



George H. Weyerhaeuser

1926 -

Although he spent 25 years leading a Fortune 100 company founded by his great-grandfather, George Weyerhaeuser doesn't mind being called a logger. As he once told the *Seattle Times*, "I have always thought of loggers and logging in terms of the outdoors—men with an independent frame of mind."

In fact, George did some honest-to-goodness logging early in his career, learning the lumber business from the ground up. Having completed his naval service during World War II, George took a summer job in the woods of Washington state as a choker setter—the logging crewman who wraps the cable around the log before it is hauled to the landing. The year was 1947, and this was George's first job in the family enterprise, Weyerhaeuser Company.

George graduated from Yale in 1949 and then returned to the Northwest to continue on the operational side of the business for seven more years. He worked at the pulp mill in Longview, Washington, from 1949 to 1951, then at the Springfield, Oregon, lumber operation, ending up as branch manager in 1954. For a time, he was a member of the union.

Those jobs, George once said, "came about as a result of a strong inclination on my part, and on my dad's, that I really ought to know something about the woods if I was going to work for Weyerhaeuser."

And working for Weyerhaeuser, of course, was something of a family tradition.

Frederick Weyerhaeuser, a German immigrant who began his life's work in an Illinois sawmill, helped found the company more than 100 years ago. It began as Weyerhaeuser Timber Company with just three employees, 900,000 acres of forestland, and a vision that would be realized largely through Frederick's hard work, honesty and personal charm. Frederick had won friends and allies in his early business ventures in the Midwest; now at age 65, he was poised for this new challenge in the unmapped forests of the Pacific Northwest, where his partnerships again would result in success for many.

This approach, coupled with the family's strong work ethic, was the root of a value system that in the century ahead would emerge as a tradition of excellence and fuel the company's tremendous growth. Today Weyerhaeuser is one of the world's largest integrated forest product companies, with 52,000 employees in 19 countries, and customers worldwide.

George's leadership was fundamental to this growth. "George could have led any company, in any industry, in this country or in the world," said Charles W. Bingham, George's executive vice president of timberlands and corporate affairs. "He was a superior executive and if he had not been born a Weyerhaeuser and he had decided to go into business, he would have been a remarkably successful chief executive."

Specifically, George is recognized for a style of personal leadership that blended being a good listener, being a champion for product quality and high ethical business standards, and being a true visionary focused on the long term.

"He disliked making decisions that were only short-term in nature," Bingham said. "The whole strength of the company, I think, was his ability to keep his focus on the long term."

George's affinity for the business began with walks in the woods with his father. Those who observed George in his early years attributed his success to having "one of the best teachers in the world"—his father, J. P. Weyerhaeuser, Jr., who put his own stamp on the company in the form of reforestation, fiber utilization, research and family values.

By the time he moved to company headquarters in downtown Tacoma in 1957, George understood the hardships and rewards experienced by employees working in the woods and the mills. He often expressed deep respect for those responsible for the core strength and future success of the company.

George also understood the need for sound and sustainable forest

practices. He was proud that his company's roots were connected to nature, and he championed the work of the forester. In an essay encouraging young people to pursue forestry, he wrote: "To many, forestry conveys inner peace through the physical and spiritual beauty of the outdoors. It offers a stimulating combination of mental and physical challenges and the thrill of growing majestic trees for future generations."

At headquarters, George rose quickly from executive vice president's assistant (1957) to manager of the wood products group and vice president (1958); executive vice president for wood products, timberlands (1961); and executive vice president operations (1964). He was elected to the Weyerhaeuser Board of Directors in 1960. On April 14, 1966, at age 39, he became the company's chief executive officer and ninth president, the sixth president with the Weyerhaeuser name. He held the chief executive office for 25 years, until 1991. He served as chairman of the board for 11 years, from 1988 to 1999.

One of George's first major decisions as president demonstrated his long-term thinking and resulted in a forest management model later embraced by the entire forest products industry. That visionary decision in 1967 was to adopt High Yield Forestry, setting forth new and rigorous practices that would become an international model for intensive, productive forest management.

The success of these principles was rooted in Weyerhaeuser's investment in research that had begun 25 years earlier. The company had dedicated considerable resources to learn how to grow trees faster, straighter and stronger. The learnings were profound—but it was George who saw the opportunity and decided it was time to put this knowledge to work.

