

Verizon Business Techs Tear Down the Wall!

In late 2006, Verizon Business techs throughout the Northeast began to organize for a voice at work by forming committees and getting their co-workers to sign union authorization cards. Verizon Business (VZB) is a new subsidiary created after Verizon Communications bought the remnants of MCI/WorldCom.

The Verizon Business techs sought recognition for their union in order to begin collective bargaining with management for wages and working conditions comparable to their co-workers at Verizon Telecom. About 95,000 employees of Verizon are united in CWA and IBEW.

Verizon has built a wall separating its un-represented employees in its Verizon Business and Wireless divisions from workers in the older "core" company. *(See attached chart showing percentage of union and non-union revenue trends at Verizon.)*



Kevin Leppmann

"When I first joined the company more than 10 years ago, management assured us we didn't need a union because they were a different kind of company," said VZB Tech and organizing committee member Kevin Leppmann from Cambridge, Mass. "They were right. They proceeded to buy up more than a hundred growing and thriving telecom firms, and turn them all into the single biggest bankruptcy in the history of the world. Thousands of jobs were lost, millions of dollars in life savings were wiped out, and a couple of executives went to jail.

"After our emergence from bankruptcy and purchase by Verizon, we were once again told that ours was a brand new company, with a renewed commitment to its workforce. But as we saw our wages fall below industry standards, as we saw our health insurance premiums rise while our benefits were reduced, we realized this wasn't a new company at all. It was the same old company, with the same old plan to prop up corporate profits and management bonuses on the backs of the people who do the real work.

"We deserve better. We need to tear down the wall management has erected between us and unite all those who create real value for the company every single day."

By March 2007, the tech's had built a solid majority in New York and New England. But management's response was to mount a classic union avoidance campaign with mandatory captive audience meetings, supervisory one-on-ones and "fact sheets" full of distortions about

unions and adverse consequences of collective bargaining. *(See attached mission statement from the VZB techs organizing committee and union supporters.)*



Roger Reece

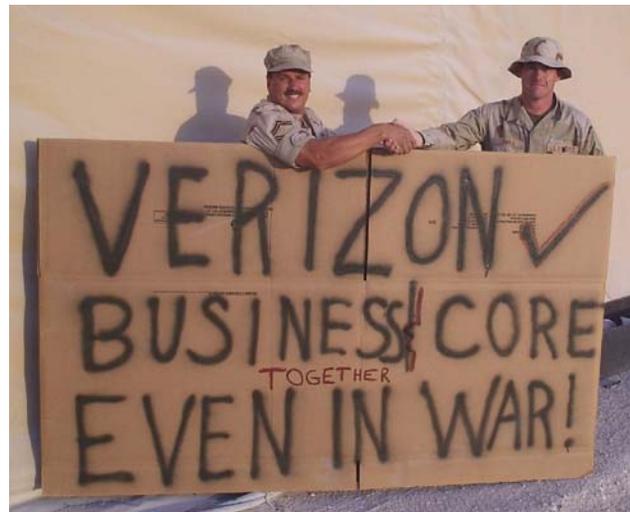
"When I asked my manager when we would be allowed to vote for a union, he hauled me into his office, and gave me a verbal warning that if I even mentioned the word "union" on the floor, I would be subject to "strong disciplinary action," which included possible "dismissal," said Roger Reece, a tester in Monsey, New York.

Management interference was so aggressive that in two separate cases, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) issued formal complaints against VZB for violating federal labor laws by spying on workers, suppressing free speech in the workplace and issuing illegal warnings to union supporters. *(See attached news clip about the NLRB complaints.)*

A 2007 report by American Rights At Work documented how Verizon's hostility to unions in its newer divisions is part of a low-road strategy to confine union jobs to a smaller and smaller part of the company and weaken members' bargaining power.

The techs could see that Verizon managers would use their power over job assignments, overtime and promotions to coerce workers to vote against forming a union.

So instead of going through a broken election procedure, the VZB techs sought an alternative route to prove their majority. IBEW and CWA union leaders enlisted elected officials in Massachusetts and New York to count the union cards, compare them to a roster of all eligible employees and verify their majority.



VZB tech Terry Skiest and Verizon tech and IBEW Local 2327 member Mark Small show unity while serving in Afghanistan

In Massachusetts the union cards were counted by Sen. John Kerry, U.S. Reps. Stephen Lynch and John Tierney and Lt. Gov. Tim Murray. In New York the cards were counted by Reps. Jerrold Nadler and Andrew Weiner, and NYC Comptroller Bill Thompson.

