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Make it happen: Life lessons from DH-turned-CEO Rebecca Bustamante-Mills

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There are two types of successful people in this world: Those born with good genes and potential, and those who started from scratch, relying solely on hard work, determination and a bit of luck. Rebecca Bustamante-Mills proudly says she's one of the latter.

The 48-year-old founder and CEO of Chalré Associates, a multinational recruitment firm for senior management executive positions, hails from a poverty-stricken family in Dasol, Pangasinan. The seventh of 11 kids, Rebecca was forced to work at an early age in order to help with her family's finances.

"Nagtitinda ako ng pan de sal, ice buko, ice candy at naglilinis ng mga bahay," she recalled. When she was in high school, she left her hometown and worked in a factory in Bataan to put her siblings through school. "N'ung namatay 'yung parents namin, umuwi ako sa amin, then nagtrabaho ako as janitress para mabuhay ko 'yung aking mga kapatid," she said.

On GMA-7's "Powerhouse", Rebecca talked about her experiences as a domestic helper in Singapore and Canada and how, eventually, she was able to succeed in life and in love.

'Determined talaga ako na makapag-aral para matulungan ko at mapag-aral 'yung mga kapatid ko.'

In 1986, Rebecca flew to Singapore to work as a domestic helper. Surprisingly, she only had a day off once a month, which she used to study accounting in a nearby school. "Talagang gusto kong makatulong sa aking mga magulang at kapatid, kasi nakita ko 'yung kahirapan [ng pamilya namin]. Halos 'yung mga kapatid ko, parang wala nang makain."

Rebecca said that she really wanted to study accounting because she thought it might help her put up a successful business. "Gusto kong pag-aralan 'yung P & L, yung profit and loss, [para malaman] kung paano mo ibu-budget 'yung pera," she shared.

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But while she was determined to finish the course, her boss gave her a hard time pursuing it. According to her boss, she was not there as a student, but rather, as “just a domestic helper.” “Masakit pero I didn’t take it as a no, but more on it’s up to me, if I want to make it happen,” Rebecca said.

‘Tinuruan ko sila na dapat 20% ng kanilang sahod, nasa banko ‘yan’

After two years in Singapore, Rebecca moved to Canada to work as a nanny. She also enrolled in Ryerson University in Ontario and took up graduate studies in Accounting and Marketing. People criticized her because they thought she didn’t need to study anymore; her salary there was more than enough to sustain the needs of her family.

“Marami akong pangarap para sa mga kapatid ko, at saka hindi ako kuntento, kaya gusto kong mag-aral at magkaroon ng magandang trabaho,” she told them.

After she graduated and became a permanent resident in Canada, Rebecca put up her own employment agency to aid fellow OFWs. She constantly reminded them to be mindful of their savings.

“Tinuruan ko sila na ‘dapat 20% ng inyong sahod, nasa banko ‘yan. Huwag niyong gagalawin ‘yan so that in case of emergency, meron kayong pera.’ Another thing, insurance,” she said. “‘Yan ang tinuro ko sa mga kapwa natin doon at ‘yan ang ginagawa ko sa sarili ko hanggang ngayon.”

‘Meron akong right as a babae na ako mismo ang maghanap kung sino ang gusto ko’

In an interview with “Powerhouse” host Kara David, Rebecca happily shared how she asked her husband of 16 years, Richard Mills, to go out with her. “‘Meron akong right as a babae na ako mismo ang maghanap kung sino ang gusto ko.”

With the help of the books she read about finding the perfect partner in life, Rebecca came up with a list of criteria, including: someone with a good family background, someone with a good education, someone who is single, someone with a stable job, someone who has potential “in being a good partner, potential in business, potential in everything,” and someone two to three years her senior.

“[Sa] first date, ako pa ang nagbayad ng date namin,” Rebecca laughingly admitted. “If you invite a man, you pay. That’s how it works.”

She added, “I told him na, the reason why I called him is because I’m ready to settle down and that I’m looking for a partner, but if he’s not ready, it’s fine with me.” When asked if it didn’t, in any way, offend Richard, she answered, “Actually he loved it. Kasi he respects a woman who is independent.”

Rebecca and Richard tied the knot in 1998. Seven years later, the Millses decided to put up Chalmré Associates, which now has operations in the Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Canada.

The power duo now live with their two teenage kids, Alex and Chris, in a mansion they own in a private subdivision in Paranaque.

‘Ang gusto namin, ‘yung praktikal lang’

Even with a grand mansion to take care of, Rebecca and Richard don’t have maids or cooks. “Madali lang namang i-maintain. Tsaka gusto kasi namin ‘yung parang buhay-abroad,” she said, adding, “Yung practical lang [dapat]. Kasi kung mag-hire ka, minsan, mahal.”

Rebecca practices practicality in all aspects of her life, even when it comes to the clothes she wears. Though fond of designer brands, she admitted that most of her outfits were bought at bargain prices.

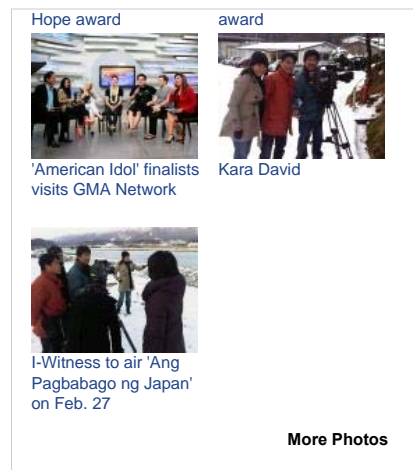
“I will never spend money on clothings kasi...why [should I]? So ‘yung price, dapat really reasonable,” she said.

‘As long as you like it, you’re determined, makukuha mo ‘yun’

Rebecca came from a large and very poor family; her mother was a fish vendor and her father had no stable job.

But instead of feeling down and giving up, Rebecca used their situation to serve as her motivation to keep striving. “Work hard! As long as you like it, you’re determined, makukuha mo ‘yun,” she said.

“Naniniwala ako na ‘yung suwerte, [kailangang mayroong] paniniwala at ginagawa,” she said. “Pero pag hinihintay mo lang yung suwerte na yan, well, mahirap. I don’t believe in that. If you work hard and you earn it, talagang sa ‘yong-sa ‘yo na ‘yan.” —[Donna Allanigue/BM, GMA News](#)



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