

# CUSHIONING THE BLOW

*When plants close, strong LMCs ease the transition*

Regardless of whether it's called a Labor-Management Committee or Transition Team, a strong and committed employer and employee committee is key to making the downsizing or closing of a plant as humane as possible. So agree the team that worked closely together the last couple of years on such committees: Sherry Kelley Marshall, President/CEO of the Southwest Ohio Region Workforce Investment Board (SWORWIB); Tina Kavanaugh and Diane Walsh, both regional representatives for the AFL-CIO/United Labor Agency of Ohio; and Sheila Roth, former Rapid Response Coordinator at the Super-Jobs Center.

As more companies in Southwest Ohio have shut down operations in the last several years, the four workforce experts have had opportunities to collaborate, beginning with a Labor-Management Committee set up as Ford started the process of closing its transmission plant in Batavia, Ohio, in 2008, impacting the joint union members at Ford's Sharonville, Ohio, plant. More recently, the four have worked on a Transition Peer Support Team established at a non-union company, Avon Inc. Avon is closing its operations in Springdale, Ohio, by mid-2012.

Marshall believes that dislocated workers typically experience a range of emotions upon learning that they are being laid off that mirror the five stages of grief first described by psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross: denial (This can't be

By **SHERRY KELLEY MARSHALL**  
and **KATHLEEN WILLIAMS**

happening!); anger (Not fair!); bargaining (If I work harder, maybe I won't be laid off); depression (Why even bother to work with a Career Coach?); and acceptance (I am going to be laid off; how can I find another job?).

Kavanaugh knows those emotions personally. She was laid off at Visteon in Connersville, Ind., in December 2007, after working there for 23 years. She was stunned at the time, and did not believe it was really going to happen. Workers latched onto every whispered rumor that Visteon was changing its mind, or another company would take over operations. Kavanaugh continues to see that theme played out when she visits plants that are being downsized.

Nothing is more important, she says, than getting the truth out to displaced workers. Speaking the truth — dealing with facts, being straight and honest with employees — is the primary responsibility of any Labor-Management Committee, all agree.

## Ford's LMC restarts

At its peak in the 1980s, Ford employed about 2,600 workers in Batavia, but by the time it closed the plant in June 2008 — part of a wave of consolidations

around the country — only 750 workers were still clocking in.

With a \$428,000 grant from the State of Ohio, the SWORWIB expanded the existing Labor-Management Committee in mid-2008 and provided a neutral chair to keep the task group focused. The LMC's objective was to implement a regional service strategy that addressed the needs of Ford workers living in various counties in Southwest Ohio, says Marshall.

The 21-member committee consisted of Phyllis Blust, President of UAW Local 863; Brandee Hughes, HR representative from Ford; and Marshall, Roth, and Kavanaugh (*see breakout on Page 2 for full list*). The neutral chair, or objective convenor, was Kathy Holzderber, a seasoned workforce professional.

What was unusual about the Ford Labor-Management Committee, Marshall points out, is that it spanned two plants in different counties. As Batavia workers with more seniority moved to another Ford plant in nearby Sharonville, Ohio, they bumped less senior Sharonville workers who then needed help to navigate their layoffs.

Meanwhile, UAW Local 647 had been operating a "Bridge to Work Transition Center" at its hall in Evendale to assist workers laid off by UBE Automotive North America, which closed operations in Mason in 2005, and NuTone, which shut its doors in Madison-

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ville in 2007. In fact, Holzderber was instrumental in working with the UAW on this Center. With transition outreach winding down for those dislocated workers, it made sense to use the facility for Ford workers, Marshall notes, so the SWORWIB contracted with UAW 647 to keep the Bridge Transition Center open another year to assist workers being displaced by Ford.

This location was ideal. It was only a mile or so from Ford's Sharonville plant, where most of the newly dislocated workers were coming from, and that pleased Blust. Two employees of Arbor E&T, which operates the SuperJobs Center, the one-stop in Cincinnati-Hamilton County, as well as staff who worked previously at the Bridge Transition Center, were assigned to continue services.

The involvement of the SuperJobs Center made the full range of one-stop resources available to Ford workers at the Bridge Center, notes Roth, who coordinated Rapid Response services at Ford-Sharonville. In fact, many people have no idea that they are entitled to free services at their local one-stop when they are laid off – and getting out that message is one of the most important missions of the committee.

