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Carl E. Van Horn

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UPDATED EDITION

WORKING SCARED

(OR NOT AT ALL)

THE LOST DECADE, GREAT RECESSION,
AND RESTORING THE SHATTERED
AMERICAN DREAM

CARL E. VAN HORN

"The most compelling analysis yet of the
biggest challenge facing America"
—**Bob Herbert**, *New York Times* op-ed columnist

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Carl E. Van Horn : Working Scared (Or Not at All): The Lost Decade, Great Recession, and Restoring the Shattered American Dream before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Working Scared (Or Not at All): The Lost Decade, Great Recession, and Restoring the Shattered American Dream:

At the end of the twentieth century, with the economy booming and unemployment at historic lows, the American economy was a job-producing marvel. The first decade of the twenty-first century was entirely different as the worst economy in seventy years, the Great Recession, crushed the lives of tens of millions of workers and their families, forestalled careers, scrapped hopes for a college education, delayed retirements, and foreclosed family homes. American workers experienced the best and worst of times and have endured an entire "lost decader" of high unemployment, stagnant or declining incomes, and anxiety. *Working Scared* draws upon nearly 25,000 interviews with employed and unemployed Americans conducted from 1998 to 2012. These "voices" of American workers tell a compelling story about wrenching structural changes and recessions during one of the most volatile periods in U.S. economic history. This book represents one of the most comprehensive social science research portraits of the views of American workers about their jobs, the workplace, and government's role in the labor market. *Working Scared* will help citizens, policy makers, educators, business, union, and community leaders better understand what is happening to the United States workforce. It also describes the essential national priorities and policies that will assist frustrated, angry and scared American workers and the reforms that will help restore the American dream of secure employment and intergenerational progress.

More than two dozen surveys of the attitudes and expectations of (mostly unemployed) workers over the period 1998-2012 constitute the essence of this book by the founding director of the Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. Significant attention is devoted to both older workers who often have lost their jobs and younger workers who have not found steady work. The underlying sources of their employment problems include increased global competition, advanced technology, and "deunionization." The great recession made everything worse. Van Horn recommends more resources devoted to education curricula that prepare people for the "new" work environment, and greater effort by employers to provide the necessary job training to enable workers to develop and keep their job skills current. He urges a much larger role for public universities as well as for the federal government, including revamping the existing unemployment insurance program so it pays people to return to work. In general the book is more descriptive of the feelings of the survey respondents than it is an analytical evaluation of how labor markets are changing, and little statistical information is provided about the surveys. Many footnotes. **Summing Up:** Recommended. General collections supporting labor studies and workforce development. (CHOICE) This sobering book captures the fears and hopes of Americans—statistically and emotionally—over the span of nearly 15 years. Using extensive data and interviews as his content—all sponsored by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development—Rutgers University professor and public policy author Van Horn tells the story of the "great recession" just like it is. Truth startles—and occasionally, surprises. Nine million public-sector jobs: lost. Three out of four U.S. workers personally affected. More than 20 million unemployed in 2010. All of his numbers are backed by extensive notes, charts, research, and graphs. What is most wrenching are the interview quotes. "When I hear people talk about temp versus permanent jobs, I laugh. The idea that any job is permanent has been well proven not to be true." Or, "I just want to get my life back." And, "There was no warning at all. My boss said 'we're going to work something out. Within a few hours, I'm gone.'" Yet Van Horn leaves us with hope and four national priorities that must be implemented: (1) reform high-school and college education to prepare all students for careers; (2) expand lifelong learning opportunities for workers; (3) replace unemployment insurance with reemployment insurance; and (4) establish a renewed worker-employer contract. Feasible? Our fingers are crossed. (Booklist) Van Horn (public policy, founding director, the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers Univ.) elaborates on the extensive research project *Work Trends: Americans' Attitudes About Work, Employers and Government* that surveyed 25,000 American workers during the period 1998–2012. By documenting workers' experiences through a time of economic prosperity followed by a maelstrom of economic despair, Van Horn reports on the survey results in a succinct history of the causes and events leading to the 2008 Great Recession and concludes with a summary of the country's current economic position. Using extensive quotes, charts, and graphs, Van Horn assesses the U.S. response to the challenges resulting from the Great Recession and offers suggestions for strategies on how to increase job creation and recommendations for transforming policies and practices. He closes with four national priorities for leaders and citizens. **Verdict** For anyone feeling affected by the economic adversity of the last decade. (Library Journal) *Working Scared (Or Not at All)* not only reminds us that the invisible poor and unemployed we have [are] always with us; they tell us to look for them in an unexpected locale, living in despondency in a land known for its quintessential optimism. ... Drawing on surveys and interviews with some 25,000 workers from 1998 through the recent recession and fledgling recovery, Carl Van Horn, who heads the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University, paints a picture of widespread personal discouragement and depression in *Working Scared (Or Not at All)*. (America: The National Catholic) *Working Scared* presents a sobering analysis on the crisis the American workforce endured over the last decade . . . along with a constructive framework to reinvigorate our American competitiveness. (Greg Brown, Chairman and CEO, Motorola Solutions) *Working Scared* is a comprehensive overview of what work looks like in the early 21st century, how we got here, and what we need to do to ensure a better future for the next generation of

