

LAYOFF AVERSION: “GET YOUR MIND RIGHT”

(Successful Workforce Partnerships Support A Demonstrative Need For A Layoff Aversion Phase and System)

By Curtis D. Wray

Rapid Response Coordinator, Southeast Region of Virginia
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Rationale

During the economic downturn of 2008, many of us have heard terms like outsourcing accentuated and expounded upon to explain why American jobs have gone overseas to foreign competition. This is my personal story as a workforce development professional in support of a concept that was given broad and strategic support by The Department of Labor in 2010, as a way of keeping jobs in America; keeping the economic engine in America running optimally; and, most importantly, keeping Americans employed. This concept is called Layoff Aversion; and, it is in its purest form is ... pro-America, and an efficient and common sensical approach in attempting to reemploy potentially laid off impacted employees with prospective or impending employment prior to the occurrence of an expected layoff.

To allow Layoff Aversion to work optimally, I think we must become more creative, innovative, and visionary in our workforce thought; be fundamentally willing to share and understand and optimize partnerships and relationships; practice “*dot connections*” for efficiencies and economies of scale; be willing to shift from status quo and change our mindset, outlook, and workforce system to one that is strategic, proactive, and dependent upon early warning, notification, and trustful relationships between workforce development, economic development, and educational professionals, and the impacted employer and employee.

It will take more than just saying that this will occur. In order for Layoff Aversion to work optimally, it will require a bedrock foundational support structure and systems approach to operationalize the concept. As a workforce, grassroots field practitioner and Rapid Response Coordinator, I provided an operational and tactical roadmap concept paper (attached below) to the Department of Labor to start a venue for discussion and a pathway for Layoff Aversion success as a system. Effective August 31, The Department of Labor Training and Employment Notice (TEN) 9-12 makes Layoff Aversion a viable tenet and

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system within the Rapid Response system. This is just the beginning of intellectual outreach, discussion, and dialogue. We have much more concentrated work to do to make Layoff Aversion an operationalized system in Rapid Response in the southeast region. With the issuance of Training and Employment Notice (TEN) 9-12, Layoff Aversion as a system it is no longer a concept, but will be an expectation. Your ideas and input are essential to the continued success of future Layoff Aversion efforts and a viable tactical and operational example for others to follow. I encourage you to “*cast your net widely,*” and think, discuss, and energetically provide input to the process.

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The Reactive Mindset

On August 13, 2010, I received an email communication from the Governor’s Office (Virginia), requesting my presence at a meeting on August 17, at the Patrick Henry Building in Richmond, Virginia. The topic of discussion was about the ensuing announcement confirming the downsizing and restructuring of the Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) in Norfolk and Suffolk, Virginia. Per the email, we were “*to discuss the potential impact and tools to mitigate and assist with job loss regarding the potential closing of JFCOM*” (Hoffman, 2010). When I arrived, I discovered that the meeting was high level around-the-table discussions with members of the Governor’s Cabinet. The only person that I recognized in the room was Mr. Peter Blake, who was then at the time, Vice Chancellor for Workforce Development, Virginia’s Community Colleges.

There was a deep sense of urgency and concern about potentially immediate and ancillary devastating economic impacts in the southeast region of Virginia, if the layoffs occurred as proposed. The mantra or position taken by the group was to do right by the affected employees and/or to avert the impending layoff altogether, if at all possible. The information about the proposed disestablishment had gone public the first week in August. So, in the meeting, we talked about preparatory “what if” strategies and scenarios. However, to be honest, I left the meeting with the mindset of *let’s wait and see how this all pans out and plays out politically*. As far as I was concerned, the meeting was preemptive intelligence; merely a preparatory “heads up” based on preliminary decisions made by then Secretary of Defense, Mr. Robert Gates. His plan was to streamline the Defense Department by making some tough and unpopular fiscal cuts. The final decision, however, to disestablish and restructure the JFCOM was awaiting approval and confirmation by the President of the United States, Mr. Barack Obama. This decision would not occur until January 2011; and, the projected terminal date for the disestablishment was August 2011...at the time, over a year away.

Rapid Response is a state supported program funded by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

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that helps employers and employees who are in a transition mode in a business cycle. They could be expanding, downsizing, or closing. In Virginia, there are four regional coordinators that work with a team of workforce service delivery partners and facilitate the Rapid Response Program. As you may have deduced, my region is the southeast region, and I have been the Rapid Response Coordinator since August 2006. At the time of the meeting, however, the mainstay or cornerstone of Rapid Response Program operations under the state Dislocated Worker Unit were event driven and contingent upon the receipt of, responding to, and therefore, reacting to an official or confirmed announcement that a layoff would actually occur. No substantive actions about Rapid Response were ever taken based on propositions, unconfirmed intelligence, rumors, proposals, or impending decisions. This tangible decision-making process had not occurred with the JFCOM impending disestablishment and layoff; and, there was no clear indication in the near term or immediate future, that it would occur. This reactive mindset, the ensuing processes and actions that followed, fell in line with Rapid Response notification and preparatory planning protocol. At the time, it was my *modus operandi*.

Flow of Strategic Change

On September 25, 2010, Virginia’s Community Colleges (VCC) office in Richmond, Virginia officially divested operational and administrative control for the responsibility of the Rapid Response Program and assigned territory to four regional Community Colleges Workforce Development Directorates. In the northern region of Virginia, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA); the central region, the Community College Workforce Alliance (CCWA); the southwest region, New River Community College (NRCC); and, the southeast region, my region, Thomas Nelson Community College (TNCC). However, the VCC still maintained funding, compliance monitoring, and administrative oversight control over the Rapid Response Program. In the southeast region, TNCC would become responsible for Rapid Response for one quarter of the state.

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The Shift to the Proactive Mindset

As the winds of change continued to blow, also, in September 2010, I received communication from Ms. Felecia McClenny, State Rapid Response Program Manager and Lead Rapid Response Coordinator, at the VCC office. The direction was to report to Glen Allen, Virginia for Department of Labor sponsored Rapid Response Technical Training on September 28 and 29. Ms. McClenny had been a Rapid Response Coordinator for the central region prior to assailing to her position previously mentioned with the VCC. She was the senior coordinator and had trained me in the Rapid Response Program. She had also been a professional confidante; and, now as the program manager, she provided exceptional insight and professional development initiatives in moving the Rapid Response proactive agenda forward. In my opinion, her greatest asset is that she is an exceptional listener.

