

Measuring Integrity

The month of love is a good time as any to take stock. Recalling Elizabeth Barrett Browning, let's ask "How do I love thee, let me count the ways." It does somehow force one to measure the depth, breadth and height of how we love those we hold dear. Yet, it is also a question I dread because it speaks of virtue and character.

With the May elections just around the corner, I could not help but think of another value that sits with love because it is precisely at the heart of it. I refer to integrity. Is it not "love for neighbor", in its deepest sense that public servants commit to when they take their oath of office? Is it not the same value that should animate leaders not just in government but also business and society?

Merriam-Webster defines integrity as a firm "adherence to a code of moral values". It is an "unimpaired condition and the quality or state of being complete and undivided". How then do we measure integrity? Does the outgoing Aquino administration's platform of *daang matuwid* (right path) lead to palpable results?

I spent a whole day attending the Integrity Summit in December organized by groups that launched a campaign in 2011 to strengthen ethical standards in business. It gave me a good perspective on how we are faring as a nation in terms of integrity. So far, some 3,000 companies, government agencies, schools and organizations have signed the Integrity Pledge, a commitment not only to uphold ethical behavior but also a willingness to be subjected to public scrutiny.

Ramon del Rosario Jr., chairman of the Integrity Initiative, cited some staggering numbers in his keynote address. The 2014 research by the Global Financial Integrity estimates that an average of Php357 billion is lost yearly to crime, corruption and tax evasion. How does investment in integrity pay off? According to the 2014-2015 SWS Survey of Enterprises on Corruption, "businesses across the country believe that their net incomes will increase by as much as 20% if the level of corruption we experience can be reduced to the level of Singapore".



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The good news is the needle is moving for the Philippines. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index shows that the country improved by 49 places since 2010.

From 134th place in 2010, we now rank 85th out of 175 surveyed countries. The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) now ranks the Philippines the 47th most competitive economy in the world, rising by 38 places from 85th of 140 countries in 2010.

In terms of the quality of its institutions, the Philippines' ranking moved up 48 places from 125th in 2010 to 77th in 2015, according to the GCI. This shows remarkable progress in governance-related indicators like the prevalence of diversion of public funds, public trust of politicians, irregular payments and bribes and ethical behavior of firms.

Francisco del Rosario Jr., president of the Management Association of the Philippines, stressed: "The government has lots of money but the major leakages from massive corruption must be stopped so the economic gains we are starting to enjoy do reach the marginalized sector through sustainable inclusive growth."

Added Guillermo Luchangco, chairman and CEO of Investment & Capital Corporation of the Philippines:

"The gains we are seeing now show what can be done with an honest president. The widespread awareness of corruption in the population must be reinforced in traditional and social media."

Still, much more needs to be done. With poverty still afflicting a fourth of the population, we must continue to expose and hold leaders to account for the institutionalized corruption that continue to victimize the poor. Let us ask each other and ourselves how do we truly love our neighbor and measure the extent we are acting accordingly in our daily lives. **E**

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