

# Riding for the Brand

**The Power of Purposeful Leadership**

Riding for the Brand  
The Power of Purposeful Leadership  
By Jim Whitt  
Copyright ©2005

ISBN 0-9770004-0-0

Published by Lariat Press  
[www.lariatpress.com](http://www.lariatpress.com)  
1-800-874-4928

"Oklahoma Hills" by Woody Guthrie and Jack Guthrie  
© 1945 - 1973 Michael H. Goldsen, Inc.  
All Rights Reserved  
International Copyright Secured  
Used By Permission Michael H. Goldsen, Inc, and Woody  
Guthrie Publishing

## Foreword

I was sitting in my office in downtown Tulsa when the phone rang. A pleasant voice with an easy Oklahoma drawl introduced himself as Jim Whitt. You could hear his smile through the phone.

He explained he was driving down the road listening to the radio when he heard this guy being interviewed about *The American*, a 21-story bronze statue of a Native American brave, arm raised to receive an American Bald Eagle in flight. The inspiration of sculptor Shan Gray, *The American* is planned to sit atop Holmes Peak in Osage County just northwest of Tulsa.

As it turns out the guy on the radio was me. During the interview I explained the project might be in danger of a funding shortfall and that Tulsa-based financial support was essential if the area was to benefit from the significant economic impact envisioned by the largest private venture of its type ever attempted.

After hearing the interview on the radio Jim called me. He explained he was writing a book that took place 25 years into the future and *The American* played a part in the story line. So he was more than just a little bit concerned when he heard me say that the project might not get off the ground!

We talked only a few minutes before I knew we were kindred spirits. Jim asked if I would mind reading his manuscript. I agreed and life would never be the same. Reading the manuscript was like Bill Murray's experiences in *Groundhog Day*. The setting, the characters and the storyline all were eerily aligned with both my current experience with the monument and of my life overall. I knew these people, I knew this author and I knew the storyline by heart. Heck, I was living it! So reading the manuscript was fun, validating and a little spooky all at the same time.

I liked Jim from the moment I first laid eyes on him. It would be hard not to like him. He has a glint in his eye that says he is comfortable in his own skin. Ramrod straight with neat, short-cropped hair and a quick, easy smile, Jim has a way of putting people at ease in short order. And it takes no time at all for him to get you into a conversation about his passion...*Purpose*.

## *Riding for the Brand*

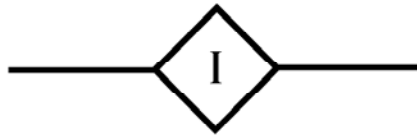
From the moment I first shook Jim's hand I knew we shared a common purpose, would be partners-for-life, were likely to do some pioneering together and that both our lives and the world would profit from the experience. Since that time, Jim and I have spent many hours sharing our experiences, beliefs and lessons learned in this life. We are sort of like two kids who have discovered that all the chocolate bars in the world have been sitting in our basement all along!

I want people to read *Riding for the Brand* because it offers the solution to a crisis I witness everyday as a businessman and civic leader. Individuals and organizations are suffering from *purpose deficit disorder*. Friendships, marriages, families, neighborhoods, schools, churches, civic groups, businesses, partnerships, corporations, city councils, legislatures, political parties, cities, counties, states, countries, cultures and mankind as a whole suffer, struggle and stutter from lack of a clear and common purpose that is positive, powerful, simple and serving. Yet it is individuals without purpose who populate each of these human groupings. Purpose is the key that unlocks the door empowering individuals and organizations to reach their full potential.

*Riding for the Brand* is much more than a good read with an interesting story, though it is certainly that, at the very least. It's the most unique book on change, motivation and leadership you'll ever read — a western novel that takes you on an adventure into the future. But along the way you'll discover how people and organizations can be transformed by the power of purpose. The principles of purposeful leadership can be applied to any organization including small businesses, corporations, nonprofits, associations and governments. The lessons you'll learn can be applied to cities, states and countries. If you want to live and lead *on purpose* then saddle up — you're ready to *ride for the brand*.

Bob Workman

*Bob Workman is cofounder and chairman of BSW International, Inc. which has provided design and architectural services for over 8,000 projects worldwide including 4,000 Wal-Mart Stores and Sam's Wholesale Clubs. He's also cofounder and president of SOL, Inc. and cofounder and director of Lucernex, Inc.*



“Sing for me, Grandpa.”