At the training site in Glen Allen, Rapid Response Coordinators were introduced to the concept of Layoff Aversion in a brief called “*Proactive Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion,*” by Mr. Ken Messina, from The National Office of Response and Rapid Response Manager, The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Mr. Jeff Ryan of The Department of Labor, and Mr. Rob Gamble, a hired consultant from The Innovation Foundry. Mr. Messina is renowned and has national prominence, and many consider him an expert in Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion. The main thrust in the concept of Layoff Aversion was based on early notification to first assist the employers in averting the layoff through workforce consultation and/or state or federal supported programs; and, second, to get affected employees back to work within the workforce mainstream before the layoff actually occurs, averting the layoff altogether (Messina, 2009). I was extremely encouraged and motivated by the training on Layoff Aversion.

I had concerns, however, about their proactive stance. It seemed (at the time, this later changed) that their presentation fell short and purported merely being proactive in Rapid

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Response in the reactive phase. To me, being proactive in Rapid Response is expressly tied to outreach and awareness training to the employer and the employee prior to a layoff, so that Rapid Response would, metaphorically speaking, become the “*magnet on the refrigerator.*” When they (the employers) need Rapid Response, they will know who to call, because through imparted knowledge of the program to the employer, an element of *trust has been established.* This trust is key and critical in the effective and efficient performance of any early warning intelligence system. Hence, outreach is a requirement or initial feeder input into any successful Rapid Response Program prior to the announcement of any layoff. I will expound upon this point later in this article.

The one important point that I remember from their brief (Messina, Ryan, and Gamble, 2010) that affected my future thinking was the PowerPoint slide that aptly stated that “*ETA views layoff aversion as much as a philosophical approach or mindset as a set of actions or interventions.*” Through the process of experience, I have come to know that this is an accurate statement. Layoff Aversion is a mindset, because in my opinion, for Layoff Aversion to optimally work, workforce service delivery partners must focus, change their methods of operating, thought processes, and culture, and get accustomed to helping the *layoff impending workforce*; those that currently have jobs and may become unemployed unless actions are taken to avert the layoff. Hence, it is mentally difficult to jump the chasm and help or assist affected employees look for work, when they already have a jobs. Workforce delivery partners are wholly accustomed to working with those who are already unemployed through no fault of their own (dislocated workers). The way both scenarios are handled in the minds of workforce professionals are totally different, and that must fundamentally change.

Insightful and Inspirational Leadership

Again, experientially speaking, it is one thing to have ideas, concepts, and diagrams in your head; and, it is something completely different to bring those concepts and ideas to fruition.

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Much credit must be given to the positive, insightful, different, and divergent leadership of Dr. Deborah George Wright, Vice President for Workforce Development at Thomas Nelson. She has a brilliant workforce mind that is able to constantly, instantly, and intuitively connect the dots on workforce initiatives. Additionally, Dr. Wright provided an atmosphere of autonomy and independent thinking and encouraged leaning forward creativity and innovation. For the first time in my professional life as a state employee, I felt free to think and continued to think intellectually and to develop concepts in my mind.

Demonstrating out of the box thinking, upon receipt of the Rapid Response Program at TNCC, at the onset, an initial strategic move and subsequent goal was to make Rapid Response a regional identity with all relevant partners within the Virginia Workforce Network, and not to be viewed or seen as embedded, and perceived competitively as the sole entity of TNCC. After all, Rapid Response in its purest form is merely a highly functional and skilled Team of Partners, who are experts in their fields of service delivery. The belief and impetus was that this strategy would pay off and create a win-win situation among workforce partners, with the underlying theme being that a regional identity would inspire more of a willingness to participate, espouse, enhance, and continue to build and support more partnerships, working relationships, and collaboration. All partners within the southeast region, could therefore, identify with Rapid Response as a “Regional Team Member,” with an important role and play in the game and reaping their reciprocity of effort (what’s in it for me). With this strategic vision and concept in mind, Dr. Wright concurred, provided unfettered support, and chose to call Rapid Response at Thomas Nelson, Southeast Virginia (SEVA) Rapid Response.

The selection of SEVA Rapid Response, in my opinion, was a leadership *high water mark* in courage or a dare to be different for the good of positive results and *a water shed event* that yielded in the very early stages of the Rapid Response divestment, some very positive and powerful results. There could have been expected “push back” from partners in attempting to introduce this new change from reactive to proactive Rapid Response. Any change can be a

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painful process. However, this was not the case. There was instant support and collaboration among partners within the Virginia Workforce Network (VWN), which led to first time successes. The regional team identity was key to successful collaboration. Comparatively speaking, this decision has reaped immeasurable benefits in collaboration, participation, regional policy development, and strategic initiatives.

Positive Fruits of Collaboration

In November 2010, we held our first regional Rapid Response Summit and created a Forecasting Team, consisting of members from the five regional colleges (Eastern Shore, Paul D. Camp, Rappahannock, Tidewater, and Thomas Nelson Community Colleges), the Virginia Employment Commission Chesapeake, Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Williamsburg local offices, the local One Stop Centers Opportunity INC and Peninsula Work Link, and area economic development directorates. The highlight of the first meeting was when the group heard a brief via teleconference from Ken Messina on the benefits of Forecasting Teams and Layoff Aversion in the development of a regional Service Plan. The group had a chance to interact and ask questions. This marked the first time this group had assembled together under the proactive auspices of Rapid Response in the southeast region. In the past, reactive Rapid Response meetings normally only included the Employment Commission and the local One Stops as primary workforce partners. The community colleges and economic development directorates were new players in game. Mr. Gregory Byrd, Suffolk Economic Development, Ms. Terri McCann, Hampton Economic Development, and Ms. Carla Howard, Norfolk Economic Development were key players during early Forecasting Team meetings on teaching and educating the Team on the nuances of working with economic development. Their input was invaluable. Included later, in February 2012, were temporary staffing agencies as members of the Forecasting Team.

The Workforce Information/Intelligence Network System (WIINS), the Wray, Wright, and

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Calver model was an unplanned workforce collaboration with me, Curtis Wray, Deborah George Wright, and John Calver, Director for the Manufacturing Excellence Center, at TNCC. I had a concept in my mind, but I was having difficulty explaining and developing it. So, in November 2010, I visited Dr. Deborah Wright’s Office, and crudely drew on paper for her what I had in my mind. She looked at it, and promptly and without hesitation said...*“that is your workforce intelligence and information network.”* I said to myself...that is brilliant and you are correct. Dr. Wright also provided input on the strategic placement of text boxes within the diagram. Later, she instructed me to take what I had drawn to show Mr. John Calver. He is an expert on decision matrices, and he assisted me with the development of the decision matrix within the diagram.

