

Five “Statistical” Life Lessons from Dr. Lisa Grace Bersales



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be a positive outlier.”

- Dr. Lisa Grace Bersales
National Statistician and
Civil Registrar General

“Do not be average; be a positive outlier,” Dr. Bersales said. The national statistician delivered an inspirational message during the UP School of Statistics recognition rites.

Dr. Lisa Grace S. Bersales took her BS, MS and PhD degrees in UP School of Statistics. She is a former Dean of the School and a former Vice President for Planning and Finance of the UP System. She is the National Statistician and Civil Registrar General – head of the Philippine Statistics Authority. She also received the 2015 UP Alumni Association Distinguished Alumni Award in Advancement of Philippine Statistics.

With her vast experience, Dr. Bersales shared five “Statistical” life lessons to School’s graduating class.

Below is the full transcription of her speech.

Dean Dennis S. Mapa, UP School of Statistics Alumni Association President Germaine Reyes, UP Statistical Center Research Foundation President Gervacio Selda Jr., distinguished officials and faculty, very supportive staff of the School, graduating class of 2015 and parents, guests and friends, good afternoon.

I see before me a group of young people who have been tested and tried, experienced exhaustion and near-desperation, sometimes stumbled and experienced disappointments BUT remained steadfast and confident, found balance and equilibrium and reached the higher plane of one who triumphed.

Indeed you passed from a high school student who took the UP College Admission Test four or five years ago, thereabouts; to a triumphant high school graduate who received information that he or she was admitted to UP; to a bright-eyed freshie who attended orientations and freshman week; to a veteran UP student in the succeeding years; and now, to a triumphant UP graduate. For those in the master’s programs... the road that brought you here was similarly rough. Thus, it is my privilege and pleasure to congratulate you and welcome you to the elite brotherhood and sisterhood of UP Alumni... and more specifically... UP School of Statistics Alumni.

I have five takeaways for you this afternoon as you leave UP and step into the world of boundless opportunities. These takeaways are consistent with your recognition theme of *Setting the Standard for Excellence*.

1. Do not be average; be a positive outlier.

You already have a premium... being a UP graduate with a degree in statistics. Wherever you decide to go, stand out as a positive member of your team and your office. There is recognition in the statistics community now for statisticians to develop EQ skills... to communicate well with other communities, to be a teamworker, but to think out of the box if needed.

2. Manage volatility

It is a challenge to be a performer through time. We all have our bad-hair days. Learn how to manage these days so that you are consistent and can be relied upon to deliver well. Thus, minimize the variability of your performance.

3. Ride the trends

Be aware of emerging areas in our discipline and study them. Be a life-long learner... also in other areas. Many exciting but challenging things are coming our way. Nations in the UN meetings are discussing post-2015 sustainable development agenda which bring with them big data, data revolution. Of course, you are aware of ASEAN economic integration. Also, the Philippines has committed to promoting open data. In all these, participation of statisticians... your participation... is crucial.

When I was a junior faculty of the School and seasonal adjustment was not yet done for official statistics, I immediately said yes when I was asked if I wanted to study it. Doing so opened up many opportunities for me to engage with official statisticians of various agencies and in another country.

4. Mind that epsilon

When we do statistical modeling, we rightly focus on significant determinants. As long as our coefficient of determination or R^2 is reached, we rest on the significant determinants. However, we should be alert on the residual which represents the epsilon. Be discerning on the seemingly non-significant which may warrant your attention.

Discernment is developed as one matures. You have already acquired knowledge, but you still need to develop discernment. Learn from your elders, your parents, your mentors.

5. Do not forget seasonality.

God, in his infinite wisdom, created night and day, rainy season and dry season, the four seasons in other countries. They remind us to take time to rest, take time to be with our parents and loved ones. Be the best statistician in your place of choice but do not forget your other hats... daughter/son, sibling, spouse and parent later on, friend.

I have always talked about my many hats... daughter, wife, mother, sister, friend. These are my precious hats. I regularly visit my father in Bacolod... thanks to promo fares. I am happy that I did this when my mother, who passed away two years ago, was still with us.

Time with my husband is of importance to me. He holds a degree in the social sciences and has enriched my life with his perspectives. When we discuss the poor, I talk about how best to measure poverty, but he talks about how it is to be actually poor.

My children did not follow my chosen career and I am proud of how they are doing in their chosen fields – my eldest son in the entertainment industry, a bassist and in IT as well; my second son in the business process outsourcing industry, honing his management skills; my daughter is majoring in film and is a drummer in a band.

Spending time with girlfriends is a blast for me. I have girls' day out with my friends... in a beauty parlor, watching a movie, having coffee.

These hats give me a good perspective of life and provide the much-needed equilibrium in my life.

Before I end, let me share with you what the Philippine Statistics Authority or PSA is. It was created through the Philippine Statistical Act of 2013. It is headed by a National Statistician, the position I now occupy. The national statistician is ex-officio the Civil Registrar General. Thus, PSA is also the repository of our civil registry. With post-2015 sustainable development agenda, national statistics offices all over the world are expected to experience culture change. The Philippines is looked up to as a model of one who is exactly in the process of this culture change. I invite you to consider being with us.

I now end with the words of Mark Twain:

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

Thank you and Congratulations again!