

# The Steelworker

## Description:

Ted has made railroad train wheels at Edgewater Steel for 30 years. His father and grandfather, both steelworkers, worked at Edgewater, too. Caught in the midst of two industrial transitions, in the rail industry and in steel, Ted has seen his paycheck shrink and his job security erode.

## Key Words:

- "Where did I go wrong?"
- "... great camaraderie working in a place like this ..."
- "Real wages have gone down."
- "... comparable to your friends ..."
- "There is no justice here."
- "... a future ..."

## Suggested Uses:

"The Steelworker" can be used to illustrate the problems associated with organizational change and some of the stereotypes or inappropriate assumptions students often make about workers caught in organizational transitions, especially workers from backgrounds different than their own. Career development issues arise in this film, also, as the models of a job for life and a one-company career are replaced by more emphasis on worker employability and personal career management. Another issue is managing people and sustaining their motivation in a declining economic environment.

## Before the students view the video, ask:

What does a typical steel worker want out of life? What does he want in his job? How does he spend his leisure time? What are his goals?

## After viewing the video, ask:

1. What does Ted want out of life? What does he want in his job? How does he spend his leisure time? What are his goals? Contrast their answers before and after, and explore the stereotypes associated with industrial work and workers. In contrast with many assumptions students often have, Ted values taking pride in his work, advancement, and a secure future. He values good pay but has major concerns surrounding his financial situation. (It can be useful to make a list of ways in which Ted's values and goals resemble and differ from those of students in the class.)
2. What has changed for him in the course of his career? What does he believe to be the causes of these changes? Do you agree with him? Class answers provide an opportunity for discussing the responsibility of labor, unions, and management in times of change.

3. How can the organization motivate a person effectively during economic downturns and transitions? Critical issues here include management credibility, resources available to provide rewards, and worker recognition of the need for change.
4. When he was hired at Edgewater, what was Ted's model of "career success"? How does that compare with the class's view of how to have a successful career today? What is the employer's responsibility in the old and new models? The employee's?

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