The Workforce Information/Intelligence Network System (WIINS) Model is important in proactive Rapid Response, because Layoff Aversion process starts with fundamentally understanding intelligence and information flow. The WIIN diagram (attached at the end of this article) must be, strategically, operationally, and tactically understood by all within the workforce system to function optimally. The lowest person within the organization must understand the importance of potential layoff intelligence and what to do with the potential intelligence when known. The intelligence is confirmed by the Rapid Response Coordinator and then the information is disseminated in a timely fashion to all relevant partners within the Virginia Workforce Network.

The genesis and impetus behind Forecasting Teams is to use intelligence and information as early warning methods to predict layoffs before they happen and to develop strategies to avert or lessen the number of employees affected by the downsizing or company closure (Messina, Ryan, and Gamble, 2010). Hence, November 2010 through February 2012, four Rapid Response Summits and four Rapid Response Forecasting Team Meetings were conducted. The success of the SEVA Rapid Response Team is inextricably tied to (1) continuous building of positive relationships and partnerships; (2) attracting and leveraging resources;

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and, (3) a willingness to participate and work together. This demonstrated ability to work together as VWN partners led to the discussion and vetting of many concepts, ideas, and solutions and was arguably linked to the successful development and publication of the Southeast Region Rapid Response Service Plan (see SEVARAPIDRESPONSE.Org-Mission).

The Service Plan was truly a team effort; and, during the development of the Service Plan, it was made clear to the Forecasting Team from the onset that it would be the Team’s plan. Tremendous input and participation provided unique definitions and discussions. I put pen to paper, but it was the Forecasting Team’s participation, input, and buy-in, and Dr. Wright’s guidance, editing, layout, prior publishing experience, insight, and insistence on attention to detail that were the reasons for a comparative exceptional product.

The development of a Rapid Response needs survey questionnaire was another Forecasting Team effort and a key instrument in the development of strategies for the JFCOM transition. The JFCOM disestablishment and layoff were unlike any layoff that the region had experienced during my tenure as Rapid Response Coordinator. It was truly a horse of a different color; a tiger of a different stripe. The primary populations of affected employees were military contractors. These people were well-trained, highly skilled, educated, many were retired military, working on their second careers, and were at salaries that far exceeded traditional users of Rapid Response services in the past. The fundamental question was...would they (the affected JFCOM contractors) use and find value in Rapid Response services?

The only way to ascertain the answer to the question was to ask the question in a needs survey. All viable partners within the VWN had input in the creation of the survey questionnaire (see survey at the JFCOM Transition Center Website at info@jfcomtransition.com). The Forecasting Team was critical in planning, discussion, and strategy development in providing service deliverables for the JFCOM affected group.

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Additionally, the JFCOM disestablishment demonstrated the flexibility of the Rapid Response Program. In March 2011, the Governor’s Office assigned Ms. Julie Gifford as the Military Liaison for the Joint Forces Command Disestablishment to the southeast region. Ms. Gifford was a willing and supporting member of the Rapid Response Team of Partners; she attended and participated in every scheduled Forecasting Team Meeting; and, she was a key ambassador in spreading the Governor’s tangible strategic message of support for each affected worker. She acted as a special liaison between the military and the affected contractors and their employees and provided direction to the JFCOM Transition Center. And, her presence and participation at all JFCOM related Rapid Response Manager’s Meetings and Employee Briefings was invaluable and gave inspiration and hope to the affected employers and employees, that the Governor was personally concerned about their careers, well-being, and future.

Confluence of Mental Thought

So to recap, it was the confluence of four important events occurring in the near term (August-November 2010): (1) the meeting in Richmond on the imminent announcement of the JFCOM disestablishment; (2) the divestment of Rapid Response from the VCC to the four regional Community Colleges; (3) the introduction of Layoff Aversion as a new proactive technical concept; and, (4) inspirational and autonomous leadership. These four mind changing events combined, focused me to start to seriously think of Layoff Aversion as a meaningful and viable reemployment strategy in Rapid Response. Hence, the phrase “*Get Your Mind Right*” is credited as being first heard and used in the 1967 movie “Cool Hand Luke,” starring Paul Newman. It is one of my favorite movies as an “*old schooler,*” watching Paul Newman eat fifty boiled eggs. More recently, however, I heard the term used by renown comedian Mr. Steve Harvey of *The Steve Harvey Morning Radio Show*, as I drove to work every morning, deep in thought; thinking how to creatively move Rapid Response in a

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positive proactive direction in the southeast region, per the Department of Labor mandate. In fully grasping Ken Messina’s approach to Layoff Aversion in Rapid Response, I really started to understand that Layoff Aversion required a fundamental shift in thinking and action...a new mindset and proactive way of doing business. The phrase “*Get Your Mind Right,*” very loosely interpreted, means to me, to mentally prepare the mind in all aspects for what is about to occur or what you are about to accept, endeavor, or seek to accomplish. The mind must be willing before the body will positively respond or follow. So, the phrase “*Get Your Mind Right*” is deemed appropriate in order to fundamentally prepare partners within the VWN for the concept of Layoff Aversion as viable tenet of a reemployment strategy, as we move from a reactive to a proactive school of thought in Rapid Response

Positive Proactive Outreach-Diminishing Knowledge Deficits

As I continued to think more introspectively about Layoff Aversion, and the dots connected in my mind, it became more apparent to me that Messina, Ryan, and Gamble was correct; that the shift from reactive to proactive Rapid Response had to align with early warning and confirmed intelligence about the impending layoff as early as possible. Hence, I have thus concluded that *proactive* Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion are inextricably linked; one cannot exist or occur without the other. However, I must add that as a functional prerequisite within a Layoff Aversion structure or system, in taking on the proactive Rapid Response construct, before or concurrent within the Layoff Aversion phase, there must be a proactive outreach or an informational plan to diminish knowledge deficits about the Rapid Response Program. These knowledge deficits exist with both employers and employees. As I stated earlier, with outreach and knowledge, trust is established. Neither an employer, nor an employee will use Rapid Response as a service delivery system, if they do not know what it is or about the services that can be provided through workforce, educational, and economic development partner delivery systems. Knowledge, education, and information will empower both the affected employer and the employee to make informed and correct decisions in the

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job loss transition. And, the affected employees can make critical decisions about their potential adult career pathways as feeder input to those providing them service delivery in preparation and training for employment and reemployment. Rapid Response is the initial point to start the development of adult career pathways. The seeds of connection must start in the minds of the affected employer and employee.

By way of example, as a Rapid Response Coordinator during the economic downturn of 2008-2009, many employers abruptly closed their operations without providing their affected employees timely notification and the benefit of Rapid Response services in order to prepare them for their job loss transition. In my opinion, those that become part of a job loss transition without knowledge and awareness of what Rapid Response services that may be provided or available to them to empower them to make informed decisions, will operate at a significant disadvantage. “*They don’t know what they don’t know.*” (McKenna, 1996). Knowledge and awareness of Rapid Response as a service delivery system are the key essentials and are the fuel or provide feeder input for any successful Rapid Response Program and Layoff Aversion System and the development of supporting aversion strategies.