Because it was focused solely on dislocated workers, those who stopped at the Bridge Center for services felt they were being treated in a more personal way. "When they go to the one-stop, and have to wait before they see



The Ford LMC team at the UAW Hall in Evendale, Ohio, where dislocated workers were served in 2008-09.

### Ford LMC members

**Phyllis Blust**, President, UAW Local 863  
**Randy Briggs**, Rapid Response Coordinator, ODJFS  
**Ervin Crawford**, District 4 Rapid Response Coordinator, ODJFS  
**Linda Dunn**, Supervisor, Workforce One Warren County  
**Vickie Franz**, Supervisor, Workforce One Butler County  
**Tim Frodge**, Director, One Stop Northern Kentucky  
**Brenda Hamilton**, Highland County One Stop  
**Brandee Hughes**, Ford Human Resources  
**Gary Jordan**, President, UAW Local 647  
**Tina Kavanaugh**, Rapid Response Coordinator, AFL-CIO United Labor Agency  
**Amy Lay**, Office Manager, WorkOne Southeast  
**Deborah Logan**, Career Consultant, Bridge to Work Center  
**Sherry Kelley Marshall**, President/CEO, SWORWIB  
**Anita Pearson**, Career Consultant, Bridge to Work Center  
**Debora Plymail**, Director, Workforce Connection of Adams & Brown Counties  
**Sheila Roth**, Rapid Response Coordinator, SuperJobs Center  
**Cathy Sahlfeld**, Business Services Rep, Workforce One Clermont County  
**Wayde Smith**, Director, SuperJobs Center  
**Al Thompson**, Director, Workforce One Clermont County  
**Jeff Weber**, Executive Director, Workforce One Investment Board  
**Dennis Whitaker**, Employee Resource Coordinator, UAW 863

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anybody, it can be disappointing,” says Kavanaugh. “They see it as just another challenge they don’t want to go through – even though all dislocated workers have to go through the same procedures at the one-stop.”

The involvement of the SWORWIB was crucial, says Blust, of UAW Local 863. “The SWORWIB moved all of us forward in our efforts to serve the Ford worker as well as the community as a whole,” she says.

From July 1, 2008, through June 30, 2009, 150 Ford workers were served at the Bridge where they received career coaching and attended various workshops. Many of the displaced workers had not applied for work in years and did not know how to put together an effective résumé or even how to navigate the Internet to search for jobs. “For adult workers in their 40s and 50s, that fear of the computer can be crippling,” notes Walsh. “Many workers of that age are afraid to go back to school to learn these techniques.”

Resource Rooms at one-stops, where job seekers can use computers to scan for jobs and upload their résumés, are typically self-directed. But if you have never used a computer, or have very limited computer skills, that tool may be of no use at all. Yet adult job seekers are often too embarrassed to ask for help, Kavanaugh and Walsh note. At the Bridge Transition Center, staffers helped customers develop their computer skills. It was a sanctuary of sorts for workers who wanted to catch up with career technology.

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*‘For adult workers in their 40s and 50s, that fear of the computer can be crippling.’*

— Diane Walsh, ULA representative

## Neutral chair can keep the committee focused

A neutral chair fills several important roles as the facilitator in Labor Management Committees, says Kathy Holzderber, a longtime workforce professional from the Cincinnati region who was the neutral chair for the Ford Labor Management Committee.

Unlike other participants on the committee, a neutral chair has no vested interest, other than making sure the committee has successful outcomes. A neutral chair can keep the team focused. And a neutral chair can take care of logistics and other elements that might weigh down another member of the committee who may still be working at the plant.

Holzderber’s primary responsibility though, was to keep everyone focused.

“I helped the committee stay on task,” she says, “by having action items after each meeting. Just the simple task of recording who, what, and when is an effective tool that keeps people’s minds on what needs to be accomplished.”

A neutral chair helps facilitate the ground rules, she says – which is essential if the members are to be successful. The Ford LMC established its ground rules, its goals and its framework for making decisions. For example, the LMC members decided that they would arrive at decisions by consensus, not majority rule.

A neutral chair can keep the focus on the workers front and center, says Holzderber. “If everyone’s goal is to get the dislocated workers the services they need to get re-engaged in the workforce – if that is uppermost in their minds and hearts, you can rally people around to make that happen.”

