



A POSITIVE
CORPORATE
CULTURE
BUILDS A

FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

(And a Lot of Other Things)

by / PAUL L. FOSTER

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, WESTERN REFINING, INC.
CHAIRMAN, WESTERN REFINING LOGISTICS, LP / CHAIRMAN, NORTHERN TIER ENERGY, LP

EVEN WHEN I WAS A KID, I knew I wanted to work in the oil and gas business. And like many, I dreamed of someday owning my own company. I was fortunate. That opportunity came in 1997 when I founded a company to handle the assets of a bankrupt refinery in El Paso, Texas. For the next three years, I put together business plans and worked to get financing, and in 2000, Western Refining bought the El Paso refinery. My dream had become a reality. And one of the first things I wanted to create and instill—throughout the entire company—was a business culture that would be unique to Western Refining, a culture that would define us, and our brand.

It was up to me to build that culture. Corporate culture is created from the top down, and then promoted and “lived” by the company. So, what was our culture to be? And how was I going to create that? It was something that I classified as critically important, and I’m glad I did. To a significant degree, Western Refining today is well respected in the industry and appreciated in the communities where we work and live. There is also a very special company pride among our employees. It is my belief that the respect and positive company image—the Western Refining brand—we have today started with, and is continually built upon, a corporate culture of doing what is right. That may sound simplistic, but it actually involves a well-defined process of making our culture more than just a mission statement on a wall. We strive to make our culture a real and tangible environment.

Since day one, I wanted the culture of our company to support, in every way possible, four core values: safety, environmental stewardship, high ethical standards, and commitment to the betterment of our communities. The first thing I did was hire very smart people who shared the same standards of conducting business that I believed in. Even after 15 years, our leadership team continues to instill in our employees a laser-focus on those original four values. It is that focus which has enabled us to build a corporate culture where everyone in the company is engaged in supporting our values. Our employees, in every department and business segment, get a clear and real sense that they count, that

their jobs are important, and that they are an integral part of our success—collectively and individually. In turn, innovation—and a lot of other positive attributes—are driven from the bottom up.

Because of the culture we’ve created and continually work to maintain, I believe our employees feel a true freedom to be innovative. Ideas can come from everywhere, and from everybody. For the most part, our employees embody our culture and become the fabric of Western Refining. They are aware that they are our best brand ambassadors—inside and outside of the workplace. Their engagement in the process creates a cycle, and they know it starts with them: being innovative differentiates them and makes them (and our company) unique. In turn, that uniqueness creates a better value, which attracts better customers, and ultimately makes us a better company. A positive corporate culture that allows for innovation to broadly and randomly bubble up is not just important, it’s critical.

In a way, my donation to Baylor University to fund the Paul L. Foster Campus for Business and Innovation stems from the core values and culture we built at Western. The Foster Campus is intended to help students, right from the start of their higher education, get on a path to building and practicing their own core values. From those values, young entrepreneurs and future business leaders might just create their own business cultures, ones that will encourage and inspire workplace innovation. ■

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