Layoff Aversion Contingency Quad for Success

Seeing the successful fruits of unfettered participation and partnership became one of the primary reasons for developing four strong legs to provide a fundamental structure for successful Layoff Aversion system...what I call the Layoff Aversion contingency quad for success. Rapid Response Coordinators per Department of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 30-09 and via VCC Memorandums of Understanding have been assigned or tasked to develop and implement Layoff Aversion strategies. Through experience, I have concluded that Layoff Aversion strategies will not work or will be diminished in their effectiveness unless there is a system or structure in place to support Layoff Aversion initiatives and processes. If employers are knowledgeable about the Rapid

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Response Program and there is intent to use Rapid Response services, then four tenets or a four pronged approach, (the layoff aversion contingency quad) is required for optimum success. **First**, per the Messina model, early intelligence and confirmation of the layoff are key and required and this system must be in place. The Rapid Response Service Plan displays the Workforce Intelligence and Information System diagram (WIINS, The Wray, Wright, and Calver Model). See SEVARAPIDRESPONSE.org, enclosure two.

The **second** requirement is a protracted layoff of two months or more is required for optimum effectiveness and efficiency. This works in tandem with point one; the earlier the notification through established trust, the better the system and service delivery partners can work toward reemployment goals prior to a layoff. During this phase, this is where concurrent events and processes are taking place. The knowledge of an impending layoff via a system of intelligence, the confirmation of intelligence, and the timely dissemination of information are key, because time is required for notification of viable partners. Rapid Response Manager’s Meetings and Employee Briefings should be scheduled; there is a needs survey questionnaire given to affected employees; and, there is the compilation and dissemination of survey results. Forecasting Team partners conduct feeder input meetings, develop layoff aversion reemployment strategies, and One Stops, and Employment Commissions conduct job search comparisons, transition seminars, workshop training, and coordinate and plan job fairs.

Mary Lawrence of The Center for Workforce Learning advocates the establishment of the Business Services Team. This team should be co-anchored with partners from the Employment Commission (Wagner-Peyser funded) and One Stop Center (WIA funded). This is important, because this team has the resources and databases for reemployment and tracking services in the aversion phase. Lawrence further advocates structure, the setting of ground rules, role definitions, deciding on meeting times etc. (Mary Ann Lawrence, 2012). Two months are considered the minimum time constraint. Obviously, the earlier the notification, the longer and better for the workforce system to proactively respond and

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optimally perform.

In my service plan, (SEVARAPIDRESPONSE.org-see Mission) I aptly called these phases frontend and backend Layoff Aversion. Frontend Layoff Aversion-for optimal success, the layoff is confirmed via intelligence as early as possible (later called the aversion phase explained later) and has no terminal date. Backend Layoff Aversion has both the start of the layoff and a terminal date. Obviously, in backend layoff aversion, the timeframe is defined and the Layoff Aversion timeframe may be diminished or too short for Layoff Aversion actions to be completed. Additionally, from a systems perspective, two months or sixty days falls in line with Worker Adjustment Retraining and Notification (WARN) Act requirements (U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration).

The **third** leg for Layoff Aversion success has to be an unfettered voluntary commitment, support, and a *sincere* willingness to participate, collaborate, innovate, communicate, and create among of all partners within the workforce system without self-serving interests or prejudice. In most cases, because of many embedded institutional barriers, this third leg normally is the hardest nut to crack. If this does not happen (*a sincere* willingness to participate), then institutional barriers will impact the effectiveness and efficiency of the reemployment process and ultimately, the affected employee experiencing the impending job loss and desire to avert the layoff.

Finally, the **fourth** and final leg of the contingency quad for success is there must be a Layoff Aversion supporting structure or supporting system in place. I have come to the conclusion through thoughtful inspiration that this has to be a requirement. A Layoff Aversion structure or system will diminish knowledge deficits in understanding what Layoff Aversion is and is not, and will aptly provide support mechanisms for completion of mission, goals, objectives, and metrics. And, it can provide a process for continuous improvement.

We cannot develop viable strategies and metrics for Layoff Aversion when there is no

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undivided commitment, no database tracking system, no strategic vision, and no tangible mandate and system support.

There appears to be confusion and ambiguity with the words system and strategy. In many cases they are used as interchangeable terms, when they are not the same. An organizational strategy defined is *“the creation, implementation, and evaluation of decisions within an organization that enables it to achieve its long-term objectives”* (Christine Meyer, 2012). Organizational system or structure *“is a system used to define a hierarchy within an organization. It identifies each job, its function and where it reports to within the organization. The structure is developed to establish how an organization operates and assists an organization in obtaining its goals to allow for future growth. The structure is illustrated using an organizational chart”*(Lucy Friend, 2012).

Hence, strategies operate within a system. We must have a Layoff Aversion system before putting strategies in place. By way of example, the SEVARAPIDRESPONSE.org Service Plan lists twenty Layoff Aversion strategies, but few will work if there is no decentralized system or support structure in place to provide vision, guidance, and direction in the meeting of short and long term objectives. There is disarray and confusion among service deliverable partners within the VWN on Layoff Aversion. The Messina model and the Department of Labor provided broad and sweeping guidance and strategic vision on the beneficial concepts of Layoff Aversion. Now it is up to states to operationalize, incorporate, inculcate, and manifest the Layoff Aversion mandate with their own strategic vision of what it should look like.

Demonstrative Need for a Layoff Aversion Phase and System

Most partners on the southeast Virginia Rapid Response Forecasting Team are just beginning to get their minds around to understanding the concept of what Layoff Aversion is, but this,

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however, is not a concerted and holistic effort. While conducting Rapid Response Forecasting Team Meetings, only one out of the five community colleges; four out of twenty plus economic development directorates; three out of four Virginia Employment Commission Directors and two out three local One Stop Centers routinely came to the Forecasting Team Meetings. I believe more involvement means greater success. A systems approach would mandate endorsement, approval, participation, and buy-in at the strategic (Governor, Jobs Creation Officer and Cabinet level); operational (Virginia’s Community Colleges Chancellor, VCC Workforce Development Division and local Workforce Investment Boards; and, tactical (assigned Community Colleges, Regional Rapid Response Coordinators, and Regional Team of Partners within the Virginia Workforce Network) levels of any organizational structure or system regionally decentralized.