Sherry Kelley Marshall and Tina Kavanaugh agreed that the addition of a neutral chair to the Ford LMC made a big difference to the committee’s effectiveness in 2008-09.

“Kathy kept everyone on track,” says Kavanaugh. “She gave us assignments, which kept us focused on the tasks we needed to accomplish.”

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Career coaches worked with dislocated workers as they sought to remake themselves for new careers. "Some of them wanted to do a 180-degree turn in their careers," Roth says. Several wanted training in medical fields such as physical therapy and licensed practical nursing. "Others stayed on a technical track and got additional training at Cincinnati State and Great Oaks," she says.

Over the year, the dislocated workers' determination to improve their skills, network aggressively and keep a positive attitude paid off. Of those who came through the Bridge Transition Center, a remarkable 61 percent -- 92 workers -- obtained jobs ranging from long-distance truck driving to nursing, Roth says.

The Bridge Center closed on June 30, 2009, its job done for the Ford Sharonville workers and others from previous plant closings.

Roth concludes, "It was the cooperative partnership among many stakeholders that ensured the success of this project. The activities of the LMC and the services offered through the Bridge created an environment for Ford workers that was conducive to successful re-employment."

### Avon forms team

On July 22, 2009, Avon Products Inc. announced it would be closing its operations in Springdale, Ohio, a 1.1 million-square-foot facility that hosts manufacturing, returns, and a Contact Center for customer service. The plant opened in 1965, and manufactures health and beauty products including lipsticks, miscellaneous liquid products, roll-on deodorants, Skin



Employee members of the Avon Peer Transition Support Team.

So Soft products, and perfumes and colognes.

Manufacturing will be moved to Avon plants in Morton Grove, Ill., and Celaya, Mexico. Avon has not yet decided what will happen with its returns operations, says Teena Renville, Human Resources Manager at Avon-Springdale. It will keep its Contact Center operation in the Cincinnati area, she says, but not at the Springdale plant. As of April 2010, a total of 950 associates worked in Springdale, of whom about 600 will lose their jobs, Renville says.

The company announced that layoffs would be coming in stages, with all to be completed by mid-2012. The first wave of layoffs is expected to take place in late 2010, Renville says.

After the announcement, the management team at Avon met with every associate, and also reached out the State of Ohio to find out what services were offered to workers who were being laid off. Simultaneously, Sheila Roth, the Rapid Response Coordinator in Cincinnati/Hamilton

County, contacted Renville to inform her about services available to Avon and its employees during the transition.

Tina Kavanaugh of the AFL-CIO/United Labor Agency and representatives from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Ohio Department of Development teamed up with Roth in the initial outreach to employees on July 29, 2009. That led to the idea to establish a transition committee at Avon that would involve front-line workers, Renville of HR, and outside workforce experts such as Roth, Kavanaugh, and Walsh.

Avon, Roth notes, is unusual among companies in giving its employees a long lead time to prepare for their layoffs.

Avon, which was offering its employees a number of services independent of Rapid Response, embraced the idea of the committee, and the first meeting of the Transition Peer Support Team, as it was eventually named, was held

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on Dec. 14, 2009.

Given the cooperative work environment, the leaders of the Transition Peer Support Team decided to forgo a neutral chair and instead ask each member to rotate as meeting chair.

The Peer Support Team meets monthly, and Avon holds what it calls departmental “mini-meetings” during the month to keep associates informed as the company moves toward closing the plant.

Additionally, Kavanaugh and Walsh set up a two-day training class in Peer Support at Avon. Those worker/leaders who participated learned how to recognize the stages their colleagues may be going through, and also were immersed in all the services the community offers to dislocated workers. They are members of the Transition Peer Support Team, and represent their departments at the monthly meetings.

As was the case with Ford, the Transition Team’s primary purpose is to make sure accurate information is relayed to Avon employees. The team will obtain answers to questions asked by associates, and will clarify any confusion that employees may have about services available to them through Avon or through the SuperJobs Center. Besides mini-meetings, the team uses e-mail and bulletin boards to relay information, and also set up an Intranet in the Spring of 2010.

As new information comes in, the committee makes sure it gets out to employees. For example, in April 2010, Avon learned that its workers qualified for additional support under Trade Adjustment Assistance since it was moving

*‘We believed that by sharing ideas and information with Avon management and workers, we’d be able to better leverage our resources for these dislocated workers.’*

— Sherry Kelley Marshall,  
CEO & president, SWORWIB

some of its operations to Mexico. This gives workers additional access to training funds, job search allowances and relocation allowances.

