Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
Baguio City

EN BANC

ROAN AMOR DATOR-MILES,
Complainant,

-versus-

ATTY. VANESSA JOYCE I. MONGE,
Respondent.

A.C. No. 14378
[Formerly CBD Case No. 23-6847]

Present:

GESMUNDO, *C.J.*,
LEONEN,
CAGUIOA,
HERNANDO,
LAZARO-JAVIER,
INTING,
ZALAMEDA,
LOPEZ, M.,
GAERLAN,
ROSARIO,
LOPEZ, J.,
DIMAAMPAO,
MARQUEZ,
KHO, JR., *and*
SINGH,* *JJ.*

Promulgated:

April 2, 2025

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* On leave.

DECISION

PER CURIAM:

The Case

In her Complaint-Affidavit[1] filed on October 7, 2022, Roan Amor Dator-Miles (Roan Amor) sought the disbarment of respondent Atty. Vanessa Joyce I. Monge (Atty. Monge) for alleged violations of Canon 1, Rule 1.01 of the Code of Professional Responsibility (CPR) and Rule 138, Section 27 of the Rules of Court. Roan Amor stated that sometime in October 2019, Atty. Monge represented herself to her as someone connected to and in partnership with Inceptigon Holdings (Inceptigon), a management company servicing fleets of electric public utility vehicles or e-buses. Inceptigon is duly licensed to operate by the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board.[2]

Atty. Monge allegedly informed her that Inceptigon was offering a public utility vehicle (PUV) investment scheme involving the operation of e-buses. Under this PUV investment scheme, investors will be required to secure e-bus units to be deployed and operated as part of the government's PUV Modernization Program. The investment scheme will generate a monthly gross income of around PHP 80,000.00.[3] It includes an asset protection provision ensuring that for the period the e-bus units are not yet deployed, the government will give the investor stimulus payments of PHP 10,000.00 per month until the actual deployment and operation of the e-bus units.[4]

Due to Atty. Monge's representations and assurance of income, she invested her money to secure one e-bus unit costing PHP 530,000.00. Beginning June 2019 until February 2020, she was able to remit to Atty. Monge, via bank transfer, the total amount of PHP 350,000.00 as partial payment for one e-bus unit. As for the remaining balance, they agreed that it shall be later on deducted from her supposed monthly gross income of around PHP 80,000.00.[5]

On September 8, 2020, she and Atty. Monge executed an Asset and Protection Trust Service Agreement (Agreement), setting out the terms and conditions of the PUV investment scheme. It also served as an acknowledgment of the successive bank transfers to the account of Atty.

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1 *Rollo*, pp. 4–10.
2 *Id.* at 4–5.
3 *Id.* at 342.
4 *Id.*
5 *Id.*

Monge. She was never furnished with the original copy of the Agreement, but only its Portable Document File copy.[6]

Towards the end of September 2020, Atty. Monge informed Roan Amor that the stimulus payment checks from the government were already available. Atty. Monge then deposited PHP 30,000.00 to the bank account of her father, Ronald F. Dator (Ronald). Nonetheless, after September 2020, neither she nor Ronald received any more stimulus payments from Atty. Monge. She did repeated follow-ups, but to no avail.[7] Even then, in December 2020, Atty. Monge assured her that the stimulus payments for the months of September to December 2020 will be released soon.[8]

After some time, Roan Amor already became suspicious that the PUV investment scheme was a scam since Atty. Monge had suddenly stopped communicating with her. She tried to contact her several times, but her efforts proved futile. She then discovered that Atty. Monge also stopped communicating with other investors in the PUV investment scheme. Later on, she was able to contact Shane Bousted (Bousted), chief executive officer of Inceptigon. She learned from Bousted that Atty. Monge was no longer employed or connected with Inceptigon, nor was she authorized to offer any PUV investment scheme on its behalf. Worse, Inceptigon itself also got defrauded by Atty. Monge.[9]

