

**DEMAND AND SUPPLY**By **BOO CHANCO****Getting fired set him off for success**

He was fired by Bobby Ongpin from an investment bank in Hong Kong for insubordination but for Manny Gonzalez, that set him off for success. It didn't happen overnight. As he recalled it, he bummed around for a while, strange for someone in mid-career and with an MBA from Columbia U in New York who had spent many years working with world class organizations including the International Finance Corp. (IFC), a World Bank subsidiary.

With free time on his hands, he thought about his dream of putting up something that incorporates the many things he had learned in the course of his life and career. He had experienced staying at the best hotels and resorts in the world's top capitals. He knows what it takes to satisfy quality conscious travelers and high powered executives in terms of hotel and restaurant service. He knows good food. And best of all, he has consciously filed all these bits of knowledge at the back of his mind for such a time like this.

Before long, things started falling into place. He had a piece of land in Mactan that didn't look like it was worth much until he found out a relative owned the adjoining lot with the more valuable sea front. He had a group of friends who shared his dream and were ready to be his partners. Thus the dream began to unfold in a most unlikely place for a world class resort — the rocky shores of Marigondon, Mactan Island.

As it turned out, getting the resort up wasn't the most difficult part of the project. The Asian financial crisis happened just as Plantation Bay was getting started. Given its debt load, it was in danger of going under as the entire region suffered the consequences of the financial meltdown. What followed was the real test of what Manny Gonzalez was made of.

Setbacks engender focus and discipline, I remember some management guru saying in one of the many conferences I have attended. It was just about the same message I recall Manny saying as he explained to me how he approached the crisis. In the end, he said, he was just lucky. One always learns more from mistakes and hard times than from successes and easy times, Manny said or words to that effect. He said the lessons he learned from the mistakes of his IFC clients as well as from his own miscalculations came in handy.

One thing that strikes you about Manny is his passion... a passion for excellence... a passion for good food... a passion for the good life... He has the ability to build on every experience and transform lessons learned from them into something with practical applications to his company's operations. No detail escapes his notice, a characteristic his staff confirms. He reminds me of Bobby Ongpin, the man who built Tagaytay Highlands with similar passion and attention to detail.

Manny said he wrote the operations manual of Plantation Bay pretty much based on a compilation of learnings he has had from Ateneo, from business graduate school, from his various workplaces, his readings and experiences. His interests are very eclectic. Many resort guests would be surprised to find out that the man analyzing their handwriting in a booth next to the booths where tarot cards and palms are read is the resort CEO himself. I know a bit about graphology, and I can say he is good in this too.

I asked him about his management philosophy and he asked Dianne Gandionco the hotel PR officer to send me a copy of his five-page write-up of what he calls "CUTTING-EDGE MANAGEMENT at Plantation Bay Mactan." It distills best practices in management in simple language that any hotel employee can understand.

First of all, Manny emphasizes, Plantation Bay's management style and philosophy were developed in-house. "The most advanced management ideas, practiced by some of the world's best companies, were studied, compared, and considered in a down-to-earth context. Given the company's industry, location, and available resources, the concepts which seemed most useful were synthesized and adapted to its real-

life needs."

Manny lists his inspirations and sources in developing a unique style of management at Plantation Bay: the collegial and project-oriented work atmosphere at International Finance Corp. (World Bank), where he previously worked; books by Tom Peters, especially *The Pursuit of WOW!*, which urges businesses to go for panache and customer delight, instead of comfortable mediocrity; the book *Built To Last*, by Collins and Porras, which identified and elaborated on the qualities which distinguish enduring industry leaders from their next-best competitors; and Juzo Itami's movie *Tampopo*, which captures much of the flavor of superior Japanese management — desire to be the best, work through task-oriented teams, borrow good ideas without apology, worry about every detail that is within your control, refuse to compromise on quality, and strive for customer satisfaction above all.

Manny explains that "individually, each of the management ideas adopted at Plantation Bay also exists in one form or another at such companies as 3M, Toyota, Hewlett-Packard, Citicorp, Disney, General Electric, IBM, Boeing, American Express, Johnson & Johnson, Procter & Gamble, and many others. Together, at Plantation Bay, these concepts comprise a fresh and effective approach to the management of a luxury resort in the Philippines."

Due to space limitations, I will just focus today on the first basic principle of Plantation Bay's management practices and policies and give the rest in future columns.

First, Manny wants all resort staff to be clear about company goals.

*"We want Plantation Bay to be the best resort in Asia. Our aim is to provide each and every guest a uniquely enjoyable and care-free stay, with our distinctive 'Welcome home to your own family plantation' service, provided by each and every member of staff and management."*

*And, "We want this to be the best workplace in the country. Plantation Bay should, above all, be an enjoyable and personally fulfilling place to work in. As befits members of the same Family, we will treat each other with courtesy, kindness, and warmth. Each of us will consider it our individual responsibility to contribute to the personal growth and happiness of every other staff member."*

These Goals hang in every office and work area, Manny explains. All employees are expected to know these goals by heart, living by the Goals are considered for promotions and bonuses and significant deviations from the Goals are penalized with dismissal.

Typically Filipino, Manny considers the resort staff a kind of extended family. He doesn't mind it if they get pirated by foreign employers ready to pay them more and expand their career horizons. He also sends staff for training in Cornell and everyone sent so far has returned.

They also have company rituals and I chanced upon one during my visit the other week. They have this contraption, where an executive or supervisor sits, that is attached to a bull's eye target. An employee hits the target with a ball which results in the executive being dunked in the salt water pool... all in good fun. Manny says, it helps relieve any hidden resentments and builds up the team spirit.

I tried it with my wife doing the honors and she hit the bull's eye with one try, dunking me with a big splash. It often takes them two or three tries but my wife's expert performance must have been powered by all those pent up feelings from exactly 30 years, as of today, of living with me. There must be something in Manny's system that works for hotel employees and long married couples.

**Good reason**

Here's Dr. Ernie E.

Prospective Employer to Applicant: "So why did you leave your previous job?"

Applicant: "The company relocated and they did not tell me where!"

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