With the strategic acceptance and mandate, there would be a *trickle-down effect* of support of a Layoff Aversion system, applicable strategies, and resources. A systems approach will provide a tactical advantage and assist in changing the organizational culture and mindset of partners through education and outreach. From a tactical or field perspective, it is much easier to fight the battle downhill than uphill. The faithful members of the southeast Virginia Rapid Response Forecasting Team appear ready to participate, but currently, there is no system that supports Layoff Aversion. A frustration as the Rapid Response Coordinator is that there is no workforce database of resources and personnel at my disposal. Rapid Response Coordinators are only as good as their initiative, leadership, and facilitation skills allow them to be.

A decentralized Layoff Aversion system will provide a framework to operate more effectively and efficiently. The amazing linchpin in the whole process in advocating a systems approach, is that there would not be a substantial increase in resources or personnel like most new visions purport. What is required is that we “*Get Our Minds Right*” about Layoff Aversion. Simply, we have to change the way we think for the future. The resources

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are already in place; we must use them wisely, effectively, efficiently, and without prejudice.

Clarity to the Layoff Aversion Process-The Aversion Phase

Completing the circle in comparing and contrasting Rapid Response, in the past, layoffs had been expressly associated with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Dislocated Worker Program representing, primarily, reactive Rapid Response. Remember what I thought about the JFCOM, upon hearing of an impending disestablishment and layoff, with no start and terminal dates. My mindset was event driven and my reaction was to do nothing until the layoff was confirmed as going to occur. So, the reactive game was to wait for clarification by the official receipt of a WARN Act notice and/or the confirmation of a layoff. However, having an evolving change in mindset, I have come to realize through proactive thought, that this waiting period is in fact, the Layoff Aversion phase ...that point when a combined, coordinated, and concerted effort among workforce service delivery system partners should be made to avert the layoff or attempt to reemploy as many affected employees as possible prior to the layoff.

The JFCOM disestablishment provided the perfect storm model for Layoff Aversion: Early warning, confirmed intelligence, and a protracted layoff (over a year). However, initially, we did not have the third leg of support...the willingness to participate and the facilitation of cohesive partnerships because of my then, reactive mindset and the institutional operational reactive position of the Rapid Response Program, but...it would come later. The fourth leg, a decentralized support system or structure and a recognizable aversion phase, are in need for optimum success.

Hence, the aversion process for the JFCOM did not start in earnest, until January 2011, when the President of the United States made the final decision that the disestablishment would occur. Because of the reactive mindset, we lost valuable planning and reemployment strategy time (August 2010-January 2011) in what I call the aversion phase. Even with the

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late start, the JFCOM layoff aversion reemployment efforts, based on information currently known, was about fifty percent. I consider this pretty good, but could this have been better? The only way to know is to be able to measure via metrics the impact of service deliverable efforts. We cannot successfully do this without a systems approach.

Un-blur the Lines: “Get Your Mind Right”

Further, in support the Layoff Aversion system, I am advocating that there be Layoff Aversion phase and this phase has to be viewed and understood as a completely separate phase from reactive Rapid Response (the Dislocation Phase). The aversion phase would align with early warning networks and early intervention with affected employers and employees within the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). So...in this phase, the aversion phase, we must “*get our minds right,*” and dispel the mindset and discontinue telling impending affected employees to “*come see us once you are laid off or dislocated.*” This mindset is reactive as opposed to being proactive and should stop.

Through my own passion and initiative in seeing and recognizing a demonstrative need and not from direction, I have tried to start the thinking movement for the aversion system and the aversion phase during the last Southeast Virginia Rapid Response Forecasting Team Meeting on February 7, 2012. In those minutes, I autonomously provided initial discussion and proposal diagrams in support of an aversion phase and systems approach (then not completed in thought). All of this is a continuous work in progress. The following are later *expounded upon paraphrased* excerpts from my initial thoughts on those Forecasting Meeting Minutes as a recap of my thoughts and intentions then and as for further discussion and recommendations in this article:

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A Layoff Aversion Phase Approach

The confusion is that often people talk about conducting Layoff Aversion when, in fact, the layoff has already occurred. They blur the lines and use the terms Layoff Aversion and Dislocated Worker interchangeably and have not fully grasped, understood, and wrapped their minds entirely around the definition of Layoff Aversion and the holistic concept. So...think about it for a moment, if the layoff has already occurred, then it is not Layoff Aversion, but a dislocation....falling under the auspices of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) dislocated worker funding program, a concept that most of us who grew up in workforce development since August 1998, know very well.

In my opinion, the Department of Labor added to the confusion in a well-intended attempt to clarify and define Layoff Aversion, when it disseminated Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) number 30-09. This TEGL, in paragraph four, expressly defines layoff aversion as *(1) a worker’s job is saved with an existing employer that is at risk of downsizing or closing; or (2) a worker at risk of a dislocation transition to a different job with the same employer or new job with a different employer and experiences no or a minimal spell of unemployment.*” We cannot bleed or spill over in terminology; this bleed-over or use of interchangeable terms that do not apply is what causes confusion at the tactical or decentralized systems level. When we do so, the lines blur and cause confusion. The word avert defined is to prevent the occurrence or avoid. So a person cannot have averted the layoff and at the same time be unemployed for a minimal spell. When unemployment is impending then, that should be the aversion phase. When a person is laid off, then that is the dislocation phase, and this becomes a clear and unambiguous line of distinction or demarcation as to how the partners within the VWN should respond. Understanding this distinction in no way changes the persons dislocated worker status upon receiving notification within 180 days of a layoff. An affected employee can have dislocated

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worker status in both phases. What the phased approach does is create a mental picture in the minds of workforce delivery system partners as to how they should proceed and what they should be doing in either phase.

Further, the term *minimal spell* is very vague and overly broad, opening the door to various definitions as to what it really means. What does minimal spell mean; and, how long does it mean? It needlessly opens the door for confusion, learned complexity, and a wide range of definitions and interpretations. We should close this door with specificity.

Further, paragraph six of TEGL 30-09 gives states broad and sweeping guidance to develop aversion strategies. However, again, I must reiterate that in my opinion, aversions strategies cannot work or be optimally effective without an aversion structure or system in place.

Making Layoff Aversion a viable system and reemployment strategy will change the culture and diminish the ambiguity. A systems approach will provide role and expectation clarity to member partners of the VWN and will provide a reportable structure. An aversion phase will provide an identity and expected completion of requirements, deadlines, goals, objectives, outcome expectations, and metrics.

