

Commencement Speech to Xavier School High School Graduates, March 23, 2003
By Energy Secretary Vincent S. Pérez

The Power of Vision

With the US led attack on Iraq in the headlines this weekend when you graduate, let's reflect on a particular lesson from war.

When the concentration camp in Auschwitz was liberated at the end of World War II, there were still several survivors. When psychiatrists interviewed the survivors, they found out they shared one thing in common: they had a vision that they had something better to hope for that is yet to come. While those who died out of illness often died out of despair and hopelessness.

This story reminds us of the **Power of Vision**.

When we were young, our parents would often ask us: what do you want to be when you grow up? Some of us say we want to be.....

What do you want to be when you graduate from Xavier School? What do you want to be when you graduate from college?

When I graduated from Xavier School, my dream was to be the head of an international bank branch in Manila. I had a dream of having a nice office, a nice car, a nice driver, and a nice home. So I chose to get into some business or economics degree. I could not even make up my mind, so I chose a hybrid degree called B.S. Business Economics at U.P. Diliman.

I joined ECOSOC and AIESEC, two business student organizations. I also kept in touch with my high school friends so I joined the UP Filipino Chinese Students Association, or Fil-Chi. I also wanted to meet some girls, so I joined the UP Filipiniana Dance Group.

I took banking related courses, took a summer internship with Far East Bank in the office of the late Jobo Fernandez, whom I met when he was chairman of the Board of Advisors of AIESEC. I then became president of AIESEC Philippines, where I had a young professor of economics as an adviser to AIESEC. Her name was Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

I later took an AIESEC internship with an American bank in New Jersey. I applied for an MBA at the Wharton School and got accepted. I did not have the money so I wrote to 24 Professors asking for a research assistantship. I received 23 rejection letters but the last one, Prof. Herbert Northrup, offered me a partial scholarship if I would work 15 hours a week researching labor unions in Southeast Asia. I knew nothing about Southeast Asia labor movement, but I bluffed my way and got a research assistantship.

I joined the Wharton Asian Club and became president, and we were busy coordinating with arranging recruiting visits by U.S. corporations for Asian students. One of these firms appreciated my assistance and gave me a summer internship. That was Citibank. By the time I graduated, I had already built a track record of banking experience of Far East Bank, New Jersey National Bank and Citibank. All internships, no full time work experience. But I got a job offer from the

International Department of Mellon Bank in Pittsburgh, which I accepted. I just turned 25 years old. I was getting closer of fulfilling my dream of hopefully becoming the expatriate senior representative of Mellon Bank in Manila, my dream of having a nice office, a nice car with a driver, with a dollar salary and a rented house in Makati all paid for. The Power of Vision was working.

Those of us who cherishes a beautiful vision, a lofty ideal in our heart, will one day realize it. Copernicus and Galileo fostered the vision of other planets, and they revealed it to us. Magellan cherished a vision of circumnavigating the world, and he discovered the Philippines; St Ignatius of Loyola prayed for a brotherhood of men who will continue the works of Jesus, and he founded the Society of Jesus. Fr. Desaltel dreamt of a school for young Chinese boys, and he founded Xavier School.

Cherish your visions, for out of them will grow all the necessary conditions, the necessary environment, and if you remain firm and true to your visions, your world will at last be built. This is the Power of Vision.

But Vision without Action is just a Dream. We have dreamers who have brilliant ideas but do nothing about them. They become idealists. A few of them will grow up to become columnists of our local newspapers, good in criticizing what's wrong with the country, but doing nothing themselves about solving them. You cannot travel inside and stand still outside.

Yet Action without Vision is merely passing time. Some of you are involved in so many activities; sports, club meetings, excursions, but there is no pattern or focus in them. They are so busy that by Sunday evening, they are so exhausted because the following week resumes again. For adults, it's incredibly easy to get caught up in an activity trap, in the busy-ness of life, to work harder and harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success, only to discover its leaning against the wrong wall.

