

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR VALUES-BASED QUALITY AND PRODUCTIVITY¹

If there is one message I wish to convey about your intriguing theme today on values-based quality and productivity, that message is PARTNERSHIP.

Most always, the best and the worst in the relations of human beings come out in every partnership they make, be this relation a marriage or enterprise; and there is no doubt that quality and productivity are the products of human relations in partnership with each other.

It is easy to achieve quality and productivity in work by merely changing the human beings with machines or perhaps by putting cyborgs to work. No questions asked. You can program them one way or the other and they will produce according to the programmed input.

But why then your theme about value-based quality and productivity? I think because by now we must all realize that the defining competitive edge of an enterprise is its human talents and how they act.

And human actions are motivated by values, good or bad.

So that in discussing values-based quality and productivity, we want to tap into the human being's well-spring of values to use these as springboards, ultimately for human progress, by way of establishing superb human organizations or enterprises whose product of goods and services are the best in quality, and whose way of producing these quality products enhances the competitiveness of firms because of ever improving productivity.

What then are the values that are most useful in building a partnership towards improving quality and enhancing productivity in our workplaces.

In my experience as a trade unionist dealing with the social partners, there are five values that will cement a partnership for mutual gains including for quality and productivity: first is friendship; second is transparency; third is honesty; fourth is participation; and last is accountability.

Let me briefly elaborate on these five values.

FRIENDSHIP is really more than what it seems. Two words are joined in one -- friend and ship -- and its meaning is multiplied. We are a country now sailing the rough seas of globalization, where competition for survival and success has indeed become very harsh. Sink or swim, the Filipino people are all on board that ship. In such a situation wouldn't our chances of survival and success be much more enhanced if we treated each other as friends rather than as enemies?

No true friendship, however, can survive without TRANSPARENCY. (Maliban lamang kung plastikan lang ang gusto natin). In fact, transparency in the transactions and relations between and among friends cements their partnership. But within the word transparency is embedded a timeless Filipino value: PARE .

¹ Contribution of Antonio C. Asper of the Federation of Free Workers (FFW) and Member, TESDA Board, to the 23rd PQPM National Quality and Productivity Congress and 2nd National Assembly of Quality and Productivity Organizations; Dusit Hotel Nikko, Ayala Center, Makati City. 7 October 2005.

What is called the PARE principle connotes a social relation derived from the religious rite of baptism. One is asked to sponsor a child in baptism that bonds the sponsor and the parents into a socio-cultural relation known as kumpare or kumare, whose original meaning and import is for the sponsor to act as a surrogate parent to the child being baptized; as also to become a role model for his or her inaanak. Thus, personal and social responsibility is built into the relationship.

In the term PARE is also implied the social bond between two equals, for mutual aid and protection, as well as for mutual help and benefit. This social bond and value is equally useful in labor relations. It can transform the social bondage created by employer-employee relations into a social partnership for progress and prosperity for all.

Any partnership for quality and productivity that is based on this time-honored value should last for a long, long time, even beyond a lifetime, to the benefit of the social partners and the society in which they belong.

The transparent relationship of true friends can only be founded on HONESTY about their personal and social relations. Mistakes and disagreements in any relation of partnership there will always be. But honesty will pull the partners through in these rough times, or if they ever decide to separate, to do so as friends and to remain as friends.

And then again, good partnerships will soon become more intimate. And in the term honesty, the word “Hon” can be extracted to denote another value in building productive partnerships. In labor relations, more intimate relationships between and among equal social partners will make it easier to hurdle even legitimate, intractable or seemingly irreconcilable differences.

There is no need to belabor the fact that a partnership is a relationship of PARTICIPATION, even as participation can be more or less, under constantly changing situations.

But what is often missed by the promoters of participatory development – or for quality and productivity for that matter – is another word again nestled in the term: the Pilipino word PARTI, which of course means equitable share in the burden and boon of participation.

It is this value that is most contentious in labor relations or partnerships for socio-economic development, where its application can make the other values I previously discussed flounder during rocky moments of the partnership. In labor relations, an embedded system of effective participation and equitable “partihan” will make partnerships produce the results commonly desired, more often than not.

Lastly is about ACCOUNTABILITY. Each of us is accountable for our own actions, before self, society and Creator. But often, because of circumstances, many of us lack the ABILITY to become accountable.

Ability denotes competence. Thus, in another sense, partnerships can fail when workers, managers and owners of enterprises alike lack the COMPETENCE necessary to make work productive and to produce the quality products that our customers demand at prices they are willing to pay. Training for competencies is, therefore, equally important in building a lasting partnership and making it work for mutual benefit.

And so, therefore, in behalf of TESDA, may I invite your organization and all of you to become our partners in technical education and skills development, in order to make the country’s work force globally competitive, productivity-oriented and quality conscious.

When all things are said and done, the last frontier in our struggles to lead this country to progress and prosperity is the frontier of promoting human work, of decent work, of developing our human talents to compete with, and to become, the best in the world. Imbuing these efforts with these five values will go a long way in realizing our common goals.

I wish you all a productive meeting and hope you will have quality output.