the seeds of corruption if abused for self aggrandizement.

First is on giving Heroism - in the past decades meant offering one's life or dying for a cause - but today, heroism, could mean offering one's life as one faces the trials and challenges of every day living - and dying - not physically, but emotionally - if what is involved is death of relationships as we experience fighting it out with those closest to our hearts in the name of justice, freedom, truth and in ensuring that good triumphs over evil - every time - wherever we are and whenever the situation calls for us to do so.

This could mean self sacrifice as we set aside our vested interests over and above our desires to give way for the good of the majority.

Love for country, during these days, can be manifested on one's level of sharing in the task of good government. A task that is not easy to carry out. A task where the weak of heart, the uncommitted, the fence-sitters, and those who sleep on their rights cannot be counted in the struggle.

A special kind of task where only the stout-hearted, the brave, the committed, the vigilant can make a change, can make a difference, and build the nation, preserve our democracy, save the Philippines.

Our national hero, Dr Jose Rizal, once said that people and government are correlated and complementary, that an aimless government would be an anomaly among a righteous people, just as a corrupt people cannot exist under just rulers and wise laws. The kind of leaders that you are to become will make or break the big dreams you have for your constituencies.

This is because, in politics and governance, we say: SALUS POPULI EST SUPREMA LEX. The welfare of the people is the supreme law.

And I am optimistic that your group – a new breed of public servants – can transform this nation into becoming a strong republic despite and in spite of the situation where both internal and external forces threaten to dismember our nation – to undermine our country's territorial integrity.

Possible or Impossible?

Is there anything at all which one may consider impossible? Yes, anything which you think is impossible cannot be possible. This simply means, that you are the ones to shape the quality of governance you are to introduce, operationalize and sustain for the good of the greater majority.

For in the veins of every Filipino flows the blood of heroes who have contributed the best of their abilities to their fellowmen .

This realization alone is more than enough reason to motivate us, you, to exert your utmost in the management of your respective jurisdiction's affairs. It is always good to reflect on the deeds of those who died and sacrificed for our country and our people that they may enjoy the blessings of freedom, liberty and democracy, and enjoy peace, progress and stability.

The very basic goals that we enshrined in our Philippine Constitution's preamble.

We need to reflect on what happened in the past because today's events show stark parallelism with those of yesterday, and none of us, you as Heads of your town/cities – I suppose would not wish to see a repeat of past mistakes.

The similarities, far from being superficial, show that the people's discontent and ensuing government action have focused principally on poverty, injustice, inequality, elitism, graft and corruption, immorality and threats of foreign control in our economy.

There is a big possibility that in your rein as the Local Chief Executive, you will have to face these non-entities.

And chances are, these might not be concluded during your three-year term or probably not even in your lifetime. But just the same, you must go on – you must not be disheartened – for the fruits of your efforts can be cascaded into your children and your children's children. They will be the ones to carry the torch long after you are gone –

Hence, you must ensure, that it is going to be a torch with good flames, one that represents the very ideals handed down from one generation to the next. Ideals that are immutable yet capable of imitation, adamant yet flexible and adaptable.

After this training, you will find yourselves all excited to go home to start making your dreams come true.

I hope I'm wrong. But unfortunately, you will soon realize, that three (3) years is not enough to make these dreams come true.

This is where trouble begins.

Some might start thinking of their reelection, their 2nd term and, depending on how big their dreams are, their 3rd term... and that is before the first year of first term is finished,

Nothing is wrong with that - thinking of the welfare of constituents, the development of towns or cities. But as one goes through these thoughts, one starts thinking of money and performance, and when one thinks of performance – it must be good performance as this will guarantee one's reelection.

Meanwhile, on the money aspect – one might find himself or herself in need of money to address the expected voluminous letters of solicitation for instance... and save some for future electoral campaigns. Some might find the easiest way to get it – that is thru jueteng and similar illegal activities.

But first-term mayors are still too idealistic for that.

So one will probably opt for projects. People need projects. The local government can finance some; the congressman, governor, senators, other government agencies and even foreign entities can fund the others. No sweat, simple networking. One gets his or her and the performance one needs for reelection.

These projects, however, need not lead to the realization of the Mayor's dreams. Not yet. They are there only to ensure that the real big dreams come true. Big dreams that include political and socio-economic reforms, a cultural revolution even. But first, one must stay in power.

One might even go with the trend of discarding the worthy projects of his or her predecessor-in-office because the credit will go to him which he could use come next election. Never mind the waste of funds, one believes he or she has better and worthier ideas. Meantime, with many on-going projects, the new Mayor now concentrates on attending various social functions, foreign to one's mayoral tasks but effective vote-getting activities. Before one knows it, its campaign period again. The people have forgotten about the promised big dreams so one will avoid reminding the constituents of those unfulfilled promises and instead think of other big dreams this time.

And the cycle repeats itself.

One day the new Mayor looks at the mirror, and whom does he or she sees? The hated politician he or she vowed never to become, the reason he or she decided to enter politics in the first place. Then he or she rationalizes. The people did this to me. I wanted to do good but they forced me into becoming a traditional politician. I did not want to steal, but they kept on asking me for money I couldn't afford. I wanted to do my real job, but they kept on inviting me to socials.

I have to please them always, least they turn their backs against me. And when they do, goodbye big dreams.

Well... the new Mayor did please them. But no big dreams. Why is that?

There's nothing wrong in always thinking of winning elections. That's how our system works. That's how to make big dreams come true. The problem lies in how we treat people and in how we try to win elections.