American workers. At once heartbreaking and hopeful, this book should be required reading for lawmakers, educators, journalists, students, and workers of all life stages. (Marci Alboher, Vice President, Encore.org) Working Scared gives a voice to what one might call the "silent minority"; young workers who have struggled to establish themselves in the labor market and older workers who are unable to regain full-time employment at wages and benefits comparable to what they earned before they lost their jobs. The history of deflating financial bubbles tells us their plight will not lessen in the near term, and the trends in globalization and rapid technological change will not make their recoveries any easier. Among Carl Van Horn's many suggestions for improvement, two seem most promising: (1) Provide better career information to students by using the data we have to calculate rates of return on human capital investments, such as in technical training or specific college majors; and (2) Emphasize reemployment of laid off workers at the beginning of their spells of unemployment, something on which the U.S. Department of Labor and states have focused recently. For readers interested in helping this "silent minority"; I recommend this book for the author's informed, high-level observations and specific suggestions for improvement. (Richard A. Hobbie, Executive Director, National Association of State Workforce Agencies) Working Scared is the most compelling analysis yet of the biggest challenge facing America - its vast army of jobless and underemployed men and women. Van Horn's insights are masterful and the stories are deeply moving. (Bob Herbert, Distinguished Senior Fellow at Demos and former Op-Ed columnist at the New York Times) Working Scared is as compelling a read as any airport novel. In it, Van Horn uses the voices of some 25,000 workers from the Heldrich Center's unique Work Trends surveys over 15 years to weave a compelling narrative about the forces that have dramatically changed work and the workplace in America since the 1990s. Based primarily on these same voices, he outlines a series of recommendations for reforming workforce development policies and the broken employer-employee compact in the nation. Policymakers at all levels, regardless of their political persuasion, should read and act upon these recommendations. (Christopher King, Director, Ray Marshall Center, LBJ School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin) Working Scared deploys copious data and the words of American workers to reveal the human tragedy and macroeconomic foolishness of a quarter century of disinvestment in our most precious asset—and to point the way towards a brighter future of global competitiveness and shared prosperity. (Andy Levin, Creator of Michigan's No Worker Left Behind program) Working Scared's points of entry in the assessment of the economic impact of the Great Recession are the voices and perspectives of those most affected by it. Through a thorough analysis of data collected for over a decade, Professor Van Horn gives voice to an often dismissed or ignored point of view and builds a compelling case for reforming the various institutions that shape the labor market. Workers in America are scared about eroding job security, stagnant earnings, and disappearing supports for career development. Results from surveys conducted by the Heldrich Center consistently show that workers are conscientious about the need to strengthen the institutions that provide continuous learning and improvement of job-related skills. Working Scared is about the big ideas that are needed to align skills development to a rapidly changing job market. Workforce development approaches are proposed to strengthen the connection between schools and college education to the skills demanded by industry, and to transform unemployment insurance into a system that goes beyond short-term income support to a system that focuses on life-long learning to meet the demands of the new job market. Working Scared is a must read for scholars and professionals who are looking for new ideas and alternatives to achieve a more dynamic economy and equitable job market. (Edwin Melendez, Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning, Director, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College) In Working Scared, Carl Van Horn pins down the reasons for a generalized unease about the job market in today's United States. Using a vast array of surveys, interviews, and data, Professor Van Horn tackles tough issues like the financial value of education, and the impact of healthcare expenses on workers. Though sobering at times, Van Horn's Working Scared is ultimately empowering, pointing out the ways in which Americans need to understand that the way we worked in the past has changed forever. (Farai Chideya, Distinguished Writer in Residence, New York University, Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute) Van Horn draws on voluminous survey research to examine the problem, and the results are insightful. He does a particularly good job of capturing the anxiety and vulnerability of working-class Americans in a global economy, especially those with low skills and educational levels. (Nitin Nohria, Dean, Harvard Business School, Harvard Business) I used Carl Van Horn's Working Scared (Or Not at All) in my Politics and Public Policy course this fall (2013). Although economic policy, especially the problem of unemployment, has been the central concern of citizens and policymakers since the Great Recession, there are surprisingly few books that analyze current economic problems in depth that can be used in an undergraduate classroom. Van Horn's presentation of citizen responses to questions from the Work Trends surveys, along with facts and analyses, provides a clear and detailed picture of the economic problems millions of Americans face. My students' favorite chapter was the one that examined the work and income expectations of recent college and high school graduates; I gravitated more toward the chapter looking at the labor market conditions confronting baby boomers. Van Horn's policy proposals in the last two chapters generated a good deal of class discussion. I highly recommend this book for political science and economics classes that seek to better understand American economic conditions and policies. (Donald C. Baumer, Smith College) Working Scared offers an excellent political analysis of America's employment problem coupled with

persuasive policy recommendations. That combination is unusual. I found this an excellent text for my graduate public policy course, and it would also work at an undergraduate course where employment was a focus. (Lawrence M. Mead, Professor of Politics and Public Policy, New York University) *Working Scared*, updated through early 2014, will help citizens, policy makers, educators, business, union, and community leaders better understand what is happening to the United States workforce. It also describes the essential national priorities and policies that will assist frustrated, angry and scared American workers and the reforms that will help restore the American dream of secure employment and inter-generational progress.

About the Author Carl E. Van Horn, Distinguished Professor of Public Policy and founding director of the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University, is an expert on workforce, human resources, and employment policy issues with extensive experience in academia and the public sector. He is the author of more than one hundred articles and author or editor of fourteen books. Van Horn is frequently sought by national media for his views on labor, workforce, and economic issues.