From that point forward, Weyerhaeuser Company applied a range of scientific and computer technologies to grow forests for specific end uses and to intensively and sustainably manage timber. High Yield Forestry began at Weyerhaeuser seedling nurseries and extended to the forest for soil preparation, reforestation, brush control, fertilization, thinning, genetic tree improvement and pruning. High Yield Forestry more than doubled the rate of wood growth on Weyerhaeuser forestland and inspired other companies to follow suit.

George understood this approach required tremendous planning and patience, and he championed it as a necessity for the company's long-term viability: "It behooves us to manage timber well, since it's our prime resource and we'd be out of business without it," he said.

By adopting these new principles, George made it clear his presidency would be focused on the future. And over the next two decades, he never failed to take the long view.

He supported diversification into new businesses, ranging from real estate to newsprint and disposable diapers. He also continued expansion in Canada and abroad, and he championed land acquisition in the southern United States.

"I like to buy timber—not sell it," he was known to tell managers. "Don't sell timber unless you can reinvest in timber and make more money somewhere else," he'd say.

George oversaw the construction of a new corporate headquarters in Federal Way, which opened in 1971. Visitors and employees still applaud the open architecture for how it "welcomes in" the woodland setting and encourages employee engagement. George wanted the office-less, door-less design to signal a new era, in which the company would shift its focus toward customers and the world marketplace. The design was critical in a corporate reorganization to break up a centralized structure and position the company's different businesses to respond more effectively to customers and to the emerging global marketplace. It signaled a new direction for the company, and George was at the helm.

"He wanted to mix with the crowd," said Merrill Robison, senior vice president who led construction of Weyerhaeuser's Technology Center as well as key research and development, engineering and

transportation projects. "He wanted to hear from the people doing the work. He always was open to hear what's really going on. Best guy I ever worked for."

F. Lowry Wyatt, who served as one of George's vice presidents, called him "as good a leader as I'll ever know."

When challenges arose in an ever-changing world, George faced them squarely. During the 1980s, when a worldwide oversupply of wood products created difficult market conditions, he talked openly with employees and made the necessary decisions to improve company competitiveness. The opportunity for Weyerhaeuser, he said, was to better understand customer requirements and then deliver to customers the quality needed to keep orders coming in. He was emphatic that quality, determined by exacting customer standards, was key to Weyerhaeuser's ability to sustain sales when prices were down, supplies were overflowing, and competition was increasing.

Defining and achieving these quality standards depended on employees' ability to communicate effectively with customers, to understand their needs and to deliver products to meet those needs. It was a tall order at a time of intense pressure on employees and the industry, but the adversity energized George. "Get in there and get it done," he'd say.

Nature dealt Weyerhaeuser a thunderous blow when Mount St. Helens erupted in 1980, destroying 68,000 acres of company forestland in southwest Washington. The blast tossed company logging equipment around like toys and littered the terrain with downed trees, charred and limbless. The company's decision to replant immediately launched an unprecedented reforestation project. Today many of these trees are 70 feet tall and a key part of Weyerhaeuser's working forest, supplying wood for homes and other forest products.

An outdoorsman, George considers himself fortunate to have spent his life in the Pacific Northwest, where he and his wife of 57 years, Wendy, raised two sons and four daughters. George's hobbies include gardening, duck hunting and tennis.

George earned many honors over the years, including Management Man of the Year (National Management Association, 1971), Top Chief Executive for Forest Products—Silver Award (The Wall Street Transcript, 1982), Distinguished Citizen for the State of Washington (1984), Ambassador of Goodwill for the State of Washington (1984) and Chief Executive Officer of the Year—Paper and Packaging (Financial World, 1989). George was recognized for Outstanding Service to the American Political System by the National Forest Products Association in 1982, and inducted into the Paper Industry Hall of Fame in 2001. He has served on the boards of Boeing, the Chevron Corporation, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, the Rand Corporation, SAFECO, Standard Oil of California, and the Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Washington. He also served as a director for the American Paper Institute and chaired the Washington Council on International Trade.

George retired from his post as chairman of the Weyerhaeuser Board of Directors in 1999, after 50 years of service. Continuing the tradition of leadership and values demonstrated by his great-grandfather, George left his own unique legacy: a leadership anchored in hard work and respect for employees, a commitment to product quality and to the highest ethical standards, and a belief that long-term thinking is fundamental to success.

On top of all his accomplishments, it may be George's humanity that is most admired. A compassionate leader and a true friend to many in good times and bad, George inspired loyalty and modeled integrity. And it is with integrity that this private and devoted family man has made an indelible contribution to Weyerhaeuser and to the entire forest products industry, across the United States and around the world.