Earlier, I mentioned a popular dictum which is more applied in politics and governance, the one that says: SALUS POPULI EST SUPREMA LEX. The welfare of the people is the supreme law.

In a democratic society, the people is the majority. In elections, the people is the plurality of votes.

Under Philippine settings, in any given locality, it is safe to assume that the poor outnumber the rich. To the politician, therefore, it is but logical to give preference to the poor in order to win elections.

The easier way of course is to give preference to rich. They are few but influential, and they give money to your campaign kitties. The poor, anyway, have short memories, have simple and cheap needs, and, most importantly, can be bought by a few pesos and noodles on election day.

But there is no logic in it. They give you more votes, and their needs are simple and cheap. If you are creative enough you can address their needs using only government money and in a manner that will not make it necessary for you to buy their votes, thus ensuring your reelection.

And because what you addressed is a basic need, and therefore a big dream for them, they develop a deep sense of gratitude to your administration no vote-buying on election day can ever hope to overturn. But, most importantly, you avoided the temptations of corruption.

Catering to the business needs of the rich (i.e. police protection and infrastructure) will almost always involve taking bribes. Come election time, they support all the candidates. No assurance of advantage to you, business as usual to them.

It is difficult to effect changes when there is fear of losing an election. Only when one thinks of people's welfare that one cannot go wrong, even in his or her desire to win elections.

This, however, can pose problems. Take the case of sidewalk vendors. Sidewalks are beyond the commerce of men, but sidewalk vending is the only source of livelihood to many. Do you implement the law, arrest the vendors, confiscate their goods and deprive them of their only source of livelihood? Or, do you allow them to ply their trade and close your eyes to what the law dictates?

Again, be creative. Why not designate, by ordinance, certain sidewalks as places where vending may be allowed at certain times of the day only if the vendors will pay a very minimal fee, say P20, for mayor's permit or as tax, whatever. You will be granting sidewalk vending a semblance of legitimacy without necessarily ignoring the law.

Let's take a look at gambling. Some are legal, some are not. But you know that not all things legal are moral, so if you and your constituents think that cockfighting or lotto, being forms of legalized gambling are not good for you, then you can always refuse to allow their operation in your cities or municipalities.

The point always is that you can at all times serve the public welfare and win elections without violating laws.

There are changes you cannot effect overnight though. For instance, try refusing a solicitation with a sermon on the evils of dole outs and you immediately alienate at least 4 votes per solicitor. But you can always start asking for counterpart investments and you provide them with a sense of ownership over that which you give them.

Why not require them to pay for the monthly water bills on the public jetmatic pumps you install, dig the septic tanks for the toilet bowls you distribute, provide the labor for the coffin materials you donate, etc?

Being the top official of your towns and cities you do not even have to do much to deter corruption. Just be incorruptible, lead by example, and almost everybody at the municipal or city hall will think twice first before engaging in corrupt practices. Mind you, people will notice and think highly of you come election day.

Report to your office 1 hour or 30 minutes before 8 in the morning and pretty soon few will be coming in late. Will the people not clean the streets of debris after a storm if they see their mayor doing it in their presence?

Of course, you can always supplement your good examples with systems/ mechanisms that reinforce compliance with the changes/ reforms you wish effected. Some people simply refuse to learn in the absence of sanctions.

Please remember: all changes or reforms will have to start from you. That is the main and only strategy.

This is the reason why it is important to be ethical – to be responsible – to be accountable. For no one can ever effect changes if there is no admission as regards limitations. If one will not set aside pride and personal interest – the welfare of the greater majority will not be addressed.

But what is ethics? How can one be considered ethical?

If we go back to the many ways of defining ethics, we could check on the following:

ETHICS is derived from the greek word ETHOS which means a characteristic way of acting, of doing things that is applied to human conduct. It points to the free and deliberate use of the will.

ETHICS is a practical science of the morality of human conduct. It is a science because it is a systematic body of knowledge meant to guide men in their pursuit of the good and happy life.

ETHICS studies human acts to discover what these must be in order to agree with the dictates of reason. As such, it becomes evident that the main objective of ethics is the right morality or rectitude of human acts.

Thus, EHTICS becomes the study and philosophy of human conduct with emphasis on the determination of right and wrong. But, we must be aware at all times, that the study of ETHICS alone does not make a person ethical. There are a number of things to be considered – one is the reality that it requires frequency of application and expertise in making choices. You will realize that the problem is not deciding what is the right thing to do but rather in doing it. People are torn between what they want to do and what they think is right. People are torn between duty and desire. And, in the process of decision making, ETHICS becomes crucial as this supplies the norms by which relations among men (regardless of sectors: juridical, political, professional, social) are regulated and what such relations must be and indicate the reasons that require them to be so.

It has always been emphasized that the ultimate purpose of human life is happiness – but in search for that happiness – it is equally important to consider as guides our Laws & Standards of Morality as well as the many reasons on why we do things.

When a professional opts to join the public service – there are again many reasons. But for today’s session and in relation to our topic – we need to focus on a noble reason – that is, to serve!

In your case, when you decided to run for Mayor in your respective jurisdiction, you must be in a position to spell out your particular purpose for doing so. Is it to be a servant leader or something else? I will no longer ask each of you as to what your particular reasons were, are and will be... Suffice it to say that your presence here right now – is already a manifestation of your noble reasons – to serve, to do your respective share towards realization of the quality of life and governance that we committed to build as specified in our Preamble and to provide the kind of quality service that our Constitution challenges us to deliver....Public Office being a Public Trust!