Her lawyer eventually sent a letter dated June 14, 2022 to Atty. Monge, demanding for the return of her PHP 350,000.00 investment.[10]

Aside from the e-bus investment scam, Roan Amor also got involved in the educational loan of Atty. Monge with the Sallie Mae Bank (SM Bank). Sometime in December 2019, Atty. Monge asked her to co-sign an educational loan in the amount of USD 32,000.00, excluding interest and other finance charges. Atty. Monge told her that she would use the loan for her enrollment at Syracuse University (Syracuse). She repeatedly assured her not to worry being her co-signer for this loan since she was going to pay SM Bank through monthly automatic debit from her own bank account.[11]

Trusting the assurances of Atty. Monge, whom she considered a friend, she obliged and became her co-signer for her educational loan.[12] Prior to the loan disbursal, however, Atty. Monge informed her that she was no longer enrolling at Syracuse, but at Boston University (Boston) instead. Roan Amor

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6 *Id.* at 342.
7 *Id.*
8 *Id.* at 342–343.
9 *Id.* at 6.
10 *Id.* at 343.
11 *Id.* at 7.
12 *Id.* at 7–8

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offered to update SM Bank about this development, but Atty. Monge assured her that Boston was already handling the matter.[13]

It turned out, however, that SM Bank was never updated about Atty. Monge's supposed transfer to Boston. As a result, on January 10, 2021, SM Bank still disbursed USD 32,000.00 to Syracuse, which in turn, refunded the amount in full to Atty. Monge. As it was, Atty. Monge never informed her about this refund.[14]

At any rate, the monthly amortizations for Atty. Monge's loan commenced on March 8, 2022. Atty. Monge was able to pay the first amortization, albeit belatedly. Roan Amor and Atty. Monge later on agreed that the latter would simply deposit the monthly payment to her bank account before every due date for remittance to SM Bank.[15] But Atty. Monge had since stopped communicating with her. Her appeals and demands for payment were ignored. She was even blocked from all of Atty. Monge's social media accounts.[16]

The succeeding monthly amortizations became due, but Atty. Monge no longer remitted any payments to Roan Amor or even directly to SM Bank. Regrettably, to avoid any negative effect on her credit score, she was forced to continue the monthly amortizations to SM Bank. Much to her distress, all efforts to reach out to Atty. Monge failed. Thus, she engaged the services of a lawyer for appropriate action against Atty. Monge.[17]

On May 10, 2022, Roan Amor's lawyer sent a letter to Atty. Monge, demanding the full payment of USD 37,250.00, inclusive of interest and finance charges, and reimbursement of USD 726.00, an amount she paid SM Bank on Atty. Monge's behalf.[18]

In support of her case against Atty. Monge, she submitted the following documents: (i) screenshots of Facebook Messenger conversations with Atty. Monge regarding the PUV investment scheme; (ii) copies of bank transfers made to Atty. Monge from June 2019 to February 2020; (iii) copy of the PUV investment scheme Agreement dated September 8, 2020; (iv) copy of Atty. Monge's email correspondence with Ronald; (v) copies of the Demand Letter dated June 14, 2022 with LBC Receipt and Tracking No. 127096178659; (vi) screenshots of Facebook Messenger conversations regarding Atty. Monge's law school loan; (vi) copies of documents from SM Bank; (vii) screenshots of Instagram conversations with Atty. Monge regarding the monthly loan

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13 *Id.* at 8.
14 *Id.*
15 *Id.*
16 *Id.*
17 *Id.*
18 *Id.* at 9.

amortizations; and (viii) copies of the Demand Letter dated May 10, 2022 with LBC Receipt and Tracking No. 127096178659.[19]

Verily, Atty. Monge committed dishonest or deceitful conduct. Despite the full trust and faith Roan Amor reposed in her as a lawyer and even as a friend, Atty. Monge just took advantage of her. Atty. Monge was also remiss in paying off her financial obligations. Atty. Monge's acts or omissions are unbecoming of a lawyer; hence, she must be disbarred.[20]

