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Asian CEO Awards Highlighting the Phl to the World

(The Philippine Star) | Updated July 28, 2013 - 12:00am



MANILA, Philippines - A creative and flexible workforce, world-class tourism destinations and plenty of business opportunities in one of the world's fastest growing economies – these are the three key magnets that have led top-level business executives Don Felbaum and Richard Mills to keep on investing in the Philippines.

"It always starts with the people," says Felbaum. "Filipinos are so adaptive. They're so creative, flexible, and when they go out into the international scene, they really shine. You've got so much talent in this country, and most of the time it goes undetected and unannounced," he adds.

Mills concurs and cites as an example the unprecedented rise of the country's business process outsourcing industry, particularly the voice sector where the Philippines now sits on the top spot previously occupied by India.

"Countries like India, which has 10 times the population of the Philippines, had a 10-year head start in the call center industry, but now the Philippines has a larger industry than India. And Filipinos will soon move ahead in the non-voice side as well," he says.

It is at this point, asserts Mills, wherein compelling opportunities to do business in the Philippines abound, that we should get the word out about the good news in the country.

"When I came here over a decade ago, it was a gloomy time. There were rallies along Ayala every other week, and coup attempts every 18 months. It was just the early stages of the now-fashionable BPO industry. Today, you go into Fort Bonifacio and Ayala, you get world-class service, attractive facilities, beautiful shopping areas and office complexes. Metro Manila has become a world-class city, and the difference from 10 years ago to now has been an outrageous transformation," Mills shares.

The Asia CEO Awards

Even with the country's stellar economic performance, negative perceptions of the Philippines persist in other countries.

"Most investors do not yet know the opportunities that are here. Don and I, we're already convinced of the Philippines, so now our mission is to convince everybody else in the global business community," Mills shares.

It is exactly for this reason that they started holding the monthly Asia CEO Forum and the annual Asia CEO Awards, slated November 14, 2013 at the Solaire Resort & Casino.

"The purpose of the awards event and the forum is to display people doing great things in the Philippines-be they Filipinos running Filipino companies, or Filipinos running international companies, or foreigners running companies here. Anybody doing anything of significance in the country, we want to display it for the whole region and the world to see," says Mills, who sits as chairman of the Asia CEO Awards.

Now on its fourth year, the Asia CEO Awards, presented by Aseana City, gives away 10 awards to many of the most accomplished leadership teams and individuals currently operating in the Philippines and in the region.

Currently at its nominations stage, the Asia CEO Awards has a stringent judging process that ensures that only the most extraordinary leaders who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in their field are recognized.

Felbaum, who is among the star-studded board of judges that include economist Dr. Bernie Villegas and renowned architect Felino "Jun" Palafox, shares that the awards follow a scientific approach when it comes to the selection process.

"If you're going for the Most Innovative Company award, for example, you can't just say 'we're an innovative company, thank you very much.' We want to see proof of that. You have to clearly demonstrate the kind of innovations you are giving. That's one of the ways we can best measure and compare one bid against many bids that come in," he says, adding that the entire evaluation process is scrutinized by auditing firm KPMG.

Promoting Philippine businesses

Being the grandest alliance of local and international business people ever created to promote the Philippines on the world stage, attending the Asia CEO Awards is the best venue to get an in-depth picture of the latest developments happening in the country.

The fact that this year's awards will be held at Solaire Resort & Casino is no coincidence, as it highlights the industries Mills and Felbaum see rising in the next years. "We try to hold our events at new facilities to highlight that there's new big investments happening in the Philippines, and this is an example of that. People have been saying that how successful Fort Bonifacio has been for the past 10 years, so will Entertainment City in Manila Bay be the future for the next 10 years. The future of the Philippines is in Manila Bay, and, consequently, the hospitality and tourism industry," Mills predicts.

According to Felbaum, what makes the Asia CEO Awards different from other award-giving bodies is that the latter tend to be very good but "inward-looking". "It's usually for the benefit of their members and that is great," he says, "but we promote the Philippines in the global platform. No one else does that with the same intensity as we do, and we hope that we continue to put the Philippines in the forefront everywhere – not only in the Asia Pacific, but globally – and I think we're getting there."

The great attention in achieving these recognitions has been very significant for the award recipients, too. "Some have shared how, since winning their award, it has been easier for them to attract new talent, especially in the BPO sector where the growth figures have been quite staggering. It's meant to help companies both in

hiring people and getting business with international clients," Mills says.

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