To change the mindset and fully embrace the new concept of Layoff Aversion, we must now allow our minds to shift from the engrained concept of dislocation and reaction and embrace the new concept of the proactive efforts of Layoff Aversion. Both are equally important and complement each other, but should occur in different phases of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Again, I must reiterate that the phased approach makes a clear line of demarcation between the phases within the WIA system. Taking this approach would allow the Layoff Aversion phase to fall neatly in line with and support and espouse the *work first principle* of the WIA, supporting an instant work exchange of qualified and skilled employees. The task in the aversion phase using workforce, educational, and economic development delivery systems is to create a job marriage for the employer and business

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systems. Hence, at the front end or beginning, we must get our minds active to thinking proactively; to bring all partner forces within the VWN to bear as reemployment service deliverables to get people back to work before *the layoff occurs*. This is a paradigm shift in thought and action, and more difficult than what people realize. It is a change in organizational culture.

Ideally speaking, in an optimum state, if the affected employer, the Employment Commission, community colleges, economic development, the one stop system, and temporary staffing agencies, and others as they apply, work together in a collective and collaborative synergy of effort and in concert and in the true spirit of partnership that job 1 is to get the affected employee back to work as quickly as possible, then with early warning, notification, and proactive intervention, an affected employee may be laid off from his or her job on Friday and back to work on Monday. Note: This is an ideal situation that we should strive to attain in every layoff situation.

If We Get Our Minds Right - A Win-Win for All

To change your mindset does not cost you anything; and, everyone can benefit from Layoff Aversion. Purporting layoff aversion strategies and efforts in a disjointed and unstructured system are the basis for personnel leak points, leak-through, and inefficient operations. If affected employers and employees do not use reemployment and employment services within the VWN, this creates a diminished strategic perception and decreased market share in competition for the external customer. The best laid plan and strategy cannot work without a supporting system. With separate aversion and dislocation phases and a successful Layoff Aversion system, all partners have contributing interplay and would benefit from the concept of Layoff Aversion in telling a compelling individual partner and/or collective partner group job service story. Their story could be used as future support and substantiation and as a shining example of reciprocity of effort for gainful return on the investment (ROI)

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for future funding by Congress.

Employment Commission

By way of examples, there would be no greater story for any Employment Commission to tell than to show or provide demonstrative quantitative and qualitative efforts on how many affected employees they summarily kept off the rolls of collecting unemployment insurance and what the net dollar savings to the taxpayers was as a result of their aversion efforts. Layoff Aversion efforts would assist in shifting the public’s strategic perception of the Virginia Employment Commission from that of the *Unemployment* Office to that of the *Employment* Commission. This would also have a strategic goal of increasing their market share for reemploying affected employees and add vitality for their future.

Employer/Businesses

Conversely, the JFCOM disestablishment and layoff was a perfect model and wholly demonstrated that the affected employer is a viable partner in the aversion phase and reemployment process. Working with partners within the VWN, employers can participate in the reemployment process of their affected workers. Employers can redeploy quality employees to other positions within the company or use their employer’s network to get affected employees rehired. More importantly, these efforts spread a feeling of goodwill in a dire situation and magnanimous feelings about their employer from the affected employees, thereby increasing company morale. Additionally, and fiscally thinking, employers have a vested economic interest in the success of a Layoff Aversion phase and system. For every affected employee that remains off the unemployment insurance rolls, it keeps employer’s unemployment insurance tax rates from increasing.

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The One Stop Center

By focusing and tracking efforts in the aversion phase, the One Stop Center could tell an equally compelling story of how they conducted resume writing, interviewing techniques, and job search strategy workshops in preparing the affected employee in the aversion phase for reemployment. And, as a result of their efforts, the affected employee attained reemployment before the layoff occurred. Currently, within the reporting realm of the One Stop System, this is an untold story, because the reemployment successes of an impacted or affected employee are not tracked in the Workforce Investment Act *self-directed* core services phase. One Stops need to find way to receive credit for the valuable service they provide in the aversion phase in providing educational seminars and workshops that lead to reemployment. This will require a shift in culture, mindset, and modus operandi. Additionally, the One Stop could tangibly demonstrate the effective use of On-The-Job-Training and Incumbent Worker Training programs optimally as aversion tactics and strategies in maintaining employment and job creation. The concept and construct of the Incumbent Worker Training Program in the Workforce Investment Act should be in the aversion phase where it neatly fits and correctly belongs, because the employees are still working and have not been dislocated. This works ideally when no official layoff notice has been given, but the intelligence and information network has confirmed that the layoff will occur (frontend layoff aversion)

Staffing Agencies

The decision to invite Temporary Staffing agencies came as participative input during the Rapid Response Monitoring Team Visit/Luncheon Meeting on January 25, 2012, by Mr. Dan Girouard, Hampton City Economic Development Directorate. This was brilliant input for the aversion phase; and, again, demonstrates the importance of recognizing input at

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Forecasting Teams from every member. In optimal operations, Staffing agencies can be feeder input for the Employment Commission, and working in tandem, the Employment Commission can shift their strategic image as a viable instant labor exchange reemployment placement facility that is value-added for staffing agencies. Temporary Staffing agencies are invaluable assets to the Layoff Aversion process for primarily two reasons: (1) staffing agencies are a vital intervening stop-gap of employment from the last desired job to the next desired job. This stop-gap is significant and important in developing a cogent and succinct income maintenance strategy while in a job loss transition; (2) and more importantly, staffing agencies are knowledgeable and are in the employer contact-loop with those positions that have temp-to-hire positions as an end state. Temp-to-hire is an optimal status in Layoff Aversion for an affected worker. Imagine that...hired as a temporary worker; and, it works out that you will become a permanently hired employee (win-win for the impending employer and affected employee) and avoid being laid off altogether.

Economic Development Directorates

Economic Development Directorates are inextricably tied to the concept of business retention and business attraction in working with businesses/employers who may have requirements that affected or impacted employees may possess as a direct hire or transferable skills. The workforce reemployment goal is to marry the two together (the business requirement and instant labor exchange of qualified employee) in the aversion phase. By having a highly skilled, highly trained, and a well-qualified workforce will allow each economic development directorate to keep the employer, employee, and tax base vitality in their locality or region. Ms. Von Gilbreath of Chesapeake Economic Development is doing outstanding work as example for other economic development directorates to participate in Rapid Response Manager and Employee Briefings, promoting business retention and business attraction in the aversion phase to find affected employee's jobs and to keep them in affected localities (win-win).

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Community Colleges

Community Colleges have an invaluable role as a training focus and focal points and may conduct up-skilling and just-in-time training for current and impending employers/businesses who have hiring requirements, but the current affected employees are deficient on skillsets, certifications, and/or training. They are flexible; and, based on business demand-driven requirements can tailor in-demand and needs-based training to certificates/certifications and diplomas. And, they can act as service providers for conducting preparatory key train labs and administering work keys testing for career readiness certificates.