In her Position Paper dated May 17, 2023, Atty. Monge riposted that she was extremely saddened that the issues between her and Roan Amor resulted in the filing of a spiteful complaint. She admitted that she entered into the PUV investment scheme agreement with Roan Amor but claimed that most PUV operators opt to remain non-operational because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, she cannot give a definite date when the e-bus units would operate.[21] With respect to the educational loan, she claimed that she was previously granted reprieve by SM Bank on the monthly amortizations but was not yet informed that the reprieve had already lapsed. In any event, she exerted utmost effort in finding ways to enroll her Philippine bank accounts for automatic debit of her monthly amortizations, but to no avail. SM Bank did not accept foreign bank accounts as debit source for monthly amortizations.[22]

Atty. Monge further posited that she did not intend to renege on her loan obligations to SM Bank, and that she deeply regrets the inconveniences caused to Roan Amor. She hoped that Roan Amor realizes the earnest efforts she exerted in settling the issues between them amicably.[23]

Finally, she asserted that the present Complaint must be dismissed since in truth, it is simply a collection suit, which is outside the jurisdiction of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP). Too, the IBP does not have jurisdiction over a loan that she contracted outside of the Philippines, more so since the subject loan is not related at all to the practice of law.[24]

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19 *Id.* at 5–9.
20 *Id.* at 9–10.
21 *Id.* at 345–346.
22 *Id.* at 346.
23 *Id.* at 347.
24 *Id.*

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Report and Recommendation of the IBP Investigating Commissioner

In his Report and Recommendation[25] dated June 29, 2023, Investigating Commissioner Ramiro B. Borres, Jr. (Commissioner Borres, Jr.) found that Atty. Monge's acts of dishonesty, misrepresentation, breach of trust, and misappropriation of funds amounted to gross misconduct, in violation of the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability (CPRA). Worse, Atty. Monge did not demonstrate her so called willingness to return the money she received from Roan Amor.[26]

In determining the appropriate penalty, Commissioner Borres, Jr. took into consideration: (1) the fact that Atty. Monge has never been involved or found guilty in administrative case prior to the present Complaint; and (2) Atty. Monge's achievements as a Filipino lawyer in the international legal community. Ultimately, he recommended that Atty. Monge be meted the penalty of suspension from the practice of law for two years. Further, Atty. Monge must reimburse Roan Amor the following amounts: (i) PHP 350,000.00, the partial payment for the purchase of one e-bus unit; (ii) USD 35,250.00, the amount of the loan from SM Bank, and USD 726.00, the amount Roan Amor paid to SM Bank on Atty. Monge's behalf.[27]

Report and Recommendation of the IBP Board of Governors

Through its Extended Resolution[28] dated February 21, 2024, the IBP Board of Governors (IBP-BOG) adopted the findings against Atty. Monge but modified the penalty. Based on the totality of the circumstances on record, the IBP-BOG found a repeated pattern of malicious and abusive acts on the part of Atty. Monge. She had taken advantage of the trust and confidence reposed on her by Roan Amor, both as a member of the Bar and as a friend.[29]

Atty. Monge's repetitive refusal to pay the amounts she borrowed from Roan Amor, a friend, and her resort to machinations to deceive the latter into engaging in a sham investment scheme, constitute gross misconduct which warrants the highest penalty of disbarment.[30] Thus:

> WHEREFORE, premises considered, the IBP Board of Governors ***RESOLVED to MODIFY****, as it is hereby* ***MODIFIED****, the Report and Recommendation of the Investigating Commissioner (IC) and to*

[25] *Id.* at 341–350.
[26] *Id.* at 348.
[27] *Id.* at 348–350.
[28] *Id.* at 351–357.
[29] *Id.* at 354–355.
[30] *Id.* at 355–357.

recommend instead to mete out upon Respondent Atty. Vanessa Joyce I. Monge the penalty of DISBARMENT;

RESOLVED FURTHER, *to recommend that the respondent be directed to reimburse the complainant the amounts of Php 350,000.00, [USD] 37,250.00 and [USD] 726.00 within 30 days from receipt of the Supreme Court's decision in this case.*[31]

Ruling

The Court adopts the factual findings and conclusions of law of the IBP – BOG but modifies the penalty.

