



Servant Heroes¹

By

CHIEF JUSTICE REYNATO S. PUNO
Supreme Court

Let me congratulate this year's recipients of the distinguished Ramon Magsaysay Awards. It is always a privilege to be part of Asia's version of the Nobel Prize, having been invited to introduce our esteemed awardees for the third time since 2007.

Today we honor six leaders whose works embody the supreme act of service. Studying the stories of our awardees, I have found that they all share the six secrets of leadership. The first is **conviction**. Many can recognize a wrong, but only a few resolve to correct it. Our awardees all saw a wrong and they took that decisive, determined stand to right the wrong, regardless of the personal cost. The second secret is **selflessness**, which purifies one's conviction with the nobler purpose of helping others. All of our awardees, privileged with pedigreed education and blessed with abundant talent, could have easily chosen a life of comfort. Instead, they chose to use their blessings to bless others. They offered their time, talent and treasure to lift others, even if it means lowering themselves. To be sure, they must have been deaf to the catcalls that greet those who take the road less traveled. Their third secret is **science**. The marriage of science and service, like a chain, begets the union of intelligence with integrity; excellence with empathy; cleverness and creativity with conscience and compassion. Our awardees used their knowledge and skills in medicine, technology, and the law to effect positive changes in their communities. They used knowledge to see farther than the others could see, to see more than others could see, and to see before others could see. The fourth secret is **commitment**. It takes an indefatigable spirit to succeed amid the scarcity of support given to lonely causes, the surrounding skepticism, and sometimes the blunt opposition from the powers-that-be. Truly, without the grim determination to take the proverbial extra mile, these path-breakers could never have reached the finish line. Thus, we see many giving up their cause halfway through their journey. But not our six awardees, who pursued their difficult goal to the end. They did not stop until the benefits of their reform had trickled down to the lowliest of beneficiaries. The fifth secret is **sustainability**. Our awardees know that reforms must transcend the present. Hence, they generously share their knowledge and skills in preparing others to continue their work. They empower people to help themselves as well as many others. Finally, there is the secret of **faith**, which, more than conviction and commitment, fuels our actions with the belief that change is possible, and that the power to make this happen starts in our hands. For only causes that take root in faith withstand trials; only with a firm belief in the impossible can success be possible.

We are thus eternally indebted to these Asian leaders for their contributions in the fields of health care, poverty alleviation, community mobilization, environmental reforms, and the protection of human rights. We thank our awardees for setting precedents that paved the way for others to follow their path, serving as inspiration so that many more could similarly dedicate their lives to the service of humanity.

President Ramon Magsaysay, the man whose legacy of heroism and service has inspired our awardees as well as countless others, believed that each of us bears a moral obligation to make our society good and just. Towards this end, I enjoin one and all to heed President Magsaysay's challenge: "Act together; act wisely; act with courage; and unselfishly, in a spirit of dedication."²

Thank you and Godspeed.

¹ * Message delivered at the Ramon Magsaysay Awards Presentation Ceremonies on 31 August 2009 at the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

² Inaugural speech of President Ramon Magsaysay, Luneta Grandstand, 30 December 1953.