“What do you want to hear, boy?”

“You know,” Bobby said excitedly.

“*San Antonio Rose?*”

“No!”

“*Faded Love?*”

“No, you know... *Oklahoma Hills!*”

The old man scratched his head, “I don’t know if I can remember the words.”

“Come on, Grandpa, don’t tease!”

“Well, let’s see...”

The boy watched anxiously as his grandpa picked up a well-worn guitar that was leaning against the wall. He cradled it in his lap, tuned it a little and then broke into song.

*Way down yonder in the Indian nation  
I rode my pony on the reservation  
In the Oklahoma Hills where I was born  
Way down yonder in the Indian nation  
A cowboy’s life is my occupation  
In the Oklahoma Hills where I born*

*Riding for the Brand*

The youngster never tired of his grandpa's singing but as the night wore on, his eyelids grew heavy and he drifted into the place of his dreams — a place where time stood still and cowboys and Indians forever rode the Oklahoma Hills. And he was right there with them...

Bobby felt a tap on his shoulder. It must be morning but he felt like he really hadn't slept at all.

"Grandpa?"

He blinked but Grandpa was nowhere in sight. Instead he found himself staring into the eyes of a very bemused flight attendant.

"I'm not your grandpa, sir."

Bob rubbed his eyes. "Oh, sorry... I must have dropped off for a minute."

"Sir, we're making our descent. You'll need to buckle your seatbelt and bring your seatback forward."

It had been a long time since Bob had been home. He never dreamed he would land an assignment that would take him back to Oklahoma. But his dream had already brought him back. He smiled. He could still hear his grandpa singing...

*Many months have come and gone  
Since I wandered from my home  
In those Oklahoma Hills where I was born*

As the plane banked for the approach, Bob looked out the window and was temporarily blinded by the early morning sun as it reflected off the buildings that formed the skyline of downtown Tulsa. Tulsa was just a sleepy cow town until Robert F. Galbreath and Frank Chesley noticed oil stains on a limestone formation while camping out on Robert and Ida Glenn's

*The Power of Purposeful Leadership*

farm south of town in 1905. Galbreath took a sledgehammer to the rock and oil literally oozed from the limestone. It wasn't long after that the *Glenn Pool* field was producing more oil than the entire state of Texas. It was one of many such Oklahoma oil fields that would make Tulsa the undisputed *Oil Capital of the World*.

The oil boom was on but cattle still grazed the Oklahoma Hills. Oil and agriculture were the two sides of the business coin in 20th century Oklahoma. In nearby Osage County, where Bob was born and raised, most people's livelihoods were tied to one or both of these two industries. It was just like Grandpa's song.

*Now as I turn life a page  
To the land of the great Osage  
Where the black oil rolls and flows  
And the snow-white cotton grows*

It was the legendary Woody Guthrie and his brother Jack who put those words to song. *Oklahoma Hills* was an anthem to the state they came of age in. Woody described his home town of Okemah as, "...one of the singingest, square dancingest, drinkingest, yellingest, preachingest, walkingest, talkingest, laughingest, cryingest, shootingest, fist fightingest, bleedingest, gamblingest, gun, club and razor carryingest of our ranch towns and farm towns, because it blossomed out into one of our first oil boom towns." That was before the drought stricken years of the 1930s scorched the amber waves of grain on America's fruited plains. The Dust Bowl needed a face and Oklahoma became the reluctant model for unflattering portraits by photographers, artists and writers. When John Steinbeck wrote about the fictional Jode family in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Oklahomans simply became known as *Okies*.

The Dirty Thirties came and went but the soil and oil of the Oklahoma Hills endured. Rodgers and Hammerstein gave the state a much needed face lift in 1943 when their musical

*Riding for the Brand*

*Oklahoma!* broke all Broadway box office records. The lyrics of the memorable title song restored the image of Oklahoma to its former glory:

*We know we belong to the land  
And the land we belong to is grand!*

By 1969 Merle Haggard was even “proud to be an Okie from Muskogee.” But by the end of the 20th century most of the oil companies had relocated their headquarters to Houston, the international hub of the energy business. Oil barons no longer came to Tulsa to broker deals but millions of people flocked to Tulsa each year to see the world’s largest freestanding bronze sculpture, *The American*. Shan Gray’s twenty-one story statue of an Indian warrior with an eagle perched on his outstretched arm was awe inspiring.