But as you face the trials and challenges of public service – there is no doubt that you will come in contact with different kinds of people that could influence the kind of leaders you are to become. Thus, it is important for you to always remember that man seeks happiness in different levels and different ways. Some seek it in riches, others in pleasure, the rest in either power, prominence, honors attained and even in sin. In a man's desire for happiness, he acts in a human manner and is seldom conscious of the fact that he is acting for happiness. If the man is upright, he acts virtuously. If a sinner, he acts viciously. Whichever of the two gets closer to you could define the kind of trials and challenges that you must face with in your day to day operations.

It is important for any leader to always factor in morality of human acts in anything that he or she is to do. Morality is defined as that quality of human acts which leads us to call some of those acts good and some evil.

Human acts, to be morally good acts must be found in agreement with the norms of morality in all aspects of the following determinants:

- + the object – the act itself as a deed done or to be done**
- + the end – the motive or purpose in performing the act**
- + the circumstances – conditions without which the act could exist, but which happen to affect or qualify it in its concrete performance.**

In the consideration of circumstances, the following questions can best be used as a guide: Who, What, Where, With what ally? In what condition? When and Why?

A human act is said to be evil if it fails to conform with the norms of morality in any one of the identified three determinants: the object, the end, and the circumstances.

Thus to be guided, the following principles are suggested for adoption:

+ as regards the object or end of the agent as determinant of morality:

a good act done for a good end takes on an added or new goodness from the end, and from each good end that influence the act

a bad act done for an evil end takes on an added or a new malice from the end, and from each evil end that influence the act

a good act done for an evil end is wholly evil if the end is the complete motive for the act or if the end, while only a partial motive, is gravely ill.

A good act done for an end slightly evil and not the whole motive of the act, is only partially vitiated.

An evil act can never become good by reason of a good end

An indifferent act is good if done for a good end and evil if done for an evil end

Likewise, it should be remembered that circumstances influence upon morality of human acts can be gleaned from the following principles:

an indifferent act becomes good or evil by reason of its circumstances

a good act may become evil by reason of circumstances

an act may become better or worse, or may take on a new goodness or evil by reason of circumstances

an evil act can never be made good by circumstances

a gravely ill circumstances entirely vitiates a good act

a slightly evil circumstances does not entirely vitiate a good act

This in effect is the meaning of the scholastic dictum that says:

“In order to be good, a thing must be totally good. A single defect renders it evil.”

This means that a human act is considered good only if the end, means and circumstances are good. When any of these three constitutive parts is evil, the entire human act is considered evil, even if the two other parts are good.

Values play a key role in the success or failure of our undertakings, our plans and our aspirations. In one of the seminars conducted on value re-orientation, it was pointed out that values are intimately related to the search for meaning in human life. It has been said that values enable man to change, to exercise self-control and to set self-directions. Values are related to religion, morality, ethics.

These are related to social and political sciences and other fields of human endeavours.

And for the Philippines, it is believed that an awareness of the Filipino values, both positive and negative, strengths and weaknesses in the Filipino character, should be made to better appreciate what values are all about.

The human person ought to hold on to virtues and values both as an individual and as a social being. As an individual, there are aspects of the human person that could easily be roots of values.

A person has a moral aspect and he could fortify this by fostering virtues and values like honesty, fairness, magnanimity, benevolence and goodwill. A human person is also a social being with economic, political and sociological aspects. As an economic being, a person could cultivate virtues and values like frugality, simplicity, and industriousness as against wastefulness, luxury and sloth.

As a political being, he should be aware of the political events in the country so that he can more personally participate in nation building and strengthen thereby his sense of nationalism.. As a social person, he could cultivate the Filipino values of harmonious interpersonal relationships, peace and unanimity, family closeness, etc. He should also be conscious of ecology, participating in the preservation of our natural resources. Some of the identified strengths of the Filipinos are:

Pakikipag kapwa tao – this trait is manifested in the basic sense of justice and fairness and concern for others. Filipinos are helpful and generous in times of need (pakikiramay) and sensitive to peoples feelings (pakikiramdam)

Family orientation – to the Filipino, one’s family is the source of personal identity, the source of emotional and material support, and one’s commitment and responsibility.

Joy and Humor – Filipinos have a cheerful and fun-loving approach to life and its ups and downs. The result is a certain emotional balance, optimism, a healthy disrespect for power and office and the capacity to survive.

Flexibility, adaptability and creativity – traits that are manifested in the ability to adopt to life in any part of the world, in the ability to make things out of scraps, in the capacity to keep machines running and in the ability to accept change

Hard work and industriousness – traits that are evident in willingness to take risks with jobs abroad and while there, work at 2 or 3 jobs, resulting in better productivity and entrepreneurship for some and survival, despite poverty, for others

Faith and religiosity – Filipinos comprehend and genuinely accept reality in the context of God’s will and plan

Ability to survive – clearly seen in the Filipinos’ capacity for endurance despite difficult times and in his ability to move on even in a slow phased mode

On the other hand, some of the identified negative values of the Filipinos are:

Extreme personalism – Filipinos view the world in terms of personal relationship, One of the manifestations is in the necessity for the establishment of a personal relationship before any business or work relationship can be successful

Extreme family centredness – while concern for family is one of the greater strengths, in the extreme, it is also a serious flaw. Excessive concern for the family creates an in-group to which the Filipino is fiercely loyal to the detriment of concern for the larger community to common good

Lack of discipline – this trait often results to inefficient and wasteful work system, violation of rules leading to more serious transgressions and a casual work ethic leading to carelessness and lack of follow through

Passivity and lack of initiative – this makes the Filipinos be more patient and take long-sufferings (matisin). Too easily resigned to one’s fate, and as such, can easily be oppressed and exploited

Colonial mentality – made up of two dimensions: lack of patriotism and actual preference for things of foreign origin. This results in a cultural vagueness or weakness that make the Filipinos extraordinarily susceptible to the acceptance of modern mass culture which is often too western

Kanya-kanya syndrome – this is evident in the tendency to bring others down in the personal ambition and the drive for power and status that is completely insensitive to common good.

