

RONA S. QUIROZ, COURT STENOGRAPHER, REGIONAL TRIAL COURT OF MANILA, BRANCH 18, COMPLAINANT, VS. CRISTETA D. ORFILA, COURT AIDE, REGIONAL TRIAL COURT OF MANILA, BRANCH 18, RESPON...

A.M. No. P-96-1210. May 07, 1997

Ponente: PANGANIBAN, J.

Read online (full-text search, related cases, audio case brief): <https://batas.org/library/3ac8ee6d00e2/>

PANGANIBAN, J.:

Employees in the government service are bound by the rules of proper and ethical behavior. They are expected to act with self-restraint and civility at all times, even when confronted with rudeness and insolence.

This admonition is echoed in these twin administrative cases which were begun by a complaint of Rona S. Quiroz, a stenographer of the Regional Trial Court of Manila, Branch 18 against Cristeta D. Orfila, a court aide.

The Facts

On February 23, 1996, Senior Deputy Court Administrator Reynaldo L. Suarez received a letter-complaint[1] from Quiroz charging Orfila with conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service and with pursuing an unauthorized private business inside court premises.[2] Quiroz averred that on February 20, 1996 at around 7:30-8:30 a.m., she sustained physical injuries caused by Orfila during a heated argument and scuffle between themselves. Aside from this, Quiroz also complained that Orfila was vending snacks inside the court premises thereby disturbing office functions.

The complaint was referred to Presiding Judge Perfecto A.S. Laguio, Jr. of Branch 18, RTC of Manila, for appropriate action, report and recommendation.[3] Judge Laguio directed Orfila to comment.[4] In her Comment or Kontra-Salaysay,[5] Orfila stated that in the span of her thirteen years of service in the court, she had never been criminally or administratively charged with any offense and that her relationship with the other court personnel was peaceful and harmonious. She admitted to selling snacks to augment her meager salary, but denied turning the office into a sari-sari store.

In her Reply (With Opposition),[6] Quiroz controverted Orfila's Kontra-Salaysay, stating that:

2) Contents of the said Counter-Affidavit (Kontra Salaysay) nos. 15-28, are indeed, FRAUD with some 'alibis' x x x as a matter of fact, she occupies some portions of the staff room for her 'sari-sari store', plus the chamber room and the comfort room for her convenience, together with the office refrigerator with Property No. (PN) RTC 1413-1 (B 18) which she locks before leaving the premises every late afternoon. This matter has been brought to the Chief of the City Security Force, Manila City Hall, thru Lt. Felixberto Peña, Deputy Chief, City Security Force; with the Investigation Report dated January 30, 1995 of SO1 Pablito S. Bulotano, CSF Investigator, Manila City Hall, regarding the Complaint of a Concerned Citizen of the eatery in Branch 18, RTC, Manila, (xerox copies of the 15 photographs of the 'sari-sari store' of Cristeta D. Orfila are hereto attached marked as Exhs. 'C', 'C-1' to 'C-14', inclusive; together with the Investigation Report dated January 30, 1995 also marked in evidence as Exh. 'D'); and

3) Contents of Counter-Affidavit (Kontra Salaysay) nos. 29 to 40, are in fact, very irrelevant, x x x on the ground that she was the one who uttered bad words against me. Although, I have the tape (which is inadmissible before the Court) for one-hour argument last February 20, 1996, the same is presently in my possession. x x x.”

On June 5, 1996, Judge Laguio, Jr. submitted his Report and Recommendation to this Court. Pertinent portions of said report are quoted, as follows:[7]

“x x x (O)n February 19, 1996, the respondent (employed as Court Aide), reported x x x that when she arrived in the office that Monday morning, she noticed that the door of the courtroom was left unlocked. Since the undersigned was aware that the complainant and another employee, Gertrudes Ygrubay, were the ones that worked in the office on Saturday, February 17, 1996, he summoned them to his office and asked them about the report of the respondent. Although the two employees claimed that they locked the courtroom door before leaving the office on February 17, 1996, the undersigned admonished them to make sure in the future that the office doors were properly locked, before leaving.

The complainant resented the respondent’s actuation and showed it in her attitude towards the respondent.

