Three reasons compel me to write this article. First, the wave of unemployment that is washing over the country is substantially different from those that have preceded it. It results from changes in the basic structure of the American economy and carries with it not only the loss of work, but also the permanent disappearance of jobs themselves. The disappearance of these jobs makes the adults who hold them obsolescent—and the children who aspire to them irrelevant—in the labor market. When the wave recedes, these people will be counted among its victims, unless preventive interventions assist them in defining new work roles appropriate to their skills.

The second reason for writing relates to the experience we have had at our mental health center. As part of a consortium of management, labor, and community agencies and groups in our county, members of our staff have been assisting workers at a large plant which will be closing in the near future. Through our work we have become familiar—in some cases, too familiar—with the human problems statistics usually mask. Without such interventions, modest though they be, professionals in human services are likely to face increasing social problems washed up in the wake of unemployment.

The third reason for writing this article has to do with the target of interventions and conceptualization of unemployment by human service professionals. A 1982 survey of member centers by the National Council of Community Mental Health Centers illustrates the point. The results indicate that most CMHC staff do not view unemployment *per se* as a legitimate target for intervention. Rather, they perceive their role as diagnosing and treating “unemployment related problems”—those resulting from the environmental pressures associated with job loss. Such services are a poor substitute for a job.

Many of the skills and techniques applied to “unemployment related problems” by human service professionals are directly applicable to interventions aimed at assisting the unemployed in finding new roles in the work force. However, unless interventionists operate within an appropriate conceptual framework, the impact of their services will be diminished.

The Employment Transition Program (ETP) of the University of Michigan...
provides such a framework. ETP views unemployment as an economic problem, the solution of which requires an economically oriented program which raises the probability of economic gain. It also views unemployment as a lack of power, requiring a program that empowers the unemployed by providing them with information, knowledge, and decision-making skills. Traditionally, blue collar workers, the bulk of the presently unemployed, have had their career decisions made for them by management and unions. According to ETP philosophy, these workers need to learn the skills necessary to control their own careers: they need to be empowered.

ETP is an applied research project funded by multiple sources, including the United States Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education, and the National Institute of Mental Health. The goal of the project is to increase the probability that participants will reenter the labor force and/or accept retraining, over the probability that non-participants will select these options. The objectives incorporate traditional preventive aims—increasing coping skills, social supports and self esteem, and reducing stressors. More specifically, the program proposes to increase participants': (a) information about the labor market, job seeking and their own interests, skills, abilities and values, (b) self esteem, and (c) skills in problem solving, goal setting, resume development and interviewing; reduce stress, anxiety, and barriers to decision making; and promote the identification of existing formal and informal supports, and the skillful utilization of these systems.

The program, which began in August of 1982, is a five-day, 32-hour training course which includes lectures, discussions, exercises, and homework. It begins by providing comprehensive and sophisticated information about the economy and labor market so participants can understand why they are unemployed, thus reducing their self-blaming. This information also assists them in realistically determining career directions. ETP provides in-depth training in skills necessary in obtaining employment. As a part of this process, participants assess their own skills, interests, values and work characteristics and explore their influence on career directions. They learn how to search for employment, how to write resumes, and how to interview, in addition to other skills.

ETP has conducted several pilot programs and is currently providing training to about 300 participants with limited education (11.2 years), little youth (48.7 years), and considerable seniority (19 years)—a population almost identical to the population we’re assisting in our county. ETP project staff are also following the prevention model of training trainers, so the program can continue to impact communities once the initial workshop has been completed. A manual, and pre- and post-test materials have been developed. A series of surveys are scheduled to be distributed immediately following each training intervention, at three months, one year, and annually through 1986. These survey data, in combination with pre- post-test results, will provide an evaluation of the success of the program in meeting its goals and objectives.

Many programs targeted to unemployment share one or more components