The elected officials verified that 67 percent of the eligible techs wanted to form a union with CWA and IBEW. The unions forwarded the results of the card counts to top managers at Verizon Business requesting recognition of the techs.

Predictably, management refused to recognize the card count. *But the VZB techs didn't give up.* They reached out to other elected officials, Verizon union members, the labor-community coalition Jobs with Justice, customers and the general public for support. At the same time,

CWA used the grievance and arbitration procedure in its contract with Verizon Telecom to argue that Verizon Business techs were doing "bargaining unit work" and should be in the union anyway.



John Elia and IBEW organizer Steve Smith at August 2007 rally

"A union at VZB will strengthen the bargaining power of all Verizon workers and bolster the entire labor movement," said John Elia, an eight-year veteran of Verizon Business from Hamilton, Mass. at a union rally in Boston. "All we want is the same job protections and rights that so-called "core" Verizon employees have. That's why a majority of us have been trying to form a union. But now Verizon is refusing to grant us the same organizing rights past employees have used to join IBEW or CWA without management interference. It's time to tear down the walls that divide and weaken our company."

Eight Senators, twenty-six Reps. and more than thirty other state and local elected officials wrote letters of concern to Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg. College students protested and customers complained. *(See attached list of elected officials who wrote letters of support.)*



John Linder

New York VZB tech John Linder testified in Congress about how VZB management's behavior illustrated the need for the Employee Free Choice Act. Others spoke at political events and at union meetings. With support from the AFL-CIO, VZB techs traveled to the company's annual meetings in Pittsburgh and Lincoln, Neb. to confront Seidenberg and educate shareholders.

At the May 2008 meeting in Lincoln, David Rogol, a tech at the Operations Support Center in Charlton, Mass. told Seidenberg, "I'm here on behalf of the hundreds of Verizon Business techs who want a voice at work. Our morale is low, our frustration is high. After all we've been through at WorldCom, why does Verizon compensate us with considerably lower pay and lower benefits than union members? Are we some sort of third class citizens? Why won't you recognize our union based on the card check process? After all, Verizon allowed a simple card check with customer service reps in 2000. Why not us?" *(See attached flyer distributed at the 2008 Annual Meeting.)*



David Rogol (center) gathered with CWA and IBEW members prior to delivering thousands of union members' proxy votes to the Verizon shareholders meeting



VZB tech Virginia Arce with Verizon techs and CWA members after City Council hearing in New York City

The cumulative effect of the tech's campaign was that large numbers of union members at Verizon, and many customers and elected officials understood the importance of reversing the company's drive to undermine the good quality jobs and services.

Speaking to the CWA convention in August, Roger Reece inspired delegates with his determination and confidence. "We need to pass the Employee Free Choice Act so that workers like me can join a union without running through a meat grinder of employer threats. I know that soon I will be holding a CWA card in my wallet. Soon my fellow

Verizon Business techs will no longer have to beg for mercy from our boss. Soon we will join with our 95,000 Verizon brothers and sisters in one big union at Verizon!"

Roger Reece, Kevin Leppmann, John Elia, David Rogol, John Linder and hundreds of their co-workers stuck together for two years. Many risked their careers to promote the benefits of collective bargaining. And most importantly, they built unity with Verizon union members who were preparing to negotiate with Verizon East management for a new contract.

When negotiations began in late November 2007, CWA District One VP Chris Shelton and other union leaders made it clear that no contract would be signed unless management addressed the Verizon Business workers' initiative to join the unions. At the same time, union representatives made a convincing case to the neutral arbitrator that the company was violating job security provisions in the contract. *(See attached summary of the new VZB contract.)*

Uncertainty about how the arbitration case would turn out led to productive conversations between top union negotiators and management. With just hours before a strike deadline at midnight on August 10, management finally agreed to fold the VZB techs into the unions and allow them to benefit from the provisions of the new contract.

In a message to his fellow techs after the victory was announced, David Rogol said, "Although the company made the decision primarily to settle the arbitration case, the pressure we put on the company through picketing, rallying, going to stockholders meetings, newsletters, wearing red t-shirts, political pressure, etc... all played an important role in the company's decision."



CWA VP Chris Shelton

A detailed chronology of the technicians' organizing campaign is attached. For more information contact Rand Wilson at (617) 803-0799 or by email at rand@mindspring.com.