

Sol Trujillo

by Suzanne B. Bopp
Alumnews Editor

Sol Trujillo has been referred to as the highest-ranking Hispanic in American business. His business education didn't begin at home, but his inspiration did. He grew up in Cheyenne, where his father worked for the railroad and his mother worked in a retail store. "In our family, we didn't know anything about business," he says. "But my parents convinced me I'd go to college, be something, do something." Nobody knew what that would be. He noticed that some of his friends' parents were in business, and their lives seemed to be good, so he thought he'd major in business in college.

That college was UW; there was never any choice about that. He worked his way through, washing dishes in the cafeteria and playing trumpet in a mariachi band on weekends. He finished a bachelor's degree in business administration, then while he waited for his new wife, Corine, to finish her degree, he earned an M.B.A. in two semesters, the first time anyone had done that at UW. That degree gave him a big leg up, thanks in large measure to the professors there at the time. "The stars were aligned relative to the quality of the faculty," he says. "I felt my M.B.A. experience allowed me to be competitive in my career with anyone. Part of the message behind that is that even though everyone talks about the Ivy League schools, but the answer is really it's up to the individual."

He credits the university itself too. "It's also about the core focus of the university: learning the nuts and bolts, the fundamentals," he says. "You had to take the core courses and learn them well." Thinking back to UW from his current home in California, he remembers the beautiful, quiet campus - "if you wanted to focus on being a student, you could" - and always being cold.

Between his degrees, he interned with Mountain Bell Telephone Company, and once he had his master's degree in hand, the company started recruiting him enthusiastically. He resisted. "I didn't want to work for a telephone company; I thought it would be too boring," he says. But finally, Mountain Bell made him an offer he couldn't refuse. He took the



Sol Trujillo, BS '73

job.

Twenty years later, he was the CEO of US West.

His first job with Mountain Bell was as a business forecaster. He went on to hold about every kind of job the company had; he learned about the business and he delivered results. At age 32, he became the youngest officer in US West's history, when he was managing Mountain Bell operations in New Mexico. In 1987, he created the Small Business Group, a new division that is now an industry benchmark, where he grew revenues 300 percent. In 1992, he was named president and CEO of US West Marketing Resources, where he grew revenues more than twice the industry average.

When he became president and CEO of the whole company, it was during a difficult time; there had been some trouble with service issues, driven by a lot of growth in remote areas. "The migration of people to the West has been dramatic; meeting their demands was a challenge," Trujillo says. "They like living in places where they don't have the best facilities."

This was one of the issues that made working for a phone company turn out not to be boring after all. "Actually it was probably one of the two or three most dynamic, fast-changing industries in the world," he says. "Today our lives are centered around communications."

But the secret of his success, he's said, is "always striving," and he met those challenges. He describes his leadership style as "leading by example. You can't ask people to do things you wouldn't do yourself." As CEO, he made UW West a top-performing Baby Bell company. They deployed the nation's first broad commercial offering of Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) high-speed access to the

Internet for residential and business customers in Phoenix in October 1997. This caused him to be called the nation's first digital telecom CEO. The new and enhanced telecommunications services the company rolled out under his direction focused particularly on often-ignored rural areas.

Trujillo's recognitions, honors and awards are many. He's been inducted into the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council Hall of Fame; he's served on governor-appointed commissions in Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico and on the boards of Bank of America and the Dayton Hudson Corp. He was named one of the "100 Most Influential Hispanics in the Nation" by Hispanic Business Magazine and has served as chairman of Race for the Cure.

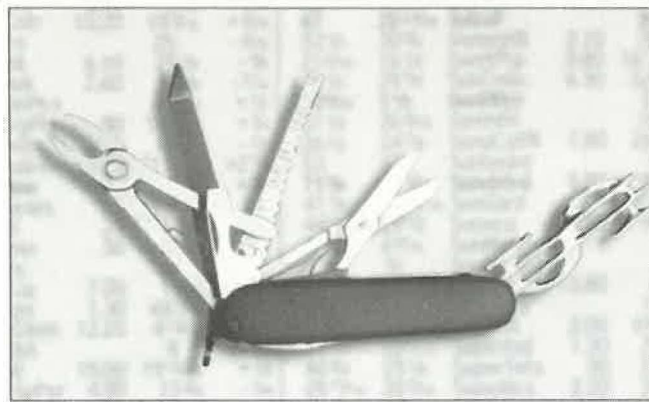
When US West merged with Qwest in 2000, Trujillo retired. He went to France to run one of their top companies and became the first American CEO ever to do so. After about a year, that company was sold, and he retired again.

Now he's taking a little time off. "What I'm mulling over is where I spend my time next, where I can help make a difference," he says. He's dismayed to see that Hispanics seem to still be at a disadvantage. "If you look

at the Fortune 100, you see no Hispanics. If you look at the Senate, you see no Hispanics. Look at the Supreme Court, no Hispanics," he says. "I used to hope, 10, 15, 20 years ago, it would change. But it hasn't. It's an inspiring story if you think about the progress of African-Americans—look at Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice. If you're a student or a young person, you see people in those positions, and you can aspire to those positions. If you're a young Hispanic, you don't see anybody like you in those positions, and your dreams may be limited."

One prescription, which he followed in his company, is for employers to alter their employee search habits. "Look for people who are talented; look in places you didn't look before," he says. "Talent is talent. But they have to be allowed in the room to compete."

His time in France gave Trujillo an opportunity to reflect on such aspects of business and life in the U.S. "It's a great experience living outside this country," he says. "You can see the strengths of this country, and where we're good but not quite great yet. But we'll be even better going forward. That was always my philosophy in business: We're good today, but we've got to be even better tomorrow."



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