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Discovering What It Truly Means to Be Part of the UP Community

Hi! I am Louie Evans Grinn Sala, 2007-34893. You're not from UP if you don't remember your student number. In fact, you can forget your first love from the University and all the feelings surrounding the experience, but never ever your student number.

My sincerest thanks and appreciation to the school administration for inviting me to this momentous event. I can still vividly recall every corner, the people, and every story from this haven of learning. I will forever treasure this moment because I am still at disbelief that an average student will one day speak in front of all these wonderful Iskolars ng Bayan.

Two things came to mind when I got a call from Dr. Ferrer:

- (1) How can I inspire this group of students who are considered the brightest, the bravest, and most socially aware? (I'll have to be politically mindful too, so I don't get bashed); and
- (2) How can I be more relevant and add value especially when I am not even sure if my story is a success story in itself.

I can talk about tips on how to survive UP, how to excel, or life hacks I learned from UP. But in introspection, I've realized that I will use this time to share my personal story about how I discovered what it truly means to be part of this community.

My story revolves around 5 things:

- (1) Redefining Success
- (2) Valuing Hard Work
- (3) Humility: Even as You Strive for Honor and Excellence
- (4) Service and Genuine Love for Country; and
- (5) Shaping Our Shared Destiny

Redefining Success

Throughout the years, I've come to realize that success is not a destination, but a journey of self-discovery. Success is understanding and living your life with purpose. It's about growing and developing to your fullest potential and recognizing that your efforts extend beyond yourself to benefit others.

I hold great respect for those who excel at the top of their class. I salute you. However, please remember that being number one or the best is not the goal in life. As you grow older, you will encounter people who are better than you—smarter, more attractive, and more talented. Some will receive more opportunities and be more blessed. But here's the

truth: There is only one you. You possess unique qualities and the capacity to become the best version of yourself. You have the power to inspire others through your own story.

In UP, success is also found in discovering ourselves and what impact we can create for others. Some may succeed with academics, while some of you will be very active with organizations that will passionately redefine your view of life. Some of you will graduate on time, but some will take their own time and pacing. While I don't entirely believe in and encourage delaying graduation, I believe that UP has also taught me the value of respecting every student's process of self-discovery. That it is not about how fast you get to your desired destination, but making the most of learnings you've gained in the process. I've met several graduates who took their time at university, but are now lawyers, doctors, business owners, and leaders who excel in their respective careers.

UP is also where all our dreams and aspirations start to get form and direction. If not because of my experiences in UP, I wouldn't be as passionate and as dedicated. In moments of self-doubt and challenges, UP always reminded me of my dreams for my family and so much so for the community. Iyong, sukong suko ka na pero laban lang dahil alam mong may patutunguhan ang bawat hirap mo para sa pamilya at para sa bayan.

Hard work is non-negotiable

As young as six years old, I was already finding ways to earn money by helping my father with his roving carinderia. Even at that age, I had an entrepreneurial spirit, recognizing the exceptional cooking skills my father possessed and understanding how the extra income would greatly assist our family. During college, I sold cellphone load and worked as a student assistant for years. I also worked as a baggage counter boy and cleaned the library in my spare time. I was never ashamed of these jobs because my primary concern was earning extra income and supporting my family.

After graduating, I continued working multiple jobs while pursuing further studies at night and on weekends, as well as attending training programs.

All my hard work eventually paid off. I became an executive at the age of 22 and started my own venture before turning 30.

I am a firm believer in being intentional and specific. Although this may not work for everyone, it certainly has been effective for me. I consistently engage in self-reflection. I write down my thoughts and plans, assign timelines to them, and identify the resources I need to achieve my goals.

Allow me to share some of the entries from my journal:

- Reach the highest position in the corporate ladder by 25. I achieved it at 22.
- Complete my Master's Degree by 30. I finished my double-degree Master's program at 28.