On the morning of February 20, 1996, at around 7:00 o’clock, the respondent and her husband arrived in the office. They noticed debris and crumpled papers scattered in the office. While they were cleaning the office, the respondent was asked by her husband why there were garbage in spite of the fact that she had cleaned the place the previous day. At this point, the complainant arrived with a turned-on portable tape recorder, (she recorded the entire incident, Exhibit “G”). the respondent continued conversing with her husband by telling him to just clean the place, because she is only a lowly employee. The complainant butted in and confronted the respondent if she was blaming her (complainant), for the scattered garbage. The respondent a(d)monished the complainant not to interfere, because she was talking to her husband, not to her. The complainant got mad and persisted in asking whether the respondent was blaming her for the debris. The complainant further told the respondent: “Ganyan ka naman pati ang mga bukas na pinto ng opisina sinusumbong mo kay Judge at pinagsasabi mo rin mayroon kaming ginagawang kalokohan.” The respondent explained that she did not accused her, or anybody in the office of any wrong doing in connection with the incident she reported to the Judge. One thing led to another and a heated exchange of words, curses, insults and recriminations ensued between the two. At the height of the arguments, the complainant suddenly threw her glass paperweight, Exhibit “1”, at the respondent, hitting the latter’s right arm and jade bracelet, Exhibit “2”, and thereby damaging a portion thereof, Exhibit “2-A”. Afterwhich, the complainant grabbed a pointed marble paper-weight and attempted to hurl it at the respondent, but the latter held the two hands of the former and they grappled with each other for the possession of the pointed marble paper weight until the respondent succeeded in snatching it from the complainant.

As a result of the scuffle, the complainant sustained scratches on her face and right hand, which lead (sic) to the filing of criminal case against respondent for physical injuries.

On complainant’s accusations of the alleged use by the respondent of the court’s office as a “sari-sari” such assertion is a gross exaggeration and misrepresentation. The respondent admitted having brought foodstuff to the office and sold them to her co-employees for their snacks and/or lunch to augment her meager income. But she transacted her private business during breaktime in discreet and considerate manner. She did not disturb or inconvenient (sic) the other employees in the office.”

Judge Laguio, Jr. reported that Orfila had been competent, upright, efficient and hardworking during her thirteen years of service in the court and had stopped vending food inside the court premises upon being advised of its illegality. Since such acts constitute a light offense under civil service rules, he recommended that Orfila be reprimanded.

In view of the report of Judge Laguio, Jr. showing facts indicting both complainant and respondent, we deemed Orfila's comment as a countercharge and Quiroz' reply as a counter-comment.

The Office of the Court Administrator (OCA), in its Memorandum dated July 10, 1996,[8] found that both court employees exhibited belligerent behavior contrary to the proper conduct and decorum expected of them. It recommended that Orfila and Quiroz be fined P1,000.00 each for discourtesy and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service and for Orfila's unauthorized private business.

Issue

Does the aforesaid conduct of both Court Stenographer Quiroz and Court Aide Orfila warrant the imposition of administrative action?

The Court's Ruling

The Court agrees with the OCA and finds the conduct of both Quiroz and Orfila short of the high standards of the judicial service.

Discourtesy and Misconduct

Time and again, this Court has stressed that the conduct and behavior of everyone connected with an office charged with the dispensation of justice is circumscribed with a heavy burden of responsibility.[9] The employees' actions at all times must be characterized by propriety and decorum and must be above suspicion.[10]

The records reveal that the conduct of both court personnel falls short of this standard. Shouting at each other within the court premises, quarreling to the point of throwing hard objects and causing injury to each other during working hours exhibit discourtesy and disrespect not only towards co-workers but to the court as well. Such behavior is contrary to the ethical conduct demanded by Republic Act No. 6713, otherwise known as "Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees." [11]

Under the Civil Service Rules, conduct grossly prejudicial to the best interest of the service is a grave offense punishable by suspension for six months and one day to one year.[12] Simple misconduct is a less grave offense punishable by suspension for one month and one day to six months for the first offense.[13] Judge Laguio's Report found that the misdeeds of the parties constituted only a light offense. Considering that both parties had served the trial court for many years, it was deemed too harsh to sanction them with a stiffer penalty. However, the OCA recommended a more severe penalty in the greater interest of protecting public service, to which we agree.

Misconduct is a transgression of some established or definite rule of action; more particularly, it is an unlawful behavior by the public officer.[14] High-strung and belligerent behavior has no place in government service where the personnel are enjoined to act with self-restraint and civility at all times even when confronted with rudeness and insolence.[15] Such conduct is exacted from them so that they will earn and keep the public's respect for and confidence in the judicial service.[16] This standard is applied with respect to a court employee's dealings not only with the public but also with his or her co-workers in the service. Conduct violative of this standard quickly and surely corrodes respect for the courts.[17]

Fighting between court employees during office hours is a disgraceful behavior reflecting adversely on the good image of the judiciary. It displays a cavalier attitude towards the seriousness and dignity with which court business should be treated. Shouting at one another in the workplace and during office hours is arrant discourtesy and disrespect not only towards co-workers, but to the court as well.[18] The behavior of the parties was totally unbecoming members of the judicial service. Such conduct cannot be countenanced.