Lack of self analysis and self reflection – there is no felt need to validate hypotheses or explanation of things. There is also the tendency to be satisfied with rhetorics and to substitute this for reality.

It can be gleaned that understanding these values will help one to give his best, specially, in his dealings with others: in the workplace, in the school, in the community where he lives, in whatever arena he is thrown into.

For politicians, I see the following very popular Filipino values that could make or break their big dreams towards good government

We have utang na loob. The Filipino is beholden to anyone who did him good or helped him in times of need. The value of indebtedness can be exaggerated to a point where a person renders undue loyalty to anyone who may have given him a job or helped his family.

Another Filipino value is pakikisama. Harmonious inter personal relationship is almost unconsciously adopted by Filipinos. This accounts for his permissiveness, his selective blindness to the faults of his family just to maintain peace in the family or community

Filipinos have expression like Bahala Na and Gulong ng Palad. They throw everything in the lap of God, knowing that they are in good hands. They do not complain as much as they are expected to because they know that life is like a wheel of fortune; one goes up and down in life. There are, of course, negative aspects of the bahala na mentality because one sometimes does not work or try hard, believing that God would help him anyway and if he is not helped, then he consigns it to the will of God

Or the gulong ng palad for that matter. If one believes that there is a wheel of fortune in life, then one has the tendency to be complacent and just wait for better times.

Every virtue starts with a value. Only when the virtue is considered a value can a person proceed to cultivating it. Whether it involves an intellectual or a cardinal or theological virtue, the same rule applies. Virtue is a good habit that can be cultivated

Values are inter-related with each other. But more than them being inter connected, they scientifically overlap so that one will not suffice without the other or others. They are made to effectively integrate with each other in order to form one integrated whole person. Thus, a person of integrity, wholeness and strength.

As Gandhi said,

“Man is one indivisible whole; he cannot be good in one department of life while attempting to be bad in another department”.

This way, values become the reason and basis for a person’s integrity, moral strength and effectiveness.

But in integrating values: goodness and firmness must never be separated. If you are good but not firm – this results to a negative situation. If your are firm but without good intentions, this is not good also.

It is good to always anchor on the four-fold direction of life, that is: GOD, FAMILY , WORK and RELATIONSHIP WITH PEOPLE

As public servants (officials or employees), we are to be guided by the Constitutional provision on Public Office is a Public Trust.

We have to be very firm in saying NO to anything that will not be in conformity with the standards for public service as explicitly stated in our Constitution. We have to say a big NO to graft and corruption – a social ill that this administration has been addressing through an intensified campaign that involves the adoption of a three-pronged approach involving credible investigation, system reforms and promotion of zero tolerance for corruption through education. Recently, we included another strategy – strategic partnership with the rest of the stakeholders – the civil society, faith based organizations, the academe, the business community and others.

This is because of the reality that it is not easy to fight graft and corruption – the trigger points on graft and corruption in the Philippines would include 508 years of historical experiences from the hands of our colonizers (from 1522 to 1945, that is, 457 years under the Spanish Empire; 47 years under the Americans; and, 4 years of Japanese rule) and continued with the onset of post colonial years beginning in 1946 marked by the 20 years from a dictatorial ruler. Each of those years likewise left marked practices that have been institutionalized in the country’s systems and processes and some imbibed by the citizenry. Every branch of government, even the judiciary, has been accused of corruption.

These turned the country into a weak state - in a way, for allowing the development of culture of tolerance and strengthened the culture of “*pakikisama*” which most of the times pushes one to yield to the temptation of graft and corruption...for there are a number of instances when one is pushed to do irregularities not because he or she is inherently corrupt, but probably because, of lack of awareness as regards the repercussions of what he is to do or just did – probably because of “*pakikisama*” or “*utang na loob*” – specially under the Philippine setting where people give so much attention to these values so much. I already talked about this earlier.

This is the reason, why, aside from the 1987 Philippine Constitution which is very clear on the constitutional mandate for public servants, public office being a public trust, there are other laws, like the anti-graft and corruption laws which provided for norms on how one should be guided in his or her dealings with anyone specially as regards official capacities as public servants.

Thus, we have on 25 July 1987 - E.O. 292 or the Administrative Code of 1987, promulgated to replace the Administrative Code then in force which happened to be forged in 1917 yet when conditions between the people and the government was totally different.

This new Code, which all of you must be very familiar with, incorporated the major structural, functional and procedural principles and rules of governance with the end view of serving the people

And on 20 February 1989, one clear law, R.A. 6713 otherwise known as “The Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees”, was enacted laying down the norms on how public servants should deliver respective mandates and meet expectations from all stakeholders – specially your constituencies.

The Code highlights the need for transparency of transaction and access to information, incentives and rewards system for exemplary service, prohibited acts and transactions and providing penalties for violations thereof, and for other purposes. And for everyone to be properly guided on the requirements of this Law – everyone, meaning, all officials and employees in the government, elective and appointive, permanent or temporary, whether in the career or non-career service, including the military and police personnel, whether or not they receive compensation and regardless of the amount, the Civil Service Commission issued the Implementing Rules and Regulations for R.A. 6713 on 21 April 1989.

