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The Caba Carpenter and His Craft



There is only one towering name in the town of Caba in terms of woodwork: **Maglaya**.

Manuel P. Maglaya, Jr. is the owner of the famed **Maglaya Furniture Shop** in barangay Lasud, Caba, La Union. His prominence as a carpenter stems out of the unparalleled quality of his work and service to his patrons, plus his helpfulness and humility.

The story of Maglaya Furniture Shop began in 1992 when young Manuel and his now deceased father started to do carpentry works for some neighbors. Manuel's father was a carpenter by profession and as the number of patrons increased, so did the orders and small contracts for woodworks. Little by little, satisfied customers came back for more furniture demand, even bringing newbies with them.

What started as simple wood fittings evolved into panel doors, dining sets, beds, dividers, and other house furnishings.

The team only had a circular saw and a couple of hand tools for their newly-discovered lucrative livelihood. Though orders were plenty, father and son could only accommodate much due to their limited equipment and labor power. The double team could not keep up with the growing demand for their products and services, especially that they lacked in manpower and equipment.

"Pero habang tumatagal at kumikita, nagawa naming maremedyohan iyong mga ibang gamit na kailangan talaga," said Manuel, in his well-known muted voice.

Gradually, their furniture business managed to produce small tools to sustain a shaky livelihood. Until the coming of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) in their life, Manuel's carpentry profession managed to get by with only an assembled circular saw, portable planer, electric drill, and a router.

Problem solved

One panel door changed the fate of the shop.

A customer who was satisfied of the panel door she ordered from Manuel's shop was the instrument for DOST to enter the threshold of the shop. The customer happened to be an employee of the DOST-La Union and referred the furniture shop to Engr. Ismael Gurtiza, the agency's provincial director, who wasted no time in introducing DOST and its life-changing programs for small and medium enterprises (SME).

Since one of the requirements to qualify for DOST's Small Enterprises Technology Upgrading Program (SETUP) is to be duly registered with the Department of Trade and Industry, Maglaya Furniture Shop officially became a business in 2010.

This opened a whole new door for the Maglaya carpenters. DOST was able to pour its support to the furniture business through various technological interventions that was part of the SETUP bundle.

Manuel, now the successor of his father, was granted P112 thousand worth of equipment for his shop. He was to pay this amount within three years without interest at all. The assistance was in the form of a radial arm saw and a thickness planer. The former is primarily used for cutting long pieces of stock, consisting of a circular saw mounted on a sliding horizontal arm while the latter is used to create boards that are of even thickness throughout their length and flat on both surfaces.



These additions to the mechanical strength of Maglaya Furniture Shop made work three times faster, easier and more accurate, thus trebling even profits, and eventually the need for more labor.

Soon, Manuel multiplied into eight men working six days a week to accommodate orders for cabinets, beds, door panels, dining sets, door jams, and whatever furniture there was in the order list. But even as the business' labor power

increased, they still could not catch up with the bunch of furniture work. Orders come flooding in. *"Marami ang hindi ko matanggihan,"* said Manuel, shaking his head.

But thanks to DOST's SETUP privilege. What used to be a three-day job now only took only a day or even less, depending on the item to be made. Income surged from four digits to as much as P20 thousand a day. *"Ang importante, may mapagkukunan ang aking pamilya sampu ng aking mga katrabaho ng pang-araw-araw na panggastos; may mapagkukunan ng pampaaral sa aming mga anak; at hindi naming kailangang mangutang,"* explained the 46-year old Manuel.

One of his objectives is to provide livelihood to jobless men in his place. And so armed with his particular skills, he continues to hire the willing, skilled or not, as laborers. *"All I need is their willingness to work. Skill is learned,"* he said.

Manuel admitted though, that it was difficult for him to find more workers for his shop. *"Ang mga hinihikayat ko ay yong mga tambay, yong mga walang trabaho. Tinuturuan ko sila ng trabaho dito hanggang sa matuto sila at makapagtrabaho ng ikabubuhay nila,"* he said. The problem comes when these men think they have learned enough. They leave the shop and go find a greener pasture. The loyal ones remain. And they are enough for the shop to run until Manuel welcomes the next batch of jobless men.

The Caba carpenter has bigger dreams for his shop. He is looking into putting up a showroom of his products along the national highway. But right now, he lacks materials, equipment, men and capital.

But alongside his inadequacies, he remains positive: *"Alam kong mangyayari ang lahat ng balak ko dahil tutulungan ako ng DOST."*

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