Unauthorized Private Business

Furthermore, Orfila's engaging in private business without the permission required by the Civil Service Rules warrants disciplinary action. Officials and employees of the judiciary are prohibited from engaging in any private business, vocation or profession without the prior approval of the Court.[19] Orfila's private business was so extensive that part of the staff room, chamber and even the comfort room of the court had been used to store her goods. Even the court's equipment (i.e. the refrigerator) had been used in the process.

It is the policy of the State to promote a high standard of ethics in the public service.[20] It frowns upon and penalizes disorderly behavior, unruly conduct and violation of civil service rules.

WHEREFORE, Rona S. Quiroz is FINED One Thousand Pesos for discourtesy and simple misconduct; and Cristeta D. Orfila is also FINED One Thousand Pesos for simple misconduct and engaging in unauthorized private business. Both are further WARNED that a repetition of said actions shall be dealt with more severely. SO ORDERED.

Narvasa, C.J., (Chairman), Davide, Jr., Melo, and Francisco, JJ., concur.

[1] Rollo, pp. 3-4. This letter-complaint was later supplemented with a Complaint-Affidavit; see rollo pp. 63-67.

[2] Rollo, pp. 3-6.

[3] First Indorsement, Rollo, p. 1.

[4] Memo, Rollo, p. 7.

[5] Rollo, pp. 13-18.

[6] Ibid, pp. 22-23.

[7] Rollo, pp. 140-141.

[8] Rollo, pp. 1-5.

[9] Re: Ms. Teresita S. Sabido, 242 SCRA 432, 434, March 17, 1995.

[10] Office of the Court Administrator vs. Yambao, 221 SCRA 77, 86, April 7, 1993; Del Rosario vs. Bascar, Jr., 206 SCRA 678, 686, March 3, 1992; and Callejo, Jr. vs. Garcia, 206 SCRA 491, 496, February 25, 1992.

[11] Apaga vs. Ponce, 245 SCRA 233, 241, June 21, 1995.

[12] Section 23(t), Rule XIV of the Omnibus Rules Implementing Book V of Executive Order No. 292 and other pertinent Civil Service Laws.

[13] Section 23, (b) on less grave offenses, *ibid*.

[14] Office of Court Administrator vs. Bucoy, 235 SCRA 588, 595, August 25, 1994; and Amosco vs. Magro, 73 SCRA 107, 108-109, September 30, 1976.

[15] Policarpio vs. Fortus, 248 SCRA 272, 275, September 18, 1995; and Flores vs. Ganadar, 61 SCRA 430.

[16] Tablate vs. Seechung, 234 SCRA 161, 167, July 15, 1994.

[17] Office of the Court Administrator vs. Bucoy, *supra*.

[18] Apaga vs. Ponce, *supra*.

[19] *Tablate vs. Seechung*, supra.; and *Gaculas vs. Maralit*, 235 SCRA 585, 587, August 25, 1994.

[20] R.A. 6713, Sec. 2.; and *Policarpio vs. Fortus*, supra.

ABOUT BATAS.ORG

Study smarter at BATAS.org

The Philippine bar review and law-school companion built around how your brain actually remembers.

The complete Philippine law library - free for everyone.

More than 100,000 Supreme Court decisions, Republic Acts, and executive issuances - full-text searchable, browsable by category and year, and always free. No paywall, no login. This PDF came from it.

Audio case-brief lectures.

Any decision becomes a podcast-style lecture - facts, issues, ruling, and doctrine - with read-along highlighting and a hands-free presentation mode. Study while commuting, working out, or resting your eyes.

Bar review built on the science of memory.

Complete, sequenced courses for all eight bar subjects, narrated like podcasts and reinforced with retrieval practice and spaced review - the study techniques with the strongest evidence behind them.

The full law-school curriculum.

One subscription unlocks the entire J.D. curriculum - every subject, every lesson, with your progress tracked down to the paragraph so you can pick up exactly where you left off, on any device.

Mock exams that tell you where you stand.

Timed multiple-choice exams graded instantly, with per-subject score breakdowns and focus suggestions that point you at your weakest topics first.

A study planner that keeps you on pace.

Set your schedule and BATAS tells you every day whether you are on track for bar day - and exactly which lesson to take next.

Start free at <https://batas.org>

The law library is free forever - and your first lesson is one click away.

The text of this document is an official public record and remains in the public domain. Formatting, presentation, and compilation © 2026 batas.org.

Downloaded free from the batas.org Law Library. Share it freely - the library is free for every law student, bar reviewee, and practitioner.