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Rafaello Atienza Feature Article

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It wasn't too long ago that Rafaello Atienza, more warmly dubbed Cholo by his friends, was a highly stressed and wildly hyper Atenean like any of us. But in that short time since receiving his diploma, Cholo has already flourished in his career, cementing his place as one of the Ateneo's successful graduates. He currently works as the Distributor Executive of the Quezon, Marinduque, and Romblon provinces under the Customer Development department of Unilever Philippines. The job involves a lot of responsibility, being that Cholo is tasked with looking after every store in all those areas. "I have to make sure that Unilever products are available, visible, and that activities are executed on time," explains Cholo. "I do these by managing the strategy, processes, and operations of our distributor partners in those provinces."

So far, Cholo attests to loving his job, and that includes all the perks. Of course, being able to afford your own things is always an upside. "*Hindi na kailangang umasa sa baon. Syempre may sweldo ka na,*" He cites other benefits of work that's based outside of Manila, such as the car, allowances and new cell phone provided by his company.

He enjoys these small pleasures, but to Cholo there's an even bigger benefit in the colorful variety of people he comes across in the field. He finds himself mingling and rubbing elbows with everyone from millionaire supermarket moguls to humble sari-sari store owners. Admittedly, the experience is a new and rare opportunity. The wealth of knowledge is not wasted on Cholo, who is instilled with a renewed appreciation for all these different walks of life. "It's a different kind of fun, picking up stuff and hanging out with people that I wouldn't have known otherwise," he says. "Out here, you'll see how blessed you are with people older than you calling you *Sir* or *Boss* because you have an Ateneo education. At the same time, it really makes you think about how we tend to disregard the simple joys the average Filipino is delighted with."

But as much as he revels in his new position, Cholo did have to go through a transition period. He admits that while he was one of ACTM's most dynamic figures, like many of us he wasn't always as enthusiastic about his studies. "Sa org lang talaga ako masipag kasi alam kong maraming ibang taong nakasalalay sa akin. So I guess this was something I had to adjust to when I moved to Unilever." There was no room for cutting or cramming in this professional environment. Cholo felt that he had something to prove, especially being the new guy. It wasn't easy, not when the competition was fierce. "*Dapat 'career' na kahit papaano kasi career na naman talaga 'to. Maraming magagaling kaya kung hindi ka sasabay pwede kang maiwan at malimutan.*"

While in the Ateneo, Cholo confesses that ACTM was the one organization he was truly and consistently active in. Cholo cites his early experience as Numina project head in his sophomore year as an example. It was also one of the proudest moments of his life. And so was winning the title of SOM Week champions, a tradition of excellence maintained even after his tenure. "Ever since SOM Week was created, it has always been about the bigger more popular orgs, but last year we were really in it to win it, and we did. *Ngayon back to back pa! Lupit talaga ng ACTM!*" Unforgettable are those days of hanging out in the org room—better yet, the people he's shared so much with. "*Ang sarap tumambay sa org room noon kasi laging may mga taong pumapasok na may mga dala ring kaibigan, tapos kahit iba-ibang batches walang paki mga tao kasi lahat naman magkakaibigan.*" The meetings, cramming sessions and camaraderie unique only to the ACTeAM, are surely missed.

Oh, and the girls. He misses those too. "Iba talaga yung sa Ateneo!"

“In ACTM, as cliché as it may sound, you learn about leadership and putting stuff you learn in the classroom into action.” He’s had a hand in many of the org’s events, and he had an early start. This custom of trust and interconnectivity is something he can easily relate to his current job, because some concepts are only truly understood when put to practice. Early on, his involvement in ACTM trained Cholo firsthand about budget management, marketing, and event planning. In retrospect, he discovered that both his academics and extracurricular affairs ultimately served to complement each other. “Even when you’re younger, you can be a project head and work with people from higher batches. It’s the same thing I have to deal with everyday in handling distributor operations. I have ACTM to thank for letting me learn through experience. The org is a really good supplement to our texts and lectures in school. You get to deal also with different types of people in the org, and you learn how to manage them. This is one of the most important things I gained in ACTM.”

He even gave a little insight as to the reality of the workplace and dealing with your co-workers: “When you get out there, you’ll have to talk and work with different people. It’s like ‘random groupings’ when it comes to work. You don’t get to choose your own group like in college.” And this is what exactly his participation in orgs prepared him for. Those who know him best describe Cholo without reservation as a People Person, and he has his fellow ACTeMers to thank for it. “*Kung active ka sa ACTM, siguradong kaya mong makisama, at magtrabaho* with different kinds of people. If you have this, there shouldn’t be any problem *kahit saan ka pa mapadpad* after college.”

Cholo reaches out to other Ateneans by encouraging them to be active in what he proudly reassures as ‘the best org in Ateneo!’, insisting that his college experience wouldn’t have been complete without it. “Join the different projects, meet new people, and learn through experience!” He humbly goes on to say that he probably wouldn’t have made it to Unilever were it not for the lessons and connections he gathered from ACTM. And hey, it doesn’t hurt that a lot of employees in Unilever happen to be ComTech graduates. “So you’re in the right org and course! Build yourself up in college so that you can become the person you want to be. *Magagawa mo yan* through orgs, learning from people and experiences, not necessarily from sitting down in the library.”