

Address to Graduating Scholars
May 25, 2019

By Mr. Lance Y. Gokongwei

Good afternoon!

As a member of the Board of Trustees of this distinguished educational institution, it warms my heart to be part of this special "Get-together of Benefactors and Graduating Scholars" on this wonderful Saturday. I personally consider it an honor and a privilege to deliver a message to our graduating scholars on behalf of my fellow benefactors.

Since I have been assigned this responsibility, I hope you will not mind if take the opportunity to personally call out and congratulate the two scholars supported by the John L. Gokongwei Scholarship – **Rocelle Jehanne Mae Bonita** (*4-BS Management*) and **Elmer Jon Ochoa** (*4-BS Management Engineering*) and another scholar supported by the Elizabeth Gokongwei Scholarship for Chinese Studies – **Elaine Frances Dizon** (*4-AB Chinese Studies*).

To Rocelle, Elmer and Elaine -- I say YAAAAAS! You guys have "slayed" it!

The scholarship we provide could not have been made possible if not for the desire to give back by a man who has lived and continues to live an audacious and yes — blessed life. So I hope you will also not mind if I briefly speak about him and in the process, perhaps impart a lesson or two from his life as we his children have learned.

As you are all probably aware of, my father John L. Gokongwei, Jr., had very humble beginnings and had to work very hard to achieve the success that we, his children, in turn, work equally hard to maintain and sustain.

He understood the value of hard work at an early age after his father died during the Japanese occupation when he was only 13.

While his contemporaries were in school and mostly enjoying their youth, my father spent his teenage years supporting his family that included his mother and five younger siblings.

With a highly determined entrepreneurial spirit, he began to engage in trading and earned what was then an already rewarding P20 a day by working long hours up to the wee hours of the morning.

My father personally sold his wares which included soap, candles and other related items using different means of transportation that ranged from his own bicycle to wooden boats and trucks that took him from Cebu to Manila.

His hard work eventually paid off as he watched how his modest trading business transformed into what we now know as Universal Robina Corporation.

Eventually, my father also got involved in other industries including banking and finance, air transportation, telecommunications and petrochemicals and was likewise successful in each of those endeavors - with sheer hard work as the underlying common ingredient.

Understanding my father' journeys gave us a better appreciation of his storied success.

And by relating this to you it is my hope that it would equally inspire everyone else including and especially you — the graduating scholars in this room.

Although my father did not graduate from Ateneo, he led a life that is very much in step with the example set by Saint Ignatius of Loyola - that of being a man for others.

He knew deep inside that for all his hard work and talent - it takes a certain amount of luck and blessings from Above to achieve what he has achieved. And this I believe is the wellspring of his instinctive and heart driven desire to give back.

Through his philanthropy as manifested by his scholarship programs, my father put a high premium on education and regarded it as the most important investment anyone can make.

But as you, graduating scholars and your respective benefactors here can all attest to, as important as education is, what you make out of it is what will eventually define you later on in life.

Contrary to what you may consider as popular belief, being my father's son did not necessarily come with a lot of perks and privileges.

If nothing else, I had to live up to a lot of high expectations from my old man.

During my high school days, the naughtiest thing that I could remember being called out for and was posted for was throwing paper plates at each other which is probably not much of a big deal among today's millennials.

Other than that, I was pretty much a good student who learned whatever I can that I would later apply in both my work and my life.

Being a Gokongwei, I always had to prove to everyone that I was worthy of my father's name, of being the boss's son.

I know many of you would say I am fortunate because I was born with privilege, and there are no two ways about that.

I am indeed grateful for that fact, but like any good son, I feel that there is an inherent responsibility in me to pay back for all that my parents have done for me --- by taking care of the businesses they have worked hard for to build, essentially by living up to the expectations of my father and my family.

But the fact of the matter, if I really have to come down to the very core of it all, there is nothing more that they need or anything else that I could give them that they don't already have - other than for me to be a good, filial son and in the end - to be simply a good human being.

For all the blessings and good fortunes that I have received, I believe that the best way to show one's gratitude is to pay it forward by being good to others - to my employees, to the communities where our company operates, and to society in general.

In many ways, I too may have everything that I need. While I'll be happy if you acknowledge the support that we have provided for your education, and I think I speak for all fellow benefactors here, the best way to show your appreciation is by paying it forward and continue doing good deeds by helping others.

One good deed might not seem like much, but if everyone did something good for someone else, then the cycle of generosity and kindness can spark us to become better people and make lives better.

Like what I have been telling my children, I'm very proud that they have very good grades in school, but more important than that, I want them to earn other people's respect.

I want them to be considerate. I want them to be kind. I want them to be known more for their good character than for anything else.

I want them to learn how to share. I want them to learn how to give back.

Just like their grandfather, who when he already earned a lot of money through the years, shared his abundance with other people - I constantly remind myself, my siblings and my children that paying it forward by simply becoming good, sharing, upright human beings is what our father would want to see in us.

To the graduates of 2019, understand that being scholars, you have had the good fortune of having generous sponsors for your education.

Earning the privilege of going to a prestigious school like Ateneo without worrying how you can pay your tuition and other fees is a trust that you have not only earned when you first set foot in this campus.

It is also something that for the most part you hopefully will pay forward by the exemplary way in which you will conduct yourself, by the way you live your lives and share your blessings when you leave the confines of this great academic institution.

To close, let me share to this year's graduates the very same message that I have given to my children because I believe these are important lessons in life, one that will make the ultimate difference when you all start building your professional careers and lives, and later on your own families.

I want you to earn other people's respect. I want you to be considerate and to be kind. I want you to be known more for your good character than for anything else.

And more importantly I want you to learn how to share and to learn how to give back.

And I think I speak here on behalf of all the benefactors that the best way to repay the kindness and generosity bestowed upon all of you, is by reciprocating and paying it forward.

By being good citizens and being good people who help others, then we all would have succeeded already in our mission to make life better, as the motto of JG Summit goes.

Lastly, on behalf of the family, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Ateneo for honoring my father with the *Paghahandog ng Sarili Award*.

Unfortunately, he and my mom are unable to join us today to personally receive the recognition but I'm sure my message to you today will be the same message that he would have delivered to you:

Pay it forward. Give back the privilege by helping others. Be a man for others.

Again, my congratulations to both the 2019 graduating scholars and your respective benefactors.

Mabuhay kayo at maraming salamat po!