

Measuring Our OFW's Global Competitiveness

The Business Management System (BMS) paradigm says that competitiveness can be measured by answering the questions: Who dictates the price? Who falls in line pleading for customers?

According to this view, something is said to be competitive when it approximates monopoly situation; that is, it has no competitors. As such, the buyer has no choice but to line up, wait his turn, and pay whatever selling price is demanded.

Given this point, it appears that the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) are not exactly competitive. Why? Because there are more Filipino workers than jobs available. Many Filipinos are precariously stranded in some remote Middle Eastern country hoping to be given a work contract. They risk their lives. To survive, many of them resort to begging alms from fellow Filipinos. Many have no choice but to accept whatever outrageously low salary rate is offered, thus further spoiling the labor market situation for OFWs. If this is what's happening, then we cannot be called competitive.

On the other hand, the OFW may be considered competitive in another way. How? Because of the many nationalities willing to be virtual slaves in rich countries, Filipinos seem to be the "first preference" or the "customer's first choice." We are said to be good English speakers; we have relatively good work attitudes (we are supposedly meek and submissive workers); and we are better educated than the workers of other nations.

But then our OFWs are willing to accept jobs that are way below their skill levels and educational background. In other words, they pose no objections to being under-employed. For example, our doctors are willing to work as nurses; our nurses as care-givers; our engineers as utility or maintenance people; our licensed CPAs as mere bookkeepers; and our teachers who hold Master's or PhD degrees as domestic helpers.

Again, can we really call this competitive? Or is it merely unimaginative surrender to a situation where the local economy is utterly incompetent in generating decent jobs for our well-trained people, a fact that is then exploited by a global order where heartless market forces reign supreme?

If our Overseas Filipino Workers are the "first choice" of foreign employers because they are clearly more skilled than the other nationalities, then perhaps in this sense we can say they are competitive. When we possess rare, in-demand, unique qualities that other workers cannot copy, such that employers have no choice but to line up and compete with each other to hire us, then we can say we are competitive!

Ultimately, the pursuit of excellence in one's work is one that Filipinos need to take to heart. The Scriptures have this to say, "Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown men." (Proverbs 22:29 NKJV)

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