From Concept to Operational Reality

There is still much work to be done in advocating an aversion phase and operationalizing the Layoff Aversion concept into a decentralized systems approach. In moving from concept to reality, now is the time in the southeast region to operationalize the aversion concept into a supporting system to develop specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely (SMART) goals and metrics to support the positive fruits of Layoff Aversion. We are at an impasse, however, without a structure in place. As important partners within the VWN, we have to be on the same page as to what Layoff Aversion is and what it is not, and we are not there yet. As internal feeder input customers in a service delivery system, we need to be able to understand what each other does and can bring to the table, in order to give the aversion process a continuous *internal scrub*; so that as collaborating partners, we can ascertain how to best serve each other as internal customers. This will optimize the quality of the product to external customers as service providers. We have done due diligence and the yeoman’s work in going from concepts in our minds to paper via the Service Plan. Now is the time to go from paper to aversion system operations.

The partner commitment to the Layoff Aversion process occurred at the Southeast Virginia

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(SEVA) Forecasting Team Meeting February 7, 2012. The linchpin for operational process development success was started by asking each partner within the VWN their voluntary dedication and commitment to a Layoff Aversion phase and system. The following were the commitments from each partner agency. Note that the process is an ongoing loop of continuous feedback and self-correction. Also the effort to systemize and operationalize the Layoff Aversion process is ongoing; and until then, no viable Layoff Aversion strategies can work optimally. Think about it for a moment...if the commitments came from one individual representing their organization, but the chain of command within the organization that they work for, may not share the same commitment or see the value in Layoff Aversion at all. This why the endorsement of a system has to have strategic acceptance at the highest levels of state government and then trickle down from within to workforce, educational, and economic development service delivery systems. The following were partner verbal commitments at The Southeast Virginia Forecasting Team meeting:

A. The Regional Local One Stop Center shall:

1. Business Services will work collaboratively with regional Economic Development Directorates to ascertain current (business retention) and future employer (business attraction) position-fill requirements.
2. Aggressively pursue On-the-Job Training and applicable Incumbent Worker programs for affected workers for the aversion phase.
3. Conduct Resume Writing, Interviewing Techniques, and Job Search Strategy workshops to increase the situation awareness and prepare the affected employee for the job market prior to the layoff. Collaborate with the Virginia Employment Commission on these workshops.
4. Work to develop a tracking system in the aversion vice dislocation phase to ascertain and track influential direct, indirect, or tangential relationships, or involvement the One Stop may have had on an affected employee averting the layoff and being hired or reemployed as a core service, prior to a layoff (the untold story). Currently, this process is tracked in the dislocated worker *intensive services* phase only and not in the *core services phase*. Because

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of this there is a continuous untold story of workforce job service accomplishment by the One Stop System.

5. Conduct job club and networking workshops.

6. Report all hires in the **aversion phase**.

B. The Regional Community Colleges shall:

1. Conduct up-skilling and just-in-time training for current and impending employers who have a requirement, but the current affected employees are deficient on skillsets and/or training.

2. Tailor in-demand/needs based training to certificates/certifications and diplomas.

3. Conduct job fairs.

4. Act as a service provider for conducting preparatory key train labs and administering work keys testing for career readiness certificates.

C. The Regional Economic Development Directorates shall:

1. Provide information on current and impending employer requirements.

2. Aggressively attempt to retain skill workers for employers through business retention and business attraction.

3. Notify the Community Colleges on skill deficits to develop training/retraining courses.

4. Partner and collaborate with One Stop Business Services and the Virginia Employment Commission Business and Economic division.

5. Report all hires in the **aversion phase**.

D. The Regional Virginia Employment Commissions shall:

1. Conduct a job comparison analysis (scrub) on jobs available in the database and comparable transferable skill sets for affected employees.

2. Provider of Labor Market Information (LMI)

3. Collaborate with the One Stop and conduct Resume Writing and Interviewing Techniques

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workshops for transition preparation in the **aversion phase**.

4. Conduct federal resume workshops.
5. Conduct job club and networking workshops.
6. Partner and collaborate with One Stop Business Services division
7. Host Job fairs.
8. Host Employers with fill-requirements and provide space to conduct interviews.
9. Aggressively attempt to register affected employees early in the aversion phase during Rapid Response Manager’s Meetings and/or Employee Briefings.
10. Report all hires in the **aversion phase**.

E. Staffing Agencies shall:

1. Continuously conduct job availability review.
2. Aggressively pursue to fill temp-to-hire positions.
3. Conduct skills testing.
4. Report all hires in the **aversion phase**.

Conclusion

So...what does this commitment mean if there is no system or support structure? The easy answer to the question is...nothing. I asked the question of partner commitment during the Forecasting Meeting, to demonstrate and prove a point for a need for a Layoff Aversion phase and system. Very little has occurred in the form of VWN partner self-directed initiative for proactive Layoff Aversion since the meeting on February 7. The partners for the most part, still have the same methods of operating and mindset; and, this is not their fault. It will take more to induce change. We must help them turn the page. We must be able to answer some fundamental questions. What is the strategic vision in Virginia for Layoff Aversion? What are the goals and objectives? What are the metrics? How do you get viable partners to participate? How is Layoff Aversion data tracked, collected, and reported?

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Does it have utility? Is it tracked for an objective or strategic purpose or end state, or is it tracked just to be tracked? What is tracked and is what reported? Where is the data stored and how will it be used? These are just a few questions that developing an aversion phase and system will answer.

There is no doubt that Layoff Aversion is an important concept and instant labor exchange of work-ready, experienced, educated, and highly skilled employees as a workforce maintenance stop-gap in lieu preparatory training for now and in the future. It is an invaluable tool in reducing unemployment percentages and should provide high quality work-ready employees as feeder output for the stability and running of America’s economic engine. However, for the Layoff Aversion system to work optimally, we must first shift to a proactive mindset, and de-silo our minds into collaboration in thinking and providing partnerships and sincere participation to get the affected employee back in the workforce mainstream as quickly as possible prior to the layoff. Again, I must reiterate that the affected employees both implicitly and explicitly contribute to the vital, viable, and forceful economic engine of America and the global economy. It is indeed our challenge to “Get Our Minds Right,” because getting our minds right in support of a workforce Layoff Aversion phase and decentralized system will ensure that we have the right workable strategies in place and are on the correct course to train and prepare the future workforce. Is your mind right for this new, challenging, and proactive change in Rapid Response? Do you understand and accept this change?