“The Statue of Liberty should be jealous,” Bob thought as he drove past in his rental car. It was good to be back in the hills of Oklahoma and the giant warrior seemed to be welcoming Bob home.

Bob had grown up on a ranch but it had been many years since the cowboy’s life had been *his* occupation. *Cowboys and Indians* pretty much described Oklahoma before the discovery of oil catapulted the territory into statehood in 1907. Fate had smiled upon the Osage tribe — they retained all of the mineral rights in the Osage Nation. Unlike many of their brethren who lived in poverty on reservations scattered across North America, the Osages weren’t poor. Oil coursed through the limestone veins underneath the Oklahoma Hills and if Osage blood coursed through your veins you shared in the wealth. That wealth was commonly reinvested into land and cattle. Indians still rode the hills but the oil boom elevated their standard of living. They could drive a Cadillac instead of going horseback.



### *The Power of Purposeful Leadership*

Cadillacs, and most other motor vehicles, were now hydrogen powered. PHCs (personal hover craft) were becoming affordable and a sizable number of the public owned them. The power lines that followed the highways were becoming scarce now that *fuel cells* had become the energy source of choice by more homes and businesses. Once the air traffic control problem was resolved and PHCs were no longer restricted by law to follow roads, Bob wondered if cars with wheels would end up as museum pieces. Transportation infrastructure could be transformed from concrete and asphalt into *virtual* highways. High-speed bullet trains were carrying more people and goods across the nation. *Teleportation* was proving to be more than just a figment of H.G. Wells's imagination. It wasn't too many years ago that it seemed crazy to think that matter actually could be dematerialized at one point and recreated at another. But ongoing research was starting to show that maybe Scotty really could beam up Captain Kirk.

Bob sometimes thought about what it would be like to travel back in time. As he drove, he imagined what the landscape might look like if the millions of acres of highway right-of-way could be returned to their native state. *Native State* was an accurate description of Oklahoma. The name comes from two Choctaw words: "okla" meaning people, and "humma" meaning red. Oklahoma was still the land of the red people. The Osage and Choctaw were among thirty-nine Native American tribes headquartered there — more than any other state.

Bob aimed his car north on Highway 75 in the direction of Bartlesville, the birthplace of Phillips Petroleum. Frank Phillips, a barber from Iowa, had come to Oklahoma in 1903 prospecting for black gold and hit the mother lode. It was the famous Burbank oilfield that made *Uncle Frank* — as he was known to his employees and the people of Bartlesville — a multimillionaire. Uncle Frank went on to that great oilfield in the sky in 1950 but his company carried on until 2003, when it merged with Conoco. Based in Ponca City, Conoco was formed when Marland Oil merged with the Continental Oil Company

### *Riding for the Brand*

in 1928. Like Frank Phillips, E.W. Marland owed much of his fortune to the Burbank Field. After the merger, ConocoPhillips joined the energy exodus across the Red River and moved their headquarters to Houston. This move that involved what used to be the two crown jewels of the Oklahoma oil industry unofficially marked the closing of a glorious era. The *Oil Capital* mantle that Tulsa had so proudly worn for so many years was unceremoniously passed on to its Texas cousin.

Bob turned westward on Highway 11. This stretch of highway snakes through blackjack covered hills interrupted frequently by vast expanses of pastureland. As the Guthries' song so eloquently put it:

*Where the oak and blackjack trees  
Kiss the playful prairie breeze*

The blackjacks thinned out as Bob continued west of Pawhuska, the Osage County seat, on Highway 60. He was now in the *Tallgrass Prairie* — cow country as it used to be called. Bob's destination was Field's Corner, a point on the map located roughly halfway between the forty-two miles that separated Pawhuska and Ponca City. To the locals the Burbank oilfield had simply been known as *The Field*. Field's Corner earned its name because it was situated on the corner of that field. The high water mark for The Field was in 1923 when it covered more than 20,000 acres and produced more than 32 million barrels of crude. By the end of the 1990s the massive Lufkin pump jacks that once dotted the landscape to suck the oil from the ground had just about disappeared.

Now, the once legendary Burbank Field was merely a footnote in the oil-rich history of Oklahoma. Some of the 20th century's great success stories were birthed in that field. Now, it was agriculture, the other side of the Oklahoma business coin that would make it home to one of the great success stories of the 21st Century.