The IRR was very specific on the roles of the heads of departments, offices and agencies in ensuring enough awareness and trainings for everyone in their respective jurisdictions that are geared towards – strengthening value systems to uphold the time-honored principle of public office being a public trust, the need to act on communications received within 15 working days from receipt of said communication and processed within reasonable time invoking a streamlined process, public disclosure of business interests and financial connections and the need to avoid conflict of interest at all times. The IRR likewise included a provision on the grounds for administrative disciplinary action and penalties.

I am convinced that if only public servants learned to internalize and operationalize the requirements set by law on how public service should be delivered, graft and corruption will never thrive and public service will be marked with good governance instead.

It is indeed very important to say no to corruption – and this is because of the following alarming statistics on the costs of corruption – The economic cost of corruption both at the national and international level, per World Bank’s report, exceeds by far the damage caused by any other single crime. Accordingly, more than US\$ 1 trillion is paid in bribes each year – a figure which includes the estimate of actual bribes paid worldwide in both developed and developing economies.

And earlier report from World Bank estimated it to be at \$48 billion over the last 20 years, greater than the entire national debt (\$40 billion) for the same period¹.

The Asian Development Bank, on the other hand, said that corruption can cost a country up to 17 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), robbing the population of resources that could have been used to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development.

In 2004, Acebedo wrote that The Economist Intelligence Unit estimated the losses from corruption from about 20 to 30 percent of the country's national budget or from P160 to P240 billion a year

In the same year, the Office of the Ombudsman said the figures reached P200 billion a year.

Very alarming indeed!

And I would like to believe that not one of you would wish to be a party to anything that would further increase these statistics. And I consider your group a very lucky group because as you start your term you are given another law that will definitely help you implement radical, actually very radical - reforms towards good governance.

Many of your predecessors, I believe, have tried to correct the systems to provide better service to the public that they vowed to serve – but failed – but this time, with your group – there is no room for failure. And this is because of another development that further bolster this administration's determination and political will to govern well.

Earlier this month, June 2 to be exact, the President, Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed into law Republic Act 9485 otherwise known as the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007. And why did I say that this is going to be a big help to you in your work as the new Chief Executive Officer of your respective cities or municipalities. This Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007 will ensure that honesty and responsibility among public officials and employees shall be maintained through measures that shall promote transparency with regard to the manner of transacting with the public.

This covers streamlining of processes and continuous assessment and upgrading of frontline services. This also covers the need to attend to the needs of every client that is already within the offices' premises within the same day.

RA 9485 requires all government offices to adopt simplified measures to expedite transactions by fixing deadlines for the completion of both simple and complex transactions to within five and ten days respectively where simple or complex transactions involve any application for any privilege, right, permit, reward, license, concession, or for any modification, renewal or extension. This also calls for the reduction of signatories to a maximum of five signatures.

RA 9485 likewise holds the heads of the agencies accountable to the public in the delivery of fast, efficient, convenient and reliable services and these can be easily done as the new Law requires the establishment of service standards or a Citizen's Charter in the form of information billboards to be posted at the main entrance of offices containing the list of procedures per transaction, the persons responsible for each step, the documents and fees required.

And there will be public assistance or complaints desk to be set up.

Any official or employee found guilty of violating the new Law's provisions shall be sanctioned with varying level of penalties depending on the nature of violation, i.e. for light offenses - 30 days suspension on the first offense, 3 months suspension without pay on the second, and dismissal and disqualification from public service on the third.

Grave offenses, on the other hand, like fixing or colluding with fixers will merit dismissal and perpetual disqualification from public office. The fixers themselves face a maximum of six years' imprisonment or a fine of P20,000 to P200,000.00

The Implementing Rules and Regulations once prepared and effective will definitely guide you on how to ensure enforcement of this new Law's provisions – all of which – can be used in facing your day-to-day challenges as the new Mayors in your respective localities.

And the Executive Branch of our government can likewise share with you its programs aimed at achieving good governance by curbing graft and corruption, particularly the ones being administered by PAGC.

We can share with you PAGC's experiences as regards the pains and joys brought about by its professionalization as it moved and still moves towards good governance.

When the President ordered an intensified campaign against graft and corruption, PAGC responded by first ensuring that it is capable of waging a good fight.

In August 2004, we started by strengthening PAGC as an institution – ensuring that there is a set vision, mission and goals anchored on how the government has set its thrusts on this area.

The basic document we used as basis is the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) for 2004 to 2010 of the Macapagal – Arroyo Administration.

You might not be aware yet of one milestone here – the inclusion of a full chapter on Anti-Corruption (Chapter 21) and Bureaucratic Reforms (Chapter 22) – which never happened in the previous MTPDPs.

Chapter 21 of the MTPDP, that is on Anti-Corruption, specifically stresses three areas of reforms on anticorruption efforts which are:

- a) punitive measures that include effective enforcement of anti-corruption laws; enforcement mechanisms within revenue generating agencies; lifestyle check and other programs**
- b) preventive measures that include strengthening of anti-corruption laws; improvement of integrity systems; improvement of systems and controls**
- c) and, promotion of zero tolerance for corruption through societal values formation and active participation and involvement of the public in the fight against corruption**

Chapter 22, on the other hand, says:

“To improve the quality and efficiency of public service, the government shall adopt institutional improvements in the bureaucracy...”