At the outset, the violations imputed to Atty. Monge were committed before the CPRA took effect on May 29, 2023. Nevertheless, its transitory provision expressly ordains its retroactive application, viz.:

> Section 1. Transitory Provision. — The CPRA shall be applied to all pending and future cases, except to the extent that in the opinion of the Supreme Court, its retroactive application would not be feasible or work injustice, in which case the procedure under which the cases were filed shall govern.

Relatedly, since the language and import of Canon 1, Rule 1.01 of the CPR was incorporated into the CPRA, the latter's application to the present case should no longer be an issue.

Atty. Monge is guilty of violation of Canon II of the CPRA

Membership in the Bar is a privilege burdened with conditions. As a privilege bestowed by law through the Supreme Court, membership in the Bar may be withdrawn where circumstances concretely show the lawyer's lack of essential qualifications,[32] including honesty, fidelity, and integrity. Indeed, these traits are not only a condition precedent for admission to the legal profession but must also remain intact to maintain one's standing in this exclusive and honored society. A high sense of honesty and fair dealing is expected and required of members of the Bar. They must conduct themselves with great propriety, and their behavior must be beyond reproach anywhere and at all times.[33] The Court has often emphasized:

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[31] *Id.* at 357.
[32] *See Garrido v. Atty. Garrido*, 625 Phil. 347, 366 (2010) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].
[33] *See Mendoza v. Atty. Deciembre*, 599 Phil. 182, 191 (2009) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

> [The] [l]aw is a noble profession, and the privilege to practice it is bestowed only upon individuals who are competent intellectually, academically and, equally important, morally. **Because they are vanguards of the law and the legal system, lawyers must at all times conduct themselves, especially in their dealings with their clients and the public at large, with honesty and integrity in a manner beyond reproach.**[34] (Emphasis supplied)

On this score, the Court finds that Atty. Monge fell short of the high standards of morality and integrity expected of members of the Bar. Her brazen deception and utter disregard of her obligations cast dishonorable light on the supposed dignified and noble profession she represents, for which, she must be held accountable.[35]

Canon II of the CPRA reads:

> **CANON II**
> *Propriety*
>
> A lawyer shall, at all times, act with propriety and maintain the appearance of propriety in personal and professional dealings, observe honesty, respect and courtesy, and uphold the dignity of the legal profession consistent with the highest standards of ethical behavior.
>
> SECTION 1. *Proper conduct.* — A lawyer shall not engage in unlawful, dishonest, immoral, or deceitful conduct.
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> SECTION 2. *Dignified conduct.* — A lawyer shall respect the law, the courts, tribunals, and other government agencies, their officials, employees, and processes, and act with courtesy, civility, fairness, and candor towards fellow members of the bar.
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> A lawyer shall not engage in conduct that adversely reflects on one's fitness to practice law, nor behave in a scandalous manner, whether in public or private life, to the discredit of the legal profession.
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> . . . .
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> SECTION 11. *False representations or statements; duty to correct.* — A lawyer shall not make false representations or statements. A lawyer shall be liable for any material damage caused by such false representations or statements.
>
> A lawyer shall not, in demand letters or other similar correspondence, make false representations or statements, or impute civil, criminal, or administrative liability, without factual or legal basis.
>
> A lawyer shall correct false or inaccurate statements and information made in relation to an application for admission to the bar, any pleading, or any other document required by or submitted to the court,

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34 *Resurreccion v. Atty. Sayson*, 360 Phil. 313, 322 (1998) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].
35 *Uy v. Atty. Libiran-Meteoro*, A.C. No. 13368, May 21, 2024 [*Per Curiam, En Banc*] at 6. This pinpoint citation refers to the copy of the Decision uploaded to the Supreme Court website.

tribunal or agency, as soon as its falsity or inaccuracy is discovered or made known to him or her.

