

EN BANC

[**A.M. No. P-08-2535 (Formerly A.M. OCA IPI No. 04-2022-P and A.M. No. 04-434-RTC), June 23, 2010**]

OFFICE OF THE COURT ADMINISTRATOR, COMPLAINANT, VS. FLORENCIO M. REYES,^[1] OFFICER-IN-CHARGE, AND RENE DE GUZMAN, CLERK, REGIONAL TRIAL COURT, BRANCH 31, GUIMBA, NUEVA ECIJA, RESPONDENTS.

D E C I S I O N

PER CURIAM:

This complaint for gross misconduct against Rene de Guzman (De Guzman), Clerk, Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Guimba, Nueva Ecija, Branch 31, is an offshoot of the complaint filed by Atty. Hugo B. Sansano, Jr. (Atty. Sansano) relative to the alleged incompetence/inefficiency of the RTC of Guimba, Nueva Ecija, Branch 31, in the transmittal of the records of Criminal Case No. 1144-G^[2] to the Court of Appeals.

In our Resolution dated September 17, 2007, we adopted the findings and recommendation of the Office of the Court Administrator (OCA) declaring as closed and terminated the administrative matter relative to the delay in the transmittal of the records of Criminal Case No. 1144-G, and exonerating De Guzman and Florencio M. Reyes (Reyes), the Officer-in-Charge of the RTC of Guimba, Nueva Ecija, Branch 31.

However, in the same Resolution, we also required De Guzman to comment on the allegation that he is using illegal drugs and had been manifesting irrational and queer behavior while at work. According to Reyes, De Guzman's manifestations of absurd behavior prompted Judge Napoleon R. Sta. Romana (Judge Sta. Romana) to request the Philippine National Police Crime Laboratory to perform a drug test on De Guzman. As alleged by Reyes:

x x x Mr. Rene de Guzman, the Docket Clerk, was [in] charge of the preparation and transmission of the records on appeal x x x. Nonetheless, x x x Judge Sta. Romana would x x x often x x x [remind him] about the transmittal of records of the appealed cases [for more than] a dozen times, even personally confronting Mr. Rene de Guzman about the matter, x x x though unsuccessfully x x x. Mr. De Guzman would just x x x dismiss the subject in ridicule and with the empty assurance that the task is as good as finished and what x x x need[s] to be done [is] simply retyping of the corrected indices or the like and that he would submit the same in [no] time at all. This was after a number of weeks from March 26, 2003 after Mr. De Guzman made the undersigned sign the transmittal of PP v. Manangan which he allegedly did not

transmit before owing to some minor corrections in the indexing. All too often, (it seems to have been customary on his part, for this he would do to other pressing assignment) he would come to the office the next day, jubilant that the problem has been solved at last! But to no avail. This attitude seemingly bordering on the irrational if not to say that a sense of responsibility is utterly lacking may have given cue for Judge Sta. Romana to have Mr. De Guzman undergo a drug test x x x.^[3]

That Mr. De Guzman could brush aside even the personal importuning by the judge is a fete no other of our co-employees dare emulate. On the contrary, everybody is apprehensive for his well being and in his behalf. x x x

On May 24, 2004, Judge Sta. Romana requested the Nueva Ecija Provincial Crime Laboratory Office to conduct a drug test on De Guzman. On May 26, 2004, De Guzman underwent a qualitative examination the results of which yielded positive for Tetrahydrocannabinol metabolites (*marijuana*) and Methamphetamine (*shabu*), both dangerous drugs.

In our Resolution of September 17, 2007, we required De Guzman to submit his comment on the charge of misconduct relative to the alleged use of prohibited drugs within 10 days from notice. Notwithstanding the Court's directive, De Guzman failed to file his Comment. Thus, on January 23, 2008, we directed De Guzman to show cause why he should not be held in contempt for failure to comply with the September 17, 2007 Resolution. At the same time, we resolved to require him to submit his comment within 10 days from notice.

De Guzman complied with our directive only on March 12, 2008. In his letter, De Guzman claimed that he failed to comply with the Court's directive because he lost his copy of the September 17, 2007 Resolution.

Treating De Guzman's letter as his Comment, we referred the same to the OCA for evaluation, report and recommendation. The OCA submitted its Report and Recommendation on July 23, 2008 which reads in part:

x x x x

Noticeably, respondent de Guzman did not challenge the authenticity and validity of the chemistry report of the Nueva Ecija Provincial Crime Laboratory Office which found him positive for "marijuana" and "shabu". He did not also promptly submit another test report or other document to controvert the drug test report. His plain refutation of the charge and his willingness to submit himself now to a drug test are token attempts at candor and assertion of innocence. These perfunctory attempts cannot prevail over the solitary yet compelling evidence of misconduct for use of prohibited drugs.

