

F.A.N.S. – A Corporate GK Journey

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FANS is an acronym for Filipino American Network at Schwab¹, an employee association in its infancy in a giant corporate environment. Yes, employees of Charles Schwab Corporation, the financial and brokerage giant of the corporate world, have now banded together to be part of Gawad Kalinga (GK). FANS came to be because of GK and GK now has a presence at Schwab because of FANS. And this is their story.

A Free Breakfast

I first met Tommy Mendoza, a Schwab employee, almost 2 years ago (2006), at a GK breakfast forum in San Bruno, northern California. The event was held at the St. Bruno parish hall, sponsored by the Peninsula Handmaids Of The Lord (HOLD) at this city about 12 miles south of San Francisco. “I came for the free breakfast,” Tommy coyly admits. “And this is going to cost me,” he later thought to himself. I remember him asking questions during the presentation, mostly relating to GK’s credibility and integrity in handling finances. Looking back, Tommy was not just seeking answers, he was also doing his due diligence, considering his Schwab background.



**Tommy
Mendoza**

Seeds Planted, Wheels Turn, corporately - by email

Months passed after our meeting at the breakfast forum before I heard from Tommy again. This time his questions were more focused on the nuts and bolts of GK, the details and processes. Apparently Tommy was gearing up to share the good news of GK with his co-workers. Everyday at their workplace lunch area, Tommy would notice invitation flyers posted by different employee associations within the company, which made him think about wanting to start a similar group for Filipinos at Schwab. Thinking that this might be a good way to share information about GK, Tommy began seeking out colleagues whom he thought had the right traits and experience to help him form a new employee resource group (ERG) and to work with GK – one who had experience with raising funds, one who wasn’t shy and one who loved charity work. Then Tommy began talking to executives at Schwab to discuss what he wanted to accomplish. First, he went to the Vice President (VP) in his department, then to Human Resources (HR), then to the HR diversity and inclusion team that oversees the employee resource groups within the company. He also talked to employees who work with Charles Schwab Foundation, a nonprofit organization with The Charles Schwab Corporation that helps facilitate employee volunteering and community involvement and has a standing matching program for employee’s charitable contributions of one-for-one up to \$1,000 per employee per year.



GK presentation at Schwab auditorium

Why Build A House?

Tommy was invited to the breakfast forum by his aunt. In return, Tommy wanted to help out by involving his colleagues at work in sponsoring the amount of a GK dwelling for a beneficiary. Up and down the corporate ladder he went, and finding out some key employees at the company namely the HR director and foundation director were also Filipinos. Finally he ended up talking with the VP of HR, where Tommy found himself answering GK questions he was asking me at the GK forum – the how, what and where questions. “Being Filipino, I wanted to personally reply to your email because I’m very much interested,” “What took you so long?” and “Why build a house when you could build a village?”, Tommy recalls the comments he received along the way.

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FANS of GK

As Tommy carefully and persistently treaded the corporate guidelines, FANS came into existence last April 2007 with GK as its first and main project. FANS had its first ever kick-off meeting last September where Joe Millares, Dylan Wilk and I formally presented GK at their capacity-filled main auditorium. To date, FANS has been trailblazing with many “first time ever” activities like **PASKO@SCHWAB** last December and “**Bowl for GK**” being their latest last April. Both activities were a hit. In addition to the GK charitable project, FANS volunteers are also planning future professional networking events and professional development workshops for FANS and their colleagues.



FANS at Bowl for GK event

Tommy Mendoza and FANS are learning best practices from HR and the foundation as much as the company and its employees and management are learning about the noble work of GK. Same journey, different names, much like GK in its infancy and when one hears of GK for the first time.

Why Me?

Last February, I invited Tommy to share his GK journey at Schwab, at a couple of our GK1mB rallies in the bay area. His story was perfect. His journey needed to be heard. But his first reaction was “Why me?” With a lot of apprehension, Tommy politely agreed. Though admittedly not a public speaker, Tommy delivered very well and shared his humble experience with sincerity.

“So why am I asked to share my story with you. I guess it’s because I had all the doubts in the world when I first started this. I have never done anything like this in my life before. I didn’t know what to do and how to do it. I didn’t think it could be done. I didn’t imagine it would grow this big. I was overwhelmed by all the people who came forward and offered their help when they learned that we were forming FANS and helping GK. I could not believe the e-mails I received from all over the company saying they know GK and would support the realization of a Schwab Village. They are the true reason why we have FANS and GK at Schwab. I just started it. It’s really amazing.” – Tommy gave this testimonial, with hands shaking and voice trembling - much like the trembling voice of a teary-eyed beneficiary, when searching for words to express their gratitude for a new home and a new beginning.

“**Why me?**” is a question we ask when faced with a seemingly daunting task. Tommy’s story is not unique and neither was his persistence. All he wanted to do was share the good news of GK with his colleagues and ended up forming an organization. All he wanted to do was to accommodate his aunt and ended up sponsoring a village. Much like the humble beginnings of GK and the people involved with the organization, everyone just wanted to make a difference, and **WE ARE, AND MORE!!!**