A lawyer is not only mandated to personally obey the laws and the legal processes but is expected to inspire respect and obedience to the laws. As such, any dishonest, immoral, or deceitful conduct by a lawyer cannot be countenanced. In *Agno v. Atty. Cagatan*,[36] the Court underscored that lawyers must possess a **high standard of honesty and fairness whether in their professional or private capacity**, thus:

> The Code of Professional Responsibility specifically mandates the following:
>
> > Canon 1. A lawyer shall uphold the constitution, obey the laws of the land and promote respect for law and legal processes.
> >
> > Rule 1.01. A lawyer shall not engage in unlawful, dishonest, immoral or deceitful conduct.
> >
> > Canon 7. A lawyer shall at all times uphold the integrity and dignity of the legal profession and support the activities of the Integrated Bar.
> >
> > Rule 7.03. A lawyer shall not engage in conduct that adversely reflects on his fitness to practice law, nor shall he, whether in public or private life, behave in a scandalous manner to the discredit of the legal profession.
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> *The afore-cited canons emphasize the high standard of honesty and fairness expected of a lawyer not only in the practice of the legal profession but in his personal dealings as well. A lawyer must conduct himself with great propriety, and his behavior should be beyond reproach anywhere and at all times.* For, as officers of the courts and keepers of the public's faith, they are burdened with the highest degree of social responsibility and are thus mandated to behave at all times in a manner consistent with truth and honor. Likewise, the oath that lawyers swear to impress upon them the duty of exhibiting the highest degree of good faith, fairness and candor in their relationships with others. *Thus, lawyers may be disciplined for any conduct, whether in their professional or in their private capacity, if such conduct renders them unfit to continue to be officers of the court.*[37] (Emphasis supplied)

Good character is an essential qualification for admission to and continued practice of law. Hence, any wrongdoing, whether professional or nonprofessional, indicating unfitness for the profession justifies disciplinary action.[38]

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[36] 580 Phil. 1 (2008) [Per J. Leonardo-De Castro, *En Banc*].

[37] *Id.* at 16–17.

[38] *Kelley v. Atty. Robielos III*, A.C. No. 13955, January 30, 2024 [*Per Curiam, En Banc*] at 4–5. This pinpoint citation refers to the copy of the Decision uploaded to the Supreme Court website.

Here, there is no doubt that Atty. Monge committed serious acts of dishonesty and deceit against Roan Amor.

First. She offered and convinced Roan Amor to take part in a PUV investment scheme despite not being authorized by or affiliated with Inceptigon. This is a clear act of deception which brought dishonor to the legal profession. She took advantage of the trust and confidence reposed upon her by Roan Amor. This was further aggravated by her receipt of PHP 350,000.00 from Roan Amor, supposedly as partial payment for one e-bus unit, but which amount she did not disburse for the indicated purpose, nor return to Roan Amor.

Second. Her failure to pay her educational loan to SM Bank despite repeated demands from Roan Amor who acted as her co-signer and who got obligated to pay the loan by reason of her (Atty. Monge) failure or refusal to honor her obligation, likewise constitutes dishonest and deceitful conduct.[39] Indeed, prompt payment of financial obligations is one of the duties of lawyers. This is in accord with their mandate to faithfully perform at all times their duties to society, to the bar, to the courts, and to their clients.[40]

As things stand, Atty. Monge only interposed bare denial and excuses to her administrative liability under the CPRA. The same, however, must fail in light of the positive, consistent, and straightforward statements of Roan Amor and as borne by the documents on record.