Relative to respondent's delay in filing his comment to the charge of misconduct, his claim that he "*lost and misplaced (his) copy of said resolution, and for that (he) almost forgot about it*" is neither a valid

reason nor an excuse for the delay in complying with the order of the Court. His flippant attitude towards the repeated orders of the Court to explain his conduct does not merit consideration and justification for delay.

It is settled that respondent's "indifference to [the resolutions] requiring him to comment on the accusation(s) in the complaint thoroughly and substantially is gross misconduct, and may even be considered as outright disrespect to the Court." After all, a resolution of the Supreme Court is not a mere request and should be complied with promptly and completely. Such failure to comply accordingly betrays not only a recalcitrant streak in character, but has likewise been considered as an utter lack of interest to remain with, if not contempt of the judicial system.

It should be mentioned that this is not the first instance that respondent is ordered to account for his failure to comply with a court order. Earlier, he was required to explain to the Court his failure to promptly submit a copy of the affidavit of retired court stenographer Jorge Caoile and to show cause why he should not be administratively dealt with for his failure to comply with a show cause order.

For failure to overcome the charge of use of prohibited drugs and to satisfactorily explain his failure to submit promptly his compliance to the Court's show cause order, respondent may be held guilty of two counts of gross misconduct.

The OCA thus submitted the following recommendations for consideration of the Court *viz*:

1. The instant matter be **RE-DOCKETED** as a regular administrative case; and
2. Respondent Rene de Guzman be found guilty of gross misconduct and accordingly be **DISMISSED** from the service effective immediately with forfeiture of all benefits except accrued leave credits, with prejudice to his re-employment in any branch or instrumentality of the government, including government-owned or controlled agencies, corporations and financial institutions.^[4]

On August 27, 2008, we required De Guzman to manifest within 10 days from receipt whether he is willing to submit the case for resolution on the basis of the pleadings/records already filed and submitted. As before, De Guzman simply ignored our directive. Consequently, on September 28, 2009, we deemed waived the filing of De Guzman's manifestation.

Our Ruling

We adopt the findings and recommendation of the OCA.

We note that De Guzman is adept at ignoring the Court's directives. In his letter-explanation in the administrative matter relative to the delay in the transmittal of the records of Criminal Case No. 1144-G, he requested for a period of 10 days or until November 15, 2004 within which to submit the Affidavit of George Caoile (Caoile), the retired Stenographer, as part of his comment. However, despite the lapse of five months, De Guzman still failed to submit Caoile's affidavit. Subsequently, we furnished him with a copy of the April 18, 2005 Resolution wherein we mentioned that we are awaiting his submission of the affidavit of Caoile which shall be considered as part of his (De Guzman's) comment.

Nine months from the time he undertook to submit the affidavit of Caoile, De Guzman has yet to comply with his undertaking. Thus, on August 10, 2005, we required De Guzman to show cause why he should not be disciplinarily dealt with or held in contempt for such failure.

Unfortunately, De Guzman merely ignored our show cause order. Consequently, on November 20, 2006, we imposed upon him a fine of P1,000.00. Finally, on January 24, 2007, or after the lapse of one year and two months, De Guzman submitted the affidavit of Caoile.

Similarly, we also required De Guzman to file his comment within 10 days from notice as regards the allegation that he was using prohibited drugs. However, he again ignored our directive as contained in the Resolution of September 17, 2007. Thus, on January 23, 2008, we required him to show cause why he should not be held in contempt for such failure. By way of explanation, De Guzman submitted a letter dated March 12, 2008 wherein he claimed that he failed to file his comment on the charge of misconduct because he allegedly lost his copy of the said September 17, 2007 Resolution.

Finally, on August 27, 2008, we required De Guzman to manifest whether he is willing to submit the case for resolution based on the pleadings submitted. As before, he failed to comply with the same.

As correctly observed by the OCA, De Guzman has shown his propensity to defy the directives of this Court.^[5] However, at this juncture, we are no longer wont to countenance such disrespectful behavior. As we have categorically declared in *Office of the Court Administrator v. Clerk of Court Fe P. Ganzan, MCTC, Jasaan, Claveria, Misamis Oriental*:^[6]

x x x A resolution of the Supreme Court should not be construed as a mere request, and should be complied with promptly and completely. Such failure to comply betrays, not only a recalcitrant streak in character, but also disrespect for the lawful order and directive of the Court. Furthermore, this contumacious conduct of refusing to abide by the lawful directives issued by the Court has likewise been considered as an utter lack of interest to remain with, if not contempt of, the system. Ganzan's transgression is highlighted even more by the fact that she is an employee of the Judiciary, who, more than an ordinary citizen, should be aware of her duty to obey the orders and processes of the Supreme Court without delay. x x x