- Start my own business by 30. My business was registered when I was 29.
- Become the youngest Global Coach by 30. I received this recognition at 27.
- Become one of the few and youngest John Maxwell certified consultants in the country. I achieved this at 30.
- Europe tour for my Mama before 30. This happened at 28.
- House, lot, and car for Mama on her retirement. This happened 2 years before she retired.

There are many other accomplishments on my list that I have thankfully been able to achieve. I share these not to boast about my accomplishments, but to emphasize that by being intentional about your dreams and aspirations, you will attract them. They will become reality because you will do everything within your power to make them happen.

However, this journey wasn't without tears and frustrations. God knows how many removal exams I had to take from Math 17 to Math 100; memorize scientific names despite being an Economics major; and go head-to-head with all the valedictorians in the class. God also knows how many rejections I had to go through even at this point in my life. Do I regret any of it? Absolutely not. I am forever grateful and happy with how things have turned out.

Humility: Even as You Strive for Honor and Excellence

UP is a haven known for nurturing intellectual prowess. People put UP graduates on a pedestal and that requires not only so much responsibility but also humility. The University has opened my mind and my heart to all issues and concerns of the country. These experiences humbled me that despite my own struggles and challenges, I still need to do my best and strive for the better because I know that I have the capacity to improve the lives of others.

I lead several business organizations, including my own consultancy, and it is one of my principles to always prioritize people over and above anything else. I know the struggle of making both ends meet and I understand that they have families to support. So, I make a conscious effort to work with them, taking into consideration the circumstances, so that we become partners in making all our dreams come true.

This is what UP has taught me, to be mindful of others. That my success is not only the many honors and accomplishments I have received, but the lives I have made an impact on because of my hard work. I hope that you also find that meaning and purpose behind the gift of being part of the UP community.

Service and Genuine Love for Country

I have high respect for all those who sacrifice and work abroad. But my personal experience of working here in the country is something I want all of us in the UP community to also consider.

Despite the many offers to start a career in other countries, plus the promise of huge income, I made a commitment to fight, survive, and thrive here in the Philippines.

UP made me realize that my unique competencies must be used to help and improve the lives of my fellow Filipinos. If we all leave and serve other countries, who will be here to lobby and fight for basic human rights and social services, for access to quality education, for health and safety, for equality, for equitable growth and development?

However, let's also be very mindful that not all those who serve the country are genuinely loving and giving. Some UP graduates sometimes forget these moral obligations when money, power, and corruption are waving and served right in front of them. PLEASE DO NOT be like them. I, along with many others in the community, will forever be discouraged and disheartened should you take that route and take part in the suffering of every Filipino.

Shaping Our Shared Destiny

Lastly, I'd like to talk about the mindset of shared destiny.

I have travelled to a lot of different countries and one thing I've noticed is that they have a strong sense of country and idea of shared destiny.

Here, in our country, we all shout and advocate for nationalism, but our thoughts and actions show the otherwise.

This mindset should start here, right now, as we enter the University. We must shift our thinking that this is just no longer about us but our neighbors, the community, and the country. We must understand that our actions and thoughts affect not only us but everyone around us. The mindset must be set on the concept of sharing one's resources -- one country, one environment, one culture.

A shared destiny mindset enables us to develop shared responsibility and accountability. As we develop this mindset, let's be optimistic and work hard for a better Philippines wherein we all strive to WORK and STAY here for the better.

In closing, I'd like to congratulate all our freshmen ISKOS and ISKAS. You are one step closer to realizing your dreams and aspirations. As you journey towards your desired future, please do not forget to do it with purpose and always consider looking back and giving back to the UP community. Enjoy the ride, excel, and make us all proud. Never ever lose in yourself and never lose sight of your values in the process.

Take your time to discover your greatest potential and take up the space intended for you in this world because there is enough space for all of us to make a difference. As you do that, always make sure to do it for the community and genuinely serve and love the PHILIPPINES.