Succinctly put, Atty. Monge's multiple infractions clearly evinced her disrespect for the law,[41] dishonesty, deceit, and serious breach of the trust and confidence reposed on her by Roan Amor both as a lawyer and as a friend. Thus, falling short of what is expected of her as a member of the Bar and as an officer of the court, Atty. Monge is answerable not just to Roan Amor, but also to the Court, her profession, and the public in general.[42]

Atty. Monge must be disbarred

Under the CPRA, serious dishonesty, fraud, or deceit is a *serious offense*.[43] Corollarily, Canon VI, Section 37(a) of the CPRA provides the penalties which may be imposed on a lawyer found guilty of a serious offense, viz.:

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39 *See Sosa v. Atty. Mendoza*, 756 Phil. 490, 499 (2015) [Per J. Brion, Second Division].
40 *Tomlin II v. Atty. Moya II*, 518 Phil. 325, 331 (2006) [Per J. Ynares-Santiago, *En Banc*].
41 Canon 1, Code of Professional Responsibility.
42 *See Besa-Edelmaier v. Atty. Arevalo*, 925 Phil. 569, 579 (2022) [Per J. Dimaampao, *En Banc*].
43 Section 33. Serious offenses. — Serious offenses include: . . . (b) Serious dishonesty, fraud, or deceit, including falsification of documents and making untruthful statements; . . .

> **SECTION 37.** ***Sanctions.*** —
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> (a) If the respondent is found guilty of a serious offense, any of the following sanctions, or a combination thereof, shall be imposed:
>
> (1) Disbarment;
>
> (2) Suspension from the practice of law for a period exceeding six (6) months;
>
> (3) Revocation of notarial commission and disqualification as notary public for not less than two (2) years; or
>
> (4) A fine not exceeding [PHP]100,000.00. . .

Further, under Rule 138, Section 27 of the Revised Rules of Court,[44] a lawyer may be disbarred or suspended by the Court for any of the following acts: (1) deceit; (2) malpractice; (3) gross misconduct in office; (4) grossly immoral conduct; (5) conviction of a crime involving moral turpitude; (6) violation of the lawyer's oath; (7) willful disobedience of any lawful order of a superior court; and (8) willfully appearing as an attorney for a party without authority to do so.

Significantly, a lawyer must at no time be wanting in probity and moral fiber, which are not only conditions precedent to their entrance to the Bar but are likewise essential demands for their continued membership in it.[45]

In imposing the appropriate penalty in administrative cases, it is the duty of the Court to exercise its sound judicial discretion based on the surrounding facts of the case.[46] The power to disbar must be exercised with great caution, and may be imposed only in a clear case of misconduct that seriously affects the standing and the character of the lawyer as an officer of the Court and as a member of the Bar.[47] The Court must consider that the primary purposes of disciplinary proceedings are to protect the public; to foster public confidence in the Bar; to preserve the integrity of the profession; and to deter other lawyers from similar misconduct.[48]

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44 Section 27. Attorneys removed or suspended by Supreme Court on what grounds. — A member of the bar may be removed or suspended from his office as attorney by the Supreme Court for any deceit, malpractice, or other gross misconduct in such office, grossly immoral conduct, or by reason of his conviction of a crime involving moral turpitude, or for any violation of the oath which he is required to take before the admission to practice, or for a wilfull disobedience of any lawful order of a superior court, or for corruptly or willful appearing as an attorney for a party to a case without authority so to do. The practice of soliciting cases at law for the purpose of gain, either personally or through paid agents or brokers, constitutes malpractice.

45 *Penilla v. Atty. Alcid, Jr.*, 717 Phil. 210, 219 (2013) [Per J. Villarama, Jr., First Division].

46 *See Alcantara v. Atty. Salas*, 867 Phil. 676, 683 (2019) [Per J. Reyes, J., Jr., First Division].

