

What successful Fil-Ams tell young Filipinos to do

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5:33 pm | Friday, July 25th, 2014

978 82 1 1121 13



Ten young Filipino-American delegates from the US are in the Philippines for the 2014 Filipino-American Youth Leadership Program (FYLPro). They shared ten pieces of advice for young Filipinos on how they can also succeed. PHOTO BY MATIKAS SANTOS/INQUIRER.net

MANILA, Philippines – Instead of dragging each other down because of crab mentality, we should bring each other up.

This was one of the many pieces of advice 10 young Filipino-Americans offered for the Filipino youth when they came to the Philippines for a five-day immersion program as part of the 2014 Filipino-American Youth Leadership Program (FYLPro) of the Philippine Embassy in the United States (US).

Jason Tengco, 26, a Senior Advisor at the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, said that crab mentality is evident in their community in the US where he was born and raised.

“Too often in our community we have that crab mentality where individuals are trying to one up each other and not necessarily thinking about uplifting others. Instead of putting each other down, [we should] try to bring each other up,” Tengco said during a press briefing in the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Friday.

He is also working as a Community Affairs Director of JeepneyHub.com, a non-profit website dedicated to helping Filipino-American youth with career development.

Tengco shared how he found a mentor, a previous FYLPro delegate, who helped him learn skills and gave him his first job, eventually uplifting him.

John Paul Ferrer, 39, who works as the Associate Vice President at multinational financial services corporation Morgan Stanley, advised young Filipinos to finish their education.

“If you look at countries around the world, the countries that are doing well are those with populations that are very young. The youth are really the future of the world,” Ferrer said.

“You’ve got to commit to finishing your education. Education is the number one equalizer, that’s how you get out of the cycle of poverty if you were born into that,” he said.

Ferrer said that he was fortunate enough that he was able to study because it opened up a lot of possibilities for him. He said that he returned here in the Philippines where he saw some of the people he knew that are still in the cycle of poverty.

Adette Contreras, 30, a Creative Director at global advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, advised young Filipinos to discover themselves and know what they are capable of doing.

“The most valuable lesson I’ve learned from being an immigrant is you really have to know yourself and what you are capable of doing and what you are not capable of doing,” she said.

“What I specifically love about our Filipino culture is that working hard is a given, that’s not the case everywhere in the world. Working hard is a given here in the Philippines and that is the value instilled in me early on which brought me a long way,” Contreras said.

Ryan Letada, 29, is currently the CEO and co-founder of NextDayBetter, a media platform that aims to bring together Filipinos to work together and share ideas or innovations that can improve their future.

His advice for young Filipinos is to “be gritty” and to take charge in their own learning.

“Understand your capacity and invent solutions for whatever things you care about,” Letada said.

“You can self-learn about how to create something meaningful, that possibility is open for everyone because of the internet and many computer shops in the country,” he said.

Ryyn Chua, 33, founder and CEO of events management firm Double Y Entertainment, advised young Filipinos to “create your own world and demand change.”

“Don’t be complacent with all you are getting and be okay with what they are giving you,” he said, citing one school in Tagaytay where he saw four students sharing a single computer.

“It’s important to really push for what you need in the education system,” Chua said.

Edward Aparis, 35, a consultant at the Strands Group, said that young Filipinos should “stand up strong.”

“You have to advocate for yourself and not be afraid to fight, if you have a dream or you believe in something, there will be people or certain things that will stop you from achieving that,” Aparis said.

“Stand up strong. It’s okay to be afraid but don’t let fear overcome you and control you,” he said.

Abbey Eusebio, 32, works for a US Congressman and said that she had never even thought she would end up working in government.

She advised young Filipinos to “pursue your passion,” saying that in her case, she did not even realize at first that she would be interested in government but when she saw her opportunity, she seized it.

Rommel Clemente, 29, a Supervising Senior Associate for the Connor Group, advised young Filipinos to find a mentor that can help them with their careers and guide them.

“Throughout my career, there was always that one person that has my back, one person to learn from,” he said.

“It’s important to understand what’s possible in life because the world is opening up to them and there are opportunities. It’s important to grow your mentor network,” Clemente said.

Michael Dahilig, 34, currently works as the Director of the Department of Planning in Hawaii. His advice to young Filipinos is to “take calculated risks.”

“You have to take calculated risks. Make a plan and don’t be afraid to fail,” he said.

“If the plan fails, repeat that cycle over and over again and take bigger risks. Through that, me and my family have been able to succeed in the US,” Dahilig said.

Rafael Jose Diokno, 37, serves as Project Lead of an engineering, science, and information technology firm that works with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

His advice for young Filipinos is for them to “create a vision for themselves” because that will make them realize how they will create value for themselves.

“Learn ways to create value so people gravitate towards you,” he said.

The 10 FYLPro delegates are in the Philippines from July 24 to 28 and will meet with government officials and non-government organizations.