



Frontrunners of Change

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Nothing is impossible if you really work for it— especially when you start with an objective in mind. I left the Philippines in June 2008 to earn a Graduate Diploma in Property from the University of South Australia in Adelaide. I came back a year later, determined to apply everything I learned to help my organization.

From being head of the Tax Mapping Operations Division at the Provincial Government of Agusan del Sur, I was eventually designated as acting Assistant Provincial Assessor after my superiors recognized my competencies and skills upon my return. In less than a year, I was officially appointed to the position.

Being resourceful

I was able to strategize and pro-actively implement my Re-entry Action Plan (REAP) despite the lack of financial resources by tapping provincial and municipal assessment personnel to come up with the sales data I needed. Hence, by maximizing technology, I was able to introduce new ideas such as the Land Parcel Monitoring System (LPMS) developed by our in-house programmer linking Real Property Tax Information System (RPTIS) and Map Digitizing, thus creating easy access to basic information of every land parcel. Moreover, LPMS, which is similar to Geographic Information System (GIS), enables viewing of sales data, picture attribute, improvements, history of assessment transactions, delinquencies, and Field Appraisal and Assessment Sheet (FAAS).

Beyond my REAP, I also assisted in the full computerization of the RPTIS by lobbying through the Provincial Road Maintenance Facility (PRMF) to replicate the system in the remaining nine out of 14 municipalities. With the strong support and approval of our provincial governor, Hon. Adolph Edward G. Plaza, PRMF through Australian Aid released a fund amounting to P2M for the purchase of computer sets with complete accessories including printers and servers for the municipalities.

We also conducted orientation training for our counterparts in the Municipal Assessment Office so that they would also have ownership of the system. To date, phase two is still ongoing because we are still doing enhancements. Although the system is already operational, we want to make it even better. We are fortunate to have an in-house programmer from the Information Management Office who can immediately implement changes as needed.

Reaping results

In these past few years, our constituents have already seen a difference when they visit the assessment office. We now have window transactions where people can get a true copy or certification of true land holding in less than one minute. And since our maps are already computerized, with just a few clicks, one can easily identify land parcels and buildings as well as real estate prices in every area.

I'd say one of the most significant learnings from my scholarship is the competency of valuing real properties. Whereof, all the projects, systems and capacity building pertaining to real property tax administration had greatly contributed to a significant 93.91% increase in revenue generation from P64.4M in 2010 to P125M in 2014 in real property tax net collectibles.

Likewise, I was able to impart best practices I've learned in Australia to my officemates. For instance, I encouraged them to practice timeliness and sticking to deadlines because out of 33 employees, only two to three were coming to work on time! Now, I can proudly say absenteeism and lateness have become few and far between. I kept reminding them, "If Australians can do that, why can't we? We're all the same!"

I sense that I was able to win the heart of my officemates because I never made them feel inferior. When I am not familiar with something, I ask and seek their help. The humility of those I worked and went to school with in Australia reminded me how important it is to always walk your talk when trying to introduce changes. Soon, you'll see your teammates walking along with you because they could see you doing what you said you'd do.

It was not surprising then that this sharing of best practices bore fruit. Among 21 provincial departments evaluated, we won the Ulirang Tanggapan (Best Office) Award for two consecutive years in 2011 and 2012. I've also been awarded Ulirang Kawani (Best Employee) for two years in a row. Some of the finalists were my own officemates. It was such a good feeling to know that they, too, are working towards positive changes. Maybe they only needed someone to lead them.

In addition, results of a survey on taxpayers revealed that we have been branded as a tax-friendly office as they now feel at home whenever they visit because our staff members are very accommodating. Customer service, after all, should be the objective of government offices. We know our clients appreciate us because, despite shelling out money to pay taxes, they still leave our office with a smile. That's very heart-warming on our part.

Even at the municipality level, where the assessment offices are already computerized, those holding permanent positions have been trained to perform their respective functions well. So,

more than my professional advancement is that fulfilment of knowing I had a share in my organization's achievements.

Again, I am not stopping there. I would like to go to the grassroots level, to the barangay local government units, because they benefit from real property taxes, too. So it's only reasonable to also engage them in helping increase revenue generation.

By this time, I can confidently say my fellow scholars and I have indeed become frontrunners of change. I believe we were able to maintain that heart of a champion and be persistent in implementing our REAPs because PAHRODF has always been there to encourage and support us. They continue to keep in touch and we greatly appreciate that.

Linda Buquir finished her Graduate Diploma in Property from the University of South Australia in 2009. Her REAP was all about Capability Building on Real Property Valuations Thru Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal System in the Province of Agusan del Sur.