47 *Mangubat v. Atty. Herrera*, 922 Phil. 39, 57 (2022) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

48 *Valdez v. Atty. Dabon*, 773 Phil. 109, 127 (2015) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

Here, the totality of the evidence on record proves that Atty. Monge miserably failed to live up to the high moral standards required of her as a member of the legal profession. Indeed, her history of deceiving Roan Amor, her friend at that, to take part in an unauthorized PUV invest scheme and to be a co-signor in her educational loan, which she later evaded payment, reveals her propensity for dishonesty and fraud unfitting of a member of the Bar. While We acknowledge that the present complaint is Atty. Monge's first offense after several years of practicing law, We still cannot turn a blind eye to her sustained pattern of deceitful acts, lack of remorse, and refusal to make restitution. She has been given several chances to rectify her wrongdoing, yet she persistently failed to return Roan Amor's money or exert any effort to settle her obligations, unabashedly demonstrating bad faith and a blatant disregard for accountability.

Allowing her to remain a member of the Bar discredits and puts into disrepute the legal profession. By letting her carry the title of a lawyer—an officer of the court sworn to uphold the Constitution and the laws—while being herself a person who breaks the same, makes a mockery of this noble calling and erodes the trust and confidence that the public places upon the legal profession. Though the penalty of disbarment must always be a last resort, We have not hesitated to disbar lawyers for clear cases of misconduct that seriously affect their standing and character as officers of the court, as here.[49]

In *Uy v. Atty. Libiran-Meteoro*,[50] the Court found respondent Atty. Elerizza Libiran-Meteoro (Atty. Libiran-Meteoro) guilty of violating Canon II, Sections 1 and 2 of the CPRA due to her dishonest and deceitful acts. She was proven to have employed unlawful means to secure loans from William Uy. She defrauded him and issued two checks in the amounts of PHP 122,500.00 each, or PHP 245,000.00 in total, which turned out to be unfunded. Worse, she brazenly failed to pay her debt despite numerous demands. She could not be contacted. Ultimately, for her failure to uphold the standards required in the legal profession, the Court meted her the ultimate penalty of disbarment.

Likewise, in *Changa v. Atty. Ban-eg*,[51] the Court disbarred respondent Atty. Vera Joy Ban-eg (Atty. Ban-eg) for her separate but consistent deceitful acts of misrepresenting the capacity of Abundance International to operate as an investment house which induced complainants Abigail Changat, et al. to give their money to Atty. Ban-eg and one Karen Puguon.

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49 *See Uy v. Atty. Libiran-Meteoro*, A.C. No. 13368, May 21, 2024, [*Per Curiam, En Banc*] at 8. This pinpoint citation refers to the copy of the Decision uploaded to the Supreme Court website.
50 *Id.*
51 A.C. No. 13757, October 22, 2024 [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

Certainly, every lawyer is expected to be honorable and reliable at all times.[52] The fitness to be a lawyer is a continuing requirement, measured against the standards laid out in the Lawyer's Oath and the CPRA, and apply to all facets of their life, including private dealings.[53] There is no distinction on whether the transgression is committed in lawyers' private lives or in their professional capacity, for lawyers **may not divide their personality as an attorney at one time and a mere citizen at another.**[54]

Thus, lawyers may be disciplined even for any conduct committed in their private capacity, as long as their misconduct reflects their want of probity or good demeanor.[55] As keepers of the public faith, lawyers are burdened with a high degree of social responsibility and, hence, must handle their personal affairs with greater caution.[56]

As for Atty. Monge's outstanding financial obligations to Roan Amor, *Lim v. Atty. Mandagan*[57] is *apropos*:

> [i]t cannot order the lawyer to return money to complainant if he or she acted in a private capacity because its findings in administrative cases have no bearing on liabilities which have no intrinsic link to the lawyer's professional engagement. **In disciplinary proceedings against lawyers, the only issue is whether the officer of the court is still fit to be allowed to continue as a member of the Bar. The only concern of the Court is the determination of respondent's administrative liability. Its findings have no material bearing on other judicial actions which the parties may choose against each other**[.] (Emphasis supplied)

