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Of Trees and Forest

Become a nation of entrepreneurs

MANILA, Philippines — I have always believed that the way to prosperity for our country and its people is to become a nation of entrepreneurs instead of employees.

Let me clarify this from the start. I respect and admire people who work hard – be they clerks or bank tellers or construction workers – because they do honest and honorable work. And their earnings and experience from their jobs can provide them and their families with a platform for a better future.

I have observed some differences in the way traditional Filipino parents prepare their children for the future compared with those of Chinese descent. Both Filipino and Chinese parents try to provide their children with good education.

Filipino parents envision their children to become successful employees of, say, big or multinational companies. So, it is not unusual for the children to “inherit” the positions occupied by their parents when they retire from a long-time employer.

Children of Chinese parents, on the other hand, receive hands-on training on business at an early age. Obviously, their parents’ vision is to see their children as successful entrepreneurs when they grow up.

The death of Apple founder Steve Jobs last October 5 prompted me to recall this observation because Jobs, outside of his reputation as a giant in the information age, is at his core an entrepreneur.

True, he was a techno-genius. He made the computer an essential gadget for everybody by bringing its prices down and its technology user-friendly. He changed our world with the iPod, the iPhone, and the iPad.

In this sense he is a rarity. But his success as an entrepreneur serves as an inspiration and model for everybody.

Jobs experienced a mixture of failures and successes since he co-founded Apple Computer with engineer Steve Wozniak in the garage of Jobs’ parents’ home in 1975. Their first products did not sell and when Apple was already a giant, he was fired.

Yet Steve Jobs worked hard to come back up. And today, Apple is one of the most valuable companies in the world.

I experienced failures, too, when I decided to shift from being an employee to become an entrepreneur. In my view, being an entrepreneur is more risky but the rewards are a lot greater.

Behind the successes I accomplished in business are the failures that I have had to endure, and which I considered as challenges that could be turned into assets, through “sipag at tiyaga,” or hard work and perseverance.

My point is that Steve Jobs’ success in business is not an isolated case. Here in our own country today, we can look up for inspiration at the success stories of our taipans. Many of them were born poor, but were able to build business empires because they decided to become entrepreneurs instead of salaried employees.

I really believe that Filipinos can also succeed as entrepreneurs, too, because we are naturally hard workers. Like Steve Jobs and the taipans, we only need to confront

challenges and work hard to achieve prosperity for our families by becoming entrepreneurs.

As a nation of entrepreneurs, I am sure the Philippines would finally join Asia's tiger economies.

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