As for PAGC’s Vision, Mission, and Goals, we set the following:

“A Graft and Corrupt-Free Philippines characterized by transparency and accountability in governance, honesty and integrity in the bureaucracy in a corruption intolerant society” for the vision

And for the Mission, we say:

“To be the President’s arm in eradicating graft and corruption through effective Deterrence, Prevention and Education in partnership with all stakeholders”

For the Goals, we have:

Under Deterrence (investigation/enforcement) – “to make graft and corruption a high-risk, low-reward activity”

Under Prevention – “to minimize opportunities for graft and corruption and ensure that systems of agencies are corruption-resistant”

For Education – “To promote corruption-intolerant society by raising awareness that mobilizes citizenry and by disseminating good citizenship values and institutionalizing the code of ethics in agencies”

Once set, we checked on our internal capacities and capabilities by ensuring that only those capable of providing positive contribution to the fight and directly address the challenges posed by the set vision, mission and goals are made part of the PAGC manpower complement. That was a radical and a very painful decision but had to be implemented. So that – in two and a half months’ time – almost 30 personnel had to be issued the pre-termination and non – renewal of respective contracts of services. Applicants had to go through a very rigid process to check on integrity and commitment levels.

PAGC investigators were sent to trainings and made to attend short term courses on field investigation, advanced fraud audit techniques, public corruption and ethics, and even internal controls. Investigators were guided to ensure credible case build-up per case with a given standard timeframe of 90 days with extension to be considered depending on the type and nature of the cases.

We established a database of Personal Data Sheets, Sworn Statement of Assets, Liabilities and Networth and appointment papers of presidential appointees (PAs) from various agencies so that we no longer have to subpoena these documents when a particular PA has been a subject of a complaint --- to avoid getting the subject alarmed on any PAGC investigation being conducted on him or her.

Through the assistance of USAID, we designed a Complaints and Case Management Manual of Operations in the last quarter of 2005. This manual aims to be a quick and ready reference for technical and support staff responsible for the tracking, monitoring of cases and investigation and enforcement of the laws administered by the Commission. Hence, transfer of technology and phasing in of new investigators is easier.

With this manual is an Excel programmed case monitoring and document-tracking system to ensure that all incoming documents are acted upon within the required period and to ensure that all cases are acted upon and moving.

We employed a “shame-campaign” by reporting to the public, thru press conferences and press releases, offenders with cases that have punitive recommendations.

This include sanctions involving dismissal from service with forfeiture of benefits, cancellation of civil service eligibility and perpetual disqualification from holding public office.. This campaign promotes corruption as a high-risk, low reward activity.

For the first time also, PAGC initiated the setting up of its website, wherein the public could read the press releases on sanctioned officials as well as file complaints to PAGC.

We also forged partnerships with other government agencies, CSOs and stakeholders to increase the number of cases filed against abusive public servants.

Some of these agreements include:

- Partnership with the Transparency and Accountability Network (TAN) and the Coalition Against Corruption (CAC) for these CSOs to provide qualified volunteers to PAGC in its lifestyle check crusade against erring officials and employees in all government agencies, departments, and instrumentalities**
- MOA with 10 select agencies which were challenged by the President to file at least 1 case per quarter involving a “big fish” to PAGC or to OMB.**

- **MOA with the Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption or VACC for their volunteers to act as informants particularly in lifestyle check cases.**
- **MOA with the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLAC) to strengthen investigative processes to ensure air tight cases that would warrant affirmation of recommendations with sanctions**

PAGC also saw the need to go heavy on advocacy (education) and media campaign to respond to the worsening level of perception on corruption

Then, in December 2004, PAGC spearheaded the conduct of a three-day unprecedented Presidential Anti Corruption Workshop to craft the Integrity Development Action Plan (IDAP) which talks about agency-specific measurable initiatives and action plans towards improving images of respective agencies attended by over a hundred top officials from more than 40 government departments and offices.

These agency plans and department commitments, served as an integrity pact between the President and the Agency Heads, to ensure implementation of the same starting January 2005.

The 22 doables are:

On the area of Prevention, we have 7:

- 1. strengthening of internal control through the institutionalization of internal audit service**
- 2. conduct of Integrity Development Review or IDR in 5 agencies**
- 3. fast tracking of the electronic New Government Accounting System and electronic bidding for the procurement of goods, services and infrastructure projects**
- 4. incorporating integrity check in recruitment and promotion of government personnel**
- 5. institutionalization of a multi-stakeholder personnel and organizational performance evaluation system**
- 6. protection of meager income of government employees by ensuring a level for take home pay**
- 7. adoption of a single ID system for government officials and employees.**

We have four for the Education Strategies,

- 1. dissemination of compendium of anticorruption laws, rules and regulations**
- 2. preparation of agency-specific code of ethical standards**

- 3. conduct of ethics training, spiritual formation, and moral recovery program for agencies and stakeholders**
- 4. integration of anti-corruption modules for elementary and secondary levels.**

On deterrence or investigation and enforcement, we have seven:

- 1. development of agency Internal Complaint Unit (including the protection of whistleblowers).**
- 2. setting up/strengthening of agency Internal Affairs Unit.**
- 3. publish blacklisted offenders and maintain on-line central database for public access**
- 4. holding superiors accountable for corrupt activities of subordinates**
- 5. effective use of existing agency administrative disciplinary machinery and publication of results of administrative cases handled**
- 6. advocacy for the submission of Income Tax Returns as attachment to the Statement of Assets, Liabilities and Networth**
- 7. PAGC's carrying out of an independent survey to check anti-graft and corruption program effectiveness**

And on Strategic Partnership, we have four:

- 1. linking of existing databases of complementary agencies and sharing of information**
- 2. need to enlist or enhance participation of private sector and civil society in various areas of governance**
- 3. need to tap international development agencies and private sector for support**
- 4. institutionalization of the participation of stakeholders in agency activities**

Many lessons on best practices can be derived here and these are shared between and among the IDAP focal persons during the regular sessions that PAGC conducted to help others improve on their performance level.