Atty. Monge's civil liabilities to Roan Amor in the amounts of PHP 350,000.00, USD 37,250.00 and USD 726.00 are best determined and resolved in a civil case rather than the present administrative case.[58] The Court is not concerned with the erring lawyer's civil liability for money received from transactions that are separate, distinct, and not intrinsically linked to their professional engagement, as in this case.[59]

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52 *Manauis-Taggueg v. Atty. Taggueg*, 945 Phil. 25, 33 (2023) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].
53 *Guevarra-Castil v. Atty. Trinidad*, 925 Phil. 582, 590 (2022) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].
54 *In Re: A.M. No. 04-7-373-RTC [Report on the Judicial Audit Conducted in the RTC, Br. 60, Barili, Cebu]*, 788 Phil. 492, 507 (2016) [Per J. Jardeleza, Third Division].
55 *Belo-Henares v. Atty. Guevarra*, 801 Phil. 570, 588 (2016) [Per J. Perlas-Bernabe, First Division].
56 *Hipolito v. Atty. Alejandro-Abbas*, 867 Phil. 684, 693 (2019) [Per J. Reyes, Jr., First Division].
57 *Lim v. Atty. Mandagan*, A.C. No. 11962, December 2, 2020 [Notice, Third Division].
58 *See Saladaga v. Atty. Astorga*, 748 Phil. 1, 15 (2014) [Per J. Leonardo-De Castro, *En Banc*].
59 *Paez v. Atty. Debuque*, A.C. No. 13628, May 28, 2024 [Per J. Dimaampao, *En Banc*].

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A final note. Time and again, We have reminded lawyers that the practice of law is a privilege bestowed only to those who possess and continue to possess the legal qualifications for the profession. As such, lawyers are duty-bound to maintain at all times a high standard of legal proficiency, morality, honesty, integrity, and fair dealing.[60] As officers of the court, they are expected to act with complete candor. They may not resort to the use of deception, not just in some, but in all their dealings. Complete and absolute honesty is expected of lawyers when they appear and plead before the courts.[61] If lawyers fall short of this standard, the Court will not hesitate to discipline them by imposing an appropriate penalty based on the exercise of sound judicial discretion.[62]

ACCORDINGLY, Atty. Vanessa Joyce I. Monge is found **GUILTY** of violation of Canon II, Sections 1, 2, and 11 of the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability. She is **DISBARRED** from the practice of law and her name is **ORDERED STRICKEN OFF** from the Roll of Attorneys.

Let a copy of this Decision be furnished the Office of the Bar Confidant and attached to her personal record. Too, furnish a copy of this Decision to the Integrated Bar of the Philippines for information and guidance; and the Office of the Court Administrator for dissemination to all courts nationwide.

This Decision takes effect immediately.

SO ORDERED.

ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO
Chief Justice

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60 *Alcantara v. Atty. Salas*, 867 Phil. 676, 683 (2019) [Per J. J. Reyes, Jr., First Division].
61 *Atty. Kayaban, Jr. v. Atty. Palicte III*, 912 Phil. 14, 22 (2021) [Per J. Gaerlan, *En Banc*].
62 *De Borja v. Atty. Mendez, Jr.*, 835 Phil. 476, 487 (2018) [Per J. Peralta, Second Division].

MARVIC M.V.F. LEONEN
Senior Associate Justice

ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA
Associate Justice

RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO
Associate Justice

AMY C. LAZARO-JAVIER
Associate Justice

HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING
Associate Justice

RODIL V. ZALAMEDA
Associate Justice

MARIO V. LOPEZ
Associate Justice

SAMUEL H. GAERLAN
Associate Justice

RICARDO R. ROSARIO
Associate Justice

JHOSEP Y. LOPEZ
Associate Justice

JAPAR B. DIMAAMPAO
Associate Justice

JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ
Associate Justice

ANTONIO T. KHO, JR.
Associate Justice

(on leave)
MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH
Associate Justice