But Vision with Action can truly Change the World. All things are created twice. There's a mental or first creation, followed by a physical or second creation of all things. You have to make sure that your mental blueprint, the first creation, is really what you want, that you've thought everything through. Then you put it into specific actions, into specific activities. Join this club. Attend this lecture. Apply for this summer internship. Subscribe to this magazine. Write your Vision and specific goals in an index card and paste it in the bathroom mirror, write it on a small piece of paper and keep it in your wallet, or type it as your homepage in your computer, or input it in your welcome text of your cellphone. Whatever works, you must translate your Vision into Action. Then you can change your world.

Soon you will enter college. This will become one of the most memorable phases in your life. You will make life long friendships from among your classmates. Some of them may become your future officemates. Some of them may become your future business partners. And it is highly likely that one of them may become your future wife. Let me share some college tips for Xavierians:

Have More Fun than Anyone Else. Find and hang around fun people. These are people with interesting hobbies, good story telling, slightly twisted sense of humor, fresh insight, brave choices.

Remember, in a survey among women of what they look for the most in men, they rate intelligence and humor higher than good looks and cars.

Don't think about yourself around other people. Some of us seem cursed with no with selfishness in always drawing attention to ourselves. After 5 minutes, your classmate will find you totally boring, dull and uninteresting. A good general rule is to think only about yourself when alone, and, when in the presence of others, think and ask about them. Expressing interest in the life and work of others will lead to a delightful reputation of you being an interesting person and good conversationalist.

Make yourself interesting. Cultivate a diverse group of friends. Surround yourself with those different from and more interesting than you. Remember, it is our differences that enrich us, delight us, educate us and keep us alive. Avoid associating only with your own kind, to the exclusion of everyone else, for this always brings out our worst features, our worst selves and our hidden tendency we have to feel superior to anyone else.

Take summer jobs. Explore various fields and see which ones you like. Your best work of art is always what you do with your life, not what life ends up doing with you. Join a corporate summer marketing project, or an NGO campaign to save the whalesharks of Donsol.

Join a select but variety of clubs. Make yourself more interesting and expand your horizon with these clubs. Choose a sports club, a field of major club. Take active participation in the club activities, whether in organizing a fund raising or some annual induction dinner. If you can't find a specific club that you find interesting, form one yourself.

Consider staying in a dorm for one semester. Live on campus for a change and realize how it is to live away from home. I did it for one semester and it was fun and memorable. This will force you to become self-reliant, force you to be alone and confront yourself.

Respect your fellow female classmates. Treat your female classmates with respect, and they will respect you. Don't abuse them, or intentionally hurt them, for you may be emotionally scarring them for life. If they hurt you, then remember that all is fair in love. Please avoid getting anyone pregnant.

Be known to be Dependable and Reliable. How? Develop three basic characteristics: Show Up on Time. Do what you say. Finish what you start.

Be a Man for Others. That is the legacy that our Jesuit leaders have ingrained upon us. Help your community. Get involved in fun activities such as house building with Habitat for Humanity, or in school building projects of the Philippine Federation of Chinese Industries.

Lastly, Let your Light Shine. Be an example for others to follow. Be an example for your younger siblings. Be an example for younger Xaverians to make you their mentor. Make them proud to be a fellow schoolmate of you. Make your teachers proud. Make your parents proud.

Now, you too, will realize your Vision. You will receive what you aspire for, no more no less. Whatever your present environment may be, whether your family is rich or poor, whether your grades are good or not, you will either fall or rise with your Vision.

You could become either as mediocre as your controlling desire pulls you back; or you could become as great as your dominant aspiration.

You can only rise, conquer, and achieve by lifting up your own thoughts.

Good thoughts and actions can never produce bad results; bad thoughts and actions can never produce good results.

By your own choice and your own thoughts, you can choose to ascend to perfection, or descend towards the level of the criminal. Between these two extremes are all the grades of character, and you, only you shall be the maker and master of your own destiny.

With the Vision that you aspire in your mind, and the character that you enshrine in your heart, and the action that you pursue, then with this you will build your life by, and by this you shall become.

Now go forth and realize your Vision!