Some of the best practices point to: planning what needs to be done and who shall be asked to do the tasks, capturing agreements, decisions taken, action plans, timelines, and the like, in written form, disseminating information to the rest of the public officials and employees in their respective offices and taking time to bring reforms for their regional or provincial offices

The reasons cited for failure to register improvements in ratings include failure of the IDAP designated focal person/s to report to their respective superiors – not even the Department’s Secretary is given updates on IDAP, targets and accomplishment reports are personally set/prepared by the focal person hence no action has ever been taken by the Department,

For the objectives, parameters and rating scale for these measures, these are made part of the documents I requested to be distributed to you. Should you have any questions on IDAP, please feel free to communicate with us.

Now, I would like to share with you a CD that came from no less than Mr Tony Kwok – I am not sure if you have heard of him – he was once a well known graftbuster heading the Hong Kong’s Independent Commission Against Corruption or ICAC. He was responsible for steering ICAC in their successful cleansing of Hong Kong from one of the most corrupt countries in the 70s to one of the cleanest seven years after....

This CD contains stories that talk about the experiences, and challenges that new entrants to the public service, per my own assessment, must see.

There are a number of challenges here that the public servants are faced with – the stories might be totally different from what you have experienced in the past or might experience as you start your new roles as Mayors in your respective towns. But, the manner of handling those would always require prudence and assurance that whatever your decisions might be – such must be in conformity with how public officials must do given the constitutional mandate for a public office being a public trust.

C D SHOW.....

The different stories depict trigger points on how a public servant can be exposed to temptations and finally yield to temptations...

When this happens, we can expect mismanagement resulting to poor governance and loss of trust and confidence of the people we all vowed to serve.

But if the public servant is aware of what is supposed to be the roles and responsibilities and of course accountabilities of everyone in the public service, specially the ones leading – a bigger percentage of success in achieving good governance is assured.

And I know that we all know that this is not an easy job to do.

May I now invite you to take a look at a number of things you need to work on, individually and with your teams – these are:

- to show your leadership capabilities;
- your value systems and character;
- your capability to influence others;
- to set people in the right direction—where right direction is gauged based on values—of being truthful, ethical and principled;
- to exhibit integrity—where integrity is tied up with honesty and where honesty means doing what one says he will do— with no trace of deception nor cover-ups;
- to provide consistency between words and deeds;
- to take a stand on important principles—saying NO when everyone else says YES;
- of making a difference in the midst of conformism; and,
- to basically serve like candles in the dark.

Very hard job indeed! As this is actually a call for sacrifice for our country — as what is likewise being carried by the following biblical guides...

Sirach 2: 1-3, gives us an indication of what we mean here....it says:
“...if you have decided to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. Keep your heart upright and remain resolute; do not be upset in the time of adversity. Hold fast to the Lord, do not separate yourself from Him so that you may be successful till the end of your days.”

Further, Sirach 4:28, says:

“Fight for the truth till death and the Lord will fight for you”

This could be taken to mean, death in terms of relationships – this I earlier mentioned.

We see here the cutting off of ties with the other party if the latter is doing the wrong thing that the other party is addressing... the other party could be a member of one’s immediate or extended family, a friend, an officemate, an associate....; or death in one’s ways – from being wasteful to having concerns about judicious use of government’s scarce resources; and the list goes on and on.... This just tells us of the need to effect radical reforms and that the change must start within ourselves, within our own circles of association; within our own sets of ways.

And with GOD's grace, with your resolve to work with passion and do your respective mission in the task of building a graft and corruption -free Philippines through your own localities, I am sure you will all succeed.

And for you to have something to hold as you face the heroic journey you are to take on specially during trying times, I would like to share with you the following guidance:

You need to prepare yourselves for the kind of fight you are to face head on...

You need to professionalize yourselves and your organization as a whole...

You need to be more committed to the kind of work that public servants are tasked to deliver...

You need to go beyond doing what has been there as a result of tradition handed over to you by those who have resigned thinking that what is in there is already a hopeless and helpless situation...

When you were younger, I am sure you dreamed about change. You crafted recommendations contained in reports. .. but most of the times they remained as such – reports and totally untouched.

Now, you are given the chance to do something and see if you could get your recommendations working. You could finally effect changes. That is precisely what would be expected of you, of us all, ...to effect changes...

The challenge is obviously not how one can get away with doing as little as possible and leaving the unpleasant work to everyone else but rather how each and everyone of us can contribute most effectively and meaningfully to this crucial struggle

I am confident that you can deliver...

We all need to begin our efforts with a big HOPE.... as the seedbed of all great endeavors is HOPE... where the WILL is planted and nourished.

And for us to do this, there is a –

+ Need to direct our energies to things or activities that best benefit not only ourselves but others;

+ Need to bloom where we are planted, give our best shot to whatever we do or are tasked to do.

