



# Finding what works: Values then. Values now.

Fuzzy Bitar,

SVP, HSE and carbon

Tallow Chandlers 2023 Awards

8 November 2023



Master, Lady Mayoress, Award Winners, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an immense honour to join you today.

It's my first time speaking at this event.

But I feel a longstanding connection to the Tallow Chandlers – and to these awards.

I've been freeman of the livery company for many years.

Long enough that Tallow Chandlers feels a lot like home (although perhaps with a few more suits of armour than I'm used to).

For a few years, I was actually lucky enough to serve as one of the judges for these awards.

Which was both a huge privilege – and a daunting challenge, given the calibre of nominees.

And while I'm not judging this year's entries, I have read the citations and spoke to some of the nominees and winners earlier today.

And clearly the standard is higher than ever.

Moustapha, Matthew, Nicole, Conor

Rachel, Safia, Calum, Emily

On behalf of bp, please accept my heartfelt congratulations to you all.

I have been in this industry for 35 years.

And I can tell you that demonstrating such quality, maturity and achievement at this stage of your career is very rare indeed.

But then perhaps I wouldn't know.

You see, my arrival at the company was not exactly conventional.

## Laying down a challenge

I graduated with a degree in mining engineering from Newcastle University.

I knew I wanted to work for a large, complex energy company.

A company where I could get to work on some the most pressing challenges of the day.

A company like bp, in fact.

So straight out of college – I applied for a place here.

But I didn't get one.

No trouble, I told myself. I'll try again.

That didn't work out either.

So I tried again. And again. But I still didn't make the cut.

This merry dance went on an embarrassing number of times.

As my family will testify, my persistence can occasionally border on stubbornness.

It went on so many times, in fact, that I eventually received a letter from bp asking me, in very polite terms, to stop applying.

So, I did. I lined up a role at another company and was ready to set out on a different course in South Africa.

But then I came across a speech by the then chairman & CEO of bp, Robert Horton.

I say "I" came across it. It was actually my father who found it.

Robert was talking to students graduating from the University of Colorado.

And in it he spoke of the attributes he liked to see in people at bp.

Stamina, commitment, and a care for good work.

He also liked graduates to be able to laugh. And – perhaps surprisingly – to sing.

Operatics aside... what Robert was doing was laying down a challenge to the graduates.

Suggesting that if they demonstrated these attributes – if they felt they had what it takes – they should join him at bp.

My dad – aside from having great taste in speeches – also knew me pretty well.

And after I read it – he encouraged me to apply.

'Again?' I thought. 'I think bp's opinion of me is pretty clear.'

But persistence clearly runs in the family.

And my Dad convinced me to try again. But with a different tactic.

So I wrote to Robert Horton directly.

I remember it was a rather short letter.

And basically, I said: "Look, I read and enjoyed your speech. I believe I answer to the attributes you postulated, and I am ready to accept the challenge!"

A few days later, I got a call.

And after a fairly rigorous assessment process, I was offered a job.

The rest, as they say, is history.

## The rest is history

Now fortunately, you're clearly having much better luck than me in the early stages of your career.

So, you don't need to write to the current chairman, begging for a job. For which I'm sure Helge Lund would be grateful.

But that's how I ended up at bp.

Skip forward a decade or 2. Or 3. Or almost 4.

And one of the things I've enjoyed most about a career at bp is variety. The breadth of experience available to you.

I've been fortunate to live in several countries, from the jungles of South America to the deserts of the Middle East, working with different teams and collaborating with many amazing colleagues.

And ahead of today I was reflecting on my career and what I wanted to say to you.

And it got me thinking about those values Robert Horton challenged the graduates with.

Stamina, commitment, care for good work. And the ability to laugh, and sing.

5 values – that I'd say they've proved the test of time.

But along the way, I've also learned there are some other traits that perhaps might be helpful to bear in mind.

## The Fuzzy doctrine

There are five attributes that I think really matter – that I wished I had been told earlier.

And just as Robert lay down a challenge to those graduates – here is my challenge to you.

Can you – will you – live up to these?

### Number 1 – lead by example.

Leadership is earned by what you do, not by what you say.

Role-model the values you want others to see.

For example – when it comes to mistakes, we all know everyone makes them.

What matters is not the mistake but how you respond.

So when I make a mistake – which I do often – I own it. I apologise. I learn from it. And I tell others about it so they can learn something too.

In the same way, I would expect this from my colleagues.

### Number 2 – be authentic.

You're here because of what you have to offer.

The nominees and winners today succeeded because you delivered what you're capable of.

So be true to yourself.

Sounds easy. But it might not always be.

There'll probably be times when you feel like a minority voice. Perhaps a lone voice.

When you feel you're going against consensus.

That's when it matters most – please, be true to yourself.

If you don't – and you try and mimic others – it'll be obvious. And people won't respect you as much.

### **Number 3 – be confident. And have the confidence to be humble.**

Confidence and humility? I know – that sounds a bit weird at first.

But think about it.

You've all been in a room with people vying to impress.

To be the loudest voice in the room.

Confidently making out like they have the answer.

They might.

But the leaders I have respected the most are those who pause for a moment.

Realise there might be a better idea out there.

Canvas everyone's opinion.

Are ready to listen and learn.

And then come to a decision.

I've definitely found that those decisions are the better ones.

Calmer. Sounder. More considered.

I challenge you to give it a go.

### **Number 4 – Have the hard conversations.**

I don't just mean having a wash-up after a project and weighing up what worked and what could have gone better.

Although that is important.

I mean actually going out there – and having those really honest, really tough conversations.

The ones where you hear things that don't just inflate your ego.

Seek out feedback.

Seek out bad feedback.

Find out what you didn't do so well.

What can you learn?

And do the same for those you work with. Give them the feedback they need to get better.

It can be uncomfortable.

But you – and your teams – and bp – will be better for it.

### Number five – the most important of all: care.

Be a caring leader, a curious one.

Have your team's backs.

Find out what's going on with them. Take an interest.

If there is one thing I wish I had known as I was starting out – is when there's poor performance, it's normally because there's something else going on.

So, find out. Offer to help. And give people the benefit of the doubt.

Because if you look after your people. Performance should look after itself.

### Conclusion

So, there you have it.

The five values that inspired me to join bp.

And the five values I've learned since.

I wonder if I should call it the Fuzzy doctrine?

Maybe not – I'm not sure doctrines should be fuzzy.

I hope it's of some use.

But the truth is – you'll find what works for you.

You are all supremely talented individuals who will go on to lead our industry.

In a few years, you'll be the ones invited back to events like this – recalling the values and ideas you heard early on in your career.

Figuring out whether they held true or not.

When you do – please let me know.

In the meantime, congratulations once again.

And thank you.