

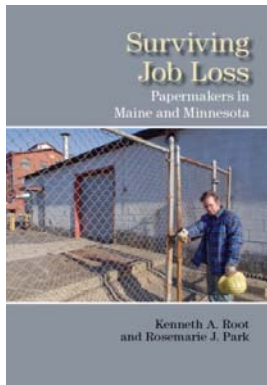


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Surviving Job Loss Papermakers in Maine and Minnesota

Kenneth A. Root and Rosemarie J. Park

February 4, 2016

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Displaced workers often find themselves hard-

pressed to obtain reemployment in the same industry or in some similar industry without taking a considerable cut in wages and benefits. Factors that hinder their reemployment include lack of human capital, geographic considerations, a lack of training opportunities, and, of course, the health of the industry undergoing contractions. Pertaining to the latter, the paper industry in the United States has been consolidating and contracting for decades as foreign competition led firms to merge and shutter mills. The result? Thousands of experienced papermakers found themselves with little hope of extending their careers, not to mention having to grapple with significant personal challenges that put stress on themselves and their families.

A new book from the Upjohn Press examines the plight of such workers displaced from two paper mills and their paths to reemployment, retirement decisions, and the personal struggles they faced as a result of their dislocations. In ***Surviving Job Loss: Papermakers in Maine and Minnesota***, Kenneth A. Root and Rosemarie J. Park provide insightful, personal portraits of workers that are representative of the hundreds who lost their jobs as a result of two mill closings—one in Sartell, Minnesota, and the other in Bucksport, Maine.

Take, for instance, Steve W., who lost his job after working for 33 years at the Sartell mill. Steve was confronted with either taking a comparable-paying job in a distant area that would severely limit the amount of time he could spend with his family, or taking a job at half the pay and reduced benefits but one that allowed stability at home. There is also Don, an electrician who

worked at the Sartell mill for 40 years and then was laid off. Don applied for 60 positions, got 12 interviews and no offers. At age 60, he wonders if he is still employable. Or there is Tom. At age 55 and with 30 years at the Sartell mill, Tom, still unemployed, was left wondering how he and his wife would adapt to their new economic reality and the feeling of worthlessness that had crept into his psyche. Couples were impacted, too. Ken and Karen, together, had almost 70 years of seniority at the Sartell mill before it was shuttered. Ken's only option was to take a low-paying part-time job while Karen remained out of work. On the other hand there is Greg, a Sartell worker who readily found a position at another mill, though he had to relocate. And then there is also John, another worker who experienced no trouble finding new work. What emerges is a picture that reveals the complex responses of workers whose welfare, and often physical and mental health, have taken an unexpected turn.

In addition, the authors describe the types of assistance that were offered to the workers displaced by the mill closings, dedicate a chapter each to the plights of female workers and of spouses who were both displaced by the closings, discuss the importance of community when economic displacement occurs, compare the experience of a mill closing in Canada with the Maine and Minnesota closings, and conclude with ways that society can be more proactive in assisting workers who suffer job displacement and the economic and psychological impacts that so often occur as a result.

Overall, this book adds a human perspective to the problems facing dislocated workers, not only in the shrinking paper industry but also in other contracting industries in the United States.

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Surviving Job Loss: Papermakers in Maine and Minnesota, by Kenneth A. Root and Rosemarie J. Park, is published by the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. February 2016. 251 pp. \$19.99 paper 978-88099-507-8. PDF is free at <http://www.upjohn.org/sites/default/files/WEfocus/surviving-job-loss.pdf>. Opinions expressed are solely those of the author. We encourage you to request a review copy of this book. Contact: Rich Wyrwa

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