We may not always choose the circumstances that life finds us in, but, if we give our best in whatever situation, then we are sure to reap a harvest of good fortune, not necessarily financial reward, but recompense of a greater value and one which would give us greater satisfaction;

+ Need to live our virtues. And these are hard work, patience, honesty and integrity. We need to hold on to them no matter what it costs us

as Frederic Flach once said:

“Whether by accident or design, there are the moments when, because of a readiness within us and a collaboration with events occurring around us, we are forced to seriously reappraise ourselves and the conditions under which we live and to make certain choices that will affect the rest of our lives.”

Let us seize this opportunity and let us make our choices and let us act NOW!

At this point, please allow me to share with you some guidance on how you could do a personal reflection as public officials to maintain and sustain integrity in governance.

This guide has been provided by Fr Albert E. Alejo – a Jesuit priest who was once a local official and now an active participant in the government’s pursuit of quality governance which his group advocates through their Ehem Aha advocacy to finally put an end to the much delayed reforms in public service

The guide questions are:

- 1. How have I changed as a person since I took public post?
What do people who really know me tell me about myself?
 (“Iba ka na talaga!” or “Ikaw na Ikaw pa rin”)**

- 2. Corruption in the country has been very much documented, and is still being exposed.
To what extent am I part of this problem?**

- 3. What are my fears in my public office?
What are my joys?
To whom do I share my fears and consolation?**

4. What is my attitude toward words?

To public oaths?

To documents and contracts?

To numbers?

(“Sa taong may hiya, ang salita’y panunumpa” – Kartilya ng Katipunan 1896)

5. What groups of people feel comfortable talking or working with me?

What groups of people find me unapproachable?

6. Do I pray? How?

How important is religious faith in my personal life?

In my public service?

7. How do I improve myself?

Do I read books?

What new skills have I learned the past year?

What new ideas am I developing?

What do I do to help me make good analysis?

8. I look at my house. What does my house say about me?

What does my car say about me?

My library?

My recreation?

My office?

My guns?

9. How do I feel about my body?

My health?

What is my form of relaxation?

How is this related to my job as public servant?

10. How do I feel about my lifestyle?

How do I develop this?

What does my lifestyle say about my principles?

My priorities?

How does it affect my performance as a public servant?

11. How do I feel about the lifestyle of my family?

My spouse?

My kids?

My relatives?

How does their lifestyle affect my decisions as a public servant?

12. How do I look at gifts?

How do I classify them?

How am I affected by them?

To whom do I owe “utang na loob”?

13. How do I know what occasions or moments of life that are really important to my people?

What events do I normally attend?

What invitations do I tend to refuse?

14. Do I believe that the Filipino way of life and thinking can support a scientific culture?

How does this relate to the need for better governance?

15. How did I come to power or position of influence?

Does my view and practice of power essentially include the “common good”?

16. Does my office promote a culture of efficiency, transparency and service?

Or does it tolerate a culture of mediocrity, ambiguity, and exclusion in its design, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs – specially for the poor?

17. Am I better public leader because of my membership in a political party?

How loyal am I to my party?

How sincere is my party to serving the common good?

18. What is my stand on the proposal to abolish the so-called “pork barrel”?

On the standard “commission” on government projects?

19. Do I have unexplained wealth? How do I explain it to myself?

Is there anything in what I have done or in what I am doing right now that could be a source of scandal in the future?

Can I imagine its impact on my family and constituency?

20. Do I know some corrupt officials in the offices/agencies within the sphere of my influence or responsibility?

What have I done or what keeps me from doing something to correct the situation?

How do I see the work of COA? The Ombudsman?

21. How am I employing the new developments in information technology for more effective governance?

Do I do benchmarking based on award-winning practices?

22. Do I have enemies?

How do I treat them?

Have I directly or indirectly killed anyone?

How do I feel about this?

23. Do I have a personal vision for my people?

Is this vision aligned with their expressed needs and interests?

24. Do I think of death?

How do I feel about death?

What if death becomes part of my work as public servant?

25. Who is my model in public leadership?

What do I really want to leave as my legacy?

What would really give meaning and inner joy to my life as a public servant?

These are some of the most important questions that need to be visited and honestly responded to every now and then.

And may be, as one does the personal reflection – then Senator Jose Diokno’s position on honesty can be another reflection guide as he posed the question: “Why be Honest” (Garcia 1993:83). He said:

“Why be honest, when it pays to be dishonest? We fight for others, when they won’t fight for you?...or even for themselves?...the answer I think lies in what life means to you. If life means having a good time, money, fame, power, security...then you don’t need principles, all you need are techniques.

On the other hand, if happiness counts more than a good time, respect more than fame, right more than power, and peace of soul more than security; if death doesn’t end life but transforms it, then you must be true to yourself and God and to love the truth and justice and freedom that are God’s other names”

Another food for thought could be the one from then Senator Jovito R Salonga (2003. The Intangibles that Make a Nation Great). It says...

“In all areas of national endeavour, there is a need for imagination, careful planning, thoroughness, hard work, sweat, integrity, dedication, self-discipline and the willingness to sacrifice all for the common good...All the funds in the world will be to no avail if we suffer from lack of these intangible forces that make a nation great.”

And finally, on Dr Jose P. Laurel’s statements in his inaugural speech which could serve as another inspiration for all of us, as he said:

“Every drop, every trickle of individual effort shall be grooved into a single channel for common endeavor until they grow into a flowing stream...a raging flood, hurdling all difficulties”.

In these difficult times for the world and our country, these words must stir and move us to unite and consecrate ourselves for our country and our people.

May our Creator, through HIS Blessed Mother, continuously bless all your undertakings – our undertakings - as we do all these for the greater glory of HIS name.

Let us not fail HIM.