All of us in workforce should be restless and relentless, introspective, creative, and innovative in our future approaches and continuously ask ourselves what it means when you hear and see the title Layoff Aversion: “*Get Your Mind Right?*” The globalization of commerce and trade and continuous changes in technology that immediately impact the current workforce and will affect future workforces, will inherently, demand that we all do so.

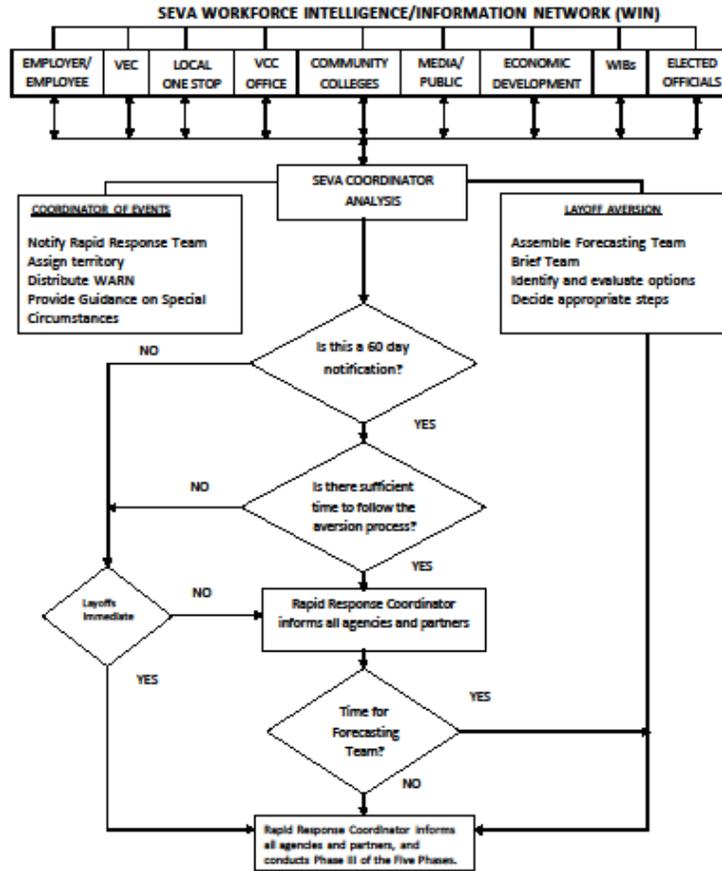
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DIAGRAM REVIEW



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Recommendations

1. **Department of Labor**: Modify the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to create a separate phase called the Layoff Aversion (LOA) Phase. This phase will be before the Dislocation Phase, and will work in tandem and concert with the Dislocation Phase. Place Incumbent Worker Training in the LOA phase where it neatly fits. The creation of the LOA Phase will provide a strategic, operational, and tactical support structure for each of the decentralized LOA systems and supporting aversion strategies of each state.

Commonwealth of Virginia: In lieu of recommended action above, take the lead and recognize an aversion phase in the development of a centralized and decentralized Layoff Aversion System. Become a national model.

2. **Department of Labor**: Create within the WIA reporting realm, outcome measures for the One Stop System to track and report the reemployment successes of affected employees in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) *self-directed* core services phase. Currently, there is no way to measure One Stop service delivery input methods contributing to reemployment in *self-directed* core services.

Commonwealth of Virginia: In lieu of recommended action above, take the lead and create a tracking system for reemployment efforts for One Stops in *self-directed* core services in the Layoff Aversion phase in the development of a Layoff Aversion system. Become a national model.

3. **Department of Labor**: In Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 30-09, modify the definition in paragraph 4 by taking out of the verbiage at the end of the definition two: “*or a minimal spell of.*” This will provide clarity to the definition and stop unintended use of Layoff Aversion and Dislocation phases interchangeably. In the LOA phase, no layoffs have occurred; and the goal is to keep them from occurring by optimizing job marriage with the

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instant labor exchange. In creating a decentralized system, the lines of demarcation are clear and unambiguous. The Layoff Aversion Phase and Dislocated Worker phases will have no impact on an affected employee’s dislocated worker status. The affected employee can have the status of a dislocated worker in each phase.

Commonwealth of Virginia: In lieu of recommended action above, to provide clarity and avoid confusion, take the lead and do not recognize the term *minimal spell of unemployment* in the development of an aversion phase and system.

- Department of Labor:** In Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 30-09, insert words to the effect: “*states can and should develop a Layoff Aversion centralized and regionally decentralized systems that will support current and developing Layoff Aversion strategies.*”

Commonwealth of Virginia: In lieu of recommended action above, take the lead and development and use a Layoff Aversion phase and central and regionally decentralized system. Become a national model.

- Department of Labor:** Monitor, measure, and create goal and expectation metrics for Layoff Aversion and Outreach efforts.

Commonwealth of Virginia: Take the lead and monitor, measure, and create goal and expectation metrics for Layoff Aversion and Outreach efforts. Become a national model.

- Commonwealth of Virginia:** At the highest level in government, endorse a Layoff Aversion strategic, operational, and tactical support structure that provides the vision, goals, missions, and objectives for the creation of a Layoff Aversion phase and system. Create a “trickle down” effect environment to change the current culture and mindset. Become a national model for the Layoff Aversion phase and supporting decentralized system.

- Virginia’s Community Colleges:** Create a statewide Layoff Aversion centralized system as

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support feeder for regional decentralized Layoff Aversion system consisting of members of Workforce, Economic, Educational and Employer/Business Systems to operate and support the Layoff Aversion Phase. Mandate regional applicable aversion strategies that support the system. Become a national model for the Layoff Aversion Phase and supporting decentralized system.

- 8. Thomas Nelson Community College:** Support the development of a regional Layoff Aversion System. Become a model for the state.

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About The Author

Curtis D. Wray has over 35 years of both federal and state public government service. He spent over 21 years in the U.S. Navy, serving as an enlistee and commissioned officer. During his time in the service, primarily as an enlistee, he served in Navigation; two tours as a ship’s Navigation Officer (Navigator); in a ship’s Engineering Department as Auxiliaries and Electrical officer; as a Flag Lieutenant; a ship’s Chief Engineer, and as an Engineering Material Readiness Officer, retiring from the Navy in October 1998.

Mr. Wray has been active in Workforce Development for over 13 years, starting in March 1999 as a wage entry level Workforce Services Interviewer and becoming a Workforce Services Supervisor in August 2001 with the Virginia Employment Commission. He has been the Rapid Response Coordinator in southeast Virginia since 2006, now under the auspices of Thomas Nelson Community College. He has an AA degree from Wingate College; a BA from the University of Kansas; a MS from Old Dominion University; and, a Master Military Studies from The Marine Corps Command and Staff College.