Avon also wants to make sure it dispels rumors that float around the plant. To that end, in May 2010 it began a monthly posting called “The Rumor Mill” that lists “what we’ve heard” and then answers the rumors with straight talk. It is updated monthly or more often as needed, Renville says.

One of the initial steps of the team was to distribute a survey to Avon associates to get a sense of their most pressing needs. Ranking very high in importance were: Learning basic computer skills, tips on résumé writing, job search tips, help in completing online forms for unemployment, advice on finances, and advice on continuing health insurance via COBRA. In response, Avon offered basic computer classes taught by other Avon associates and brought in instructors to teach Word and Excel I and II.

In addition to classes and assistance in each of those subjects offered by SuperJobs, Avon has hired outplacement firm Lee Hecht Harrison for support.

External and internal team members have collaborated on Outreach Days, the first of which

was held on Jan. 19, 2010. Vendors included representatives from regional one-stops; the United Way, Magellan, which provides EAP services; Lee Hecht Harrison, and others. Additional Outreach Days will be held as the separation dates are announced.

Renville says the Transition Peer Support Team has played a valuable role as Avon moves toward the plant’s closing.

“Going through a facility closure can be devastating to any associate,” she says. “Providing the associates with resources that prepare them for a new career is critical. Just as critical is to keep open all avenues of communication so that associates don’t feel isolated and alone.

“Having the Transition Peer Support Team available has added one more communication resource,” says Renville. “For many of our associates it’s allowed them access to someone with whom they are comfortable and cannot only seek assistance, answers to questions, but through their Peer Support team member, they feel they have a voice.

“While this doesn’t change the facility closure, it does help associates transition through

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change better because they have support,” Renville adds.

### The takeaways

As the Rapid Response team in Southwest Ohio moves its services to other companies that have announced plant closings, such as Beam Global Spirits & Wine, it builds on lessons learned.

Among them, notes Sherry Kelley Marshall, is that Labor Management Committees can be effective despite obstacles that may include less-than-ideal participation by management, or by the unions involved, or by employees who represent workers. Some committees may be too large, making them unwieldy. Sometimes personality conflicts can mar the effectiveness of a committee. It’s essential, all team members agreed, to remember that you are there for the worker and to check your ego at the door.

Other lessons:

- The government may call their services Rapid Response, but for many employees about to lose their job, it’s a misnomer. Those employees are worried about unemployment benefits and health care coverage, and not necessarily focused on looking for a job. Transition centers, with so much peer outreach, can help keep the focus on securing re-employment.

- Every dislocated worker has different needs at different times.

- The message needs to be hammered home consistently: One-stops offer free services for dislocated workers, and workers should not be embarrassed to take advantage of them.

- Peer support is crucial to getting the message out. Workers will typically give more credence to their peers than to management

### About the authors

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Kathleen Williams is public information officer for the SWORWIB and has more than 30 years of experience as a newspaper journalist.



### Peer support training is crucial

One of the most important Rapid Response early tasks is training a core group of employees in effective peer support, says Tina Kavanaugh.

The peer support specialists familiarize themselves with the services that will be available to dislocated workers, so they can accurately refer their co-workers to such services.

They are typically empathetic, offering “a friendly face and friendly ear,” as one manual puts it, to their colleagues who are likely suffering from denial, anxiety, and confusion. As members of the employer-employee committee, they can advocate for their colleagues. They ferry information back

and forth and make every effort to dispel rumors.

“They are able to validate what people are feeling, break down isolation, help people initiate the planning process, and overcome resistance to retraining opportunities,” according to a guide for peer support put out by the AFL-CIO Human Resources Development Institute.

Information that comes from peers, rather than management or outsiders, is frequently considered more credible, says Sherry Kelley Marshall of the SWORWIB. Peer support specialists are often the first approached when a worker has a question or complaint.

or outsiders, even experts.

- Public and private sectors must combine and leverage services.

- Transition Centers are there to help dislocated workers adjust, retrain and practice their job-hunting skills. They need to operate over a specific period or they

risk building dependency in the dislocated worker.

- Many people, as some point in their life, will be laid off. “We need to prepare for that reality by upgrading our skills for jobs that continue to be in demand,” says Marshall. “Retraining and continuous education are the new con-