

Change is good in Iloilo City

Lawyer Ferdinand Panes remembers when he was the newly-assigned DILG director in Iloilo City, he was reluctant because most local officials were also new and not familiar with the programs and advocacies of the Department.

Whoever said that change was good did not know what he or she was talking about, the City Director (CD) justified at the outset. He felt a degree of skepticism about LGU support to DILG's priorities and nurtured personal resistance to his new assignment.

But there was no way he could back out from the new area of assignment. He had to make good where his superiors placed him. It was futile to resist and more prudent to embrace the new post. After all, CD Panes believed that it was a losing proposition to focus on negative thoughts that would make it more difficult to transform Iloilo City, and more healthy to shift his energies to things that excited him.

Change the mindset and the expectations and feelings also change, he remembered.



And CD Panes went from one meeting to another introducing himself and the Department to the city government and its barangays. From one building block to another, he unveiled the programs of the Department and offered himself to work with others in the LGU.

I could never go wrong by involving LGU officials and functionaries, he shared, especially if this opens communication channels to formal and informal groups in the LGU that matter in facilitating shared understanding and common ground on LGU reforms.

Regular meetings with the city mayor and other officials also deepened social bonds and friendships that built trust. It was easier, he recalled in hindsight, to win over the city and barangay governments on advocacies of good housekeeping, full disclosure and transparency, and local performance management when there is a personal touch, in addition to the usual rigors of professionalism, competence, and integrity.



One can always invoke the Department's authority in the exercise of general supervision over LGUs, but it is culturally apt not to lose sight of the power of human relations, especially that Filipinos value empathy over rationality.

Working with stakeholders is not an easy task, he said, but with the right approaches in consulting, negotiating, and assisting city and barangay governments in Iloilo, there is wide latitude for broadening alliances and seeking shared solutions.

And the evidence in Iloilo City has so far been sterling: regional awardee for Gawad Pamana ng Lahi for two consecutive years (2011-2012) and a national finalist alongside with the cities of Makati, Palawan and Vigan. Likewise, it is a Galing Pook winner in 2013 and a Red Orchid Awardee for two consecutive years (2012-2013).

Now, CD Panes has full reason to believe that change is indeed good.

