A good labor pool is important to every employer; and as an employer, you know what to look for when you hire: people who work hard; people who take pride in their work, and who are loyal. We know hundreds of thousands of people like that; they are Indochinese refugees who have resettled in America. And we are out to find them jobs.

Our campaign is called "Jobs for New Americans," a community partnership between businesses, government, and non profit organizations. What makes our campaign so special is that it helps both the principal parties involved; that is, it helps refugees establish new lives in America, and helps supply industry with a most dependable and reliable work force.

Indochinese refugees come from this part of the Far East, a relatively small land mass at a latitude paralell to Central America. In their history, the three countries, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia have authored an exotic mosaic. Intermixed everywhere, are the heritages of ancient civilizations, the striving of primitive societies, and the activities of widely different cultures. The mosaic was laid down piece by piece in lands of uncommon beauty; but the mosaic has been repeatedly broken by invasion, occupation, and war. And it has been the terrible wars of the past 30 years that almost destroyed the mosaic and driven millions of men, women, and children from their homes forever.

With the fall of Saigon in 1975, followed by bloody wars in Laos and Cambodia, the stream of Indochinese refugees became a flood. In an attempt to find some haven, the refugees risked their lives and sacrificed everything they had ever owned. The flight of the boat people made headlines world-wide. But often their escape from death brought them only over crowded asylum camps, where life was almost as desperate as the life they had escaped. In an effort to help, the United States, along with other major Western nations, engineered emergency relief programs to help refugees build lives in new homelands.
Resettlement in American has been carried out under Federal guidelines with some Federal funds; but the real work has been done through the dedicated efforts of national volunteer agencies such as the International Rescue Committee and Catholic Charities, plus thousands of individual sponsors from communities all across the country. In 1980, the Federal government consolidated its various measures into one comprehensive accord: The Refugee Act of 1980, cast in one of the United States' most historic traditions. Congress took care to emphasize that the refugees were welcome in another great American tradition, one important to employers, the work ethic. Evidence shows that the Indochinese possess a strong sense of that work ethic. Born and bred to self sufficiency, they are accustomed to hard work from early youth; and they had to be especially tough to survive the hardships that brought them to America.

Today some one half million refugees are spread across the United States from the smallest towns to the largest cities. Where ever refugees resettled, local, private and public agencies concentrate their efforts on two areas: teaching refugees to speak English; and helping them to find jobs. In teaching ESL, English as a Second Language, Indochinese refugees are first taught Survival English, which permits them to live independently, to buy clothing and food, and to pay bills, travel, and to ask a Doctor or policeman for help. The second level of ESL brings refugees to the language level they need to carry out tasks in entry level jobs. The second principal focused on in the resettlement effort is Employment Services, Job Counseling, training and employment, to help a refugee earn his own way and maximize his or her potential.

While the Federal government funds much of the resettlement work of state and local agencies, job counseling, cash and medical assistance, crises intervention, successful resettlement requires the involvement of the business sector. Refugees must have jobs. The issue is whether American industry views hiring
refugees as a problem or as an opportunity.

To date, a significant segment of corporate America has seized the opportunity to help refugees, help their own businesses, and support one of the most prized policies of the United States. Chevron, for example, set up its own non profit organization, "Rescue Now," to send volunteer workers and emergency supplies to asylum camps. Pan American gave free air passage across the Pacific to volunteers going to and returning from the asylum camps. Other airlines pitched in to fly the volunteers stateside to make the over seas flight connections. Carriers like Western, Northwest, and United, the Upjon Company and Johnson and Johnson provided the asylum camps with badly needed medical supplies. Arco helped fund the rescue ship Arcuna that pulled more than 1,000 Vietnamese from the South China sea. Honeywell has hired more than 300 refugees at its main plant and encourages its employees to sponsor refugee families. Control Data has hired more than 400 refugees at its main plant and provided both classrooms and instructors to teach English as a Second Language. Yet much more remains to be done. Many refugees in America are still without jobs and must rely on public assistance to make ends meet. Thousands more are still in asylum camps waiting to be reunited with family members already in America. Fortunately, many businesses see Indochinese resettlement as an opportunity to join with local community resettlement agencies in a highly satisfying, productive and meaningful undertaking.

One such businessman is William F. May, former Chairman and CEO of American Can Company, one of the Fortune 200. As Mr. May quoted in the Wall Street Journal, "The marriage between corporate support and private volunteer action is the mainstay of the American community, the American economy and the conduct of business and industry." The private sector cannot act effectively in International relief without the full participation of its most resourceful and
substantial member, the corporate community.

A local company has many choices in the way it wants to help refugees, one such model is planning job sharing, a model that first takes into account the essential help that refugees need, then supplies that help in a way that is profitable to the company.

Polo Clothing Company, manufacturers of men’s suits, employees some 260 workers in its plant in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Polo has significantly improved the performance of its workforce by training refugees through this special job sharing method. In its job sharing program, started about a year ago, Polo hired 2 refugees for each of 10 jobs that had opened. Each morning, one half of Polo’s refugees attend classes to learn to speak English, meanwhile, the other half of the refugees underwent training for one of Polo’s manufacturing operations. In the afternoon, the two groups exchanged tasks. At the end of the day, each refugee had received one half day of English language training plus one half day of job training. At Polo, the company provided the classroom space on-site; the resettlement agency, the International Institute of Lawrence, provided the English language instructor and the teaching materials. In its Job Training, Polo found that the Indochinese learned necessary job skills just as quickly as the average new employee. After 8-10 weeks of one half time training, both men and women refugees were ready to produce work that had to pass some of the highest standards of quality control in the highly competitive clothing industry. Instead of eventually hiring only 10 of the 20 original job sharing trainees, as first planned, Polo hired all but one. As partner with Polo in the resettlement process, the International Institute continues to provide services throughout the transition period; most importantly, the Institute assigns a job counselor who is experienced in the potential problems created by great differences in language and culture and who works closely with both the refugees and their
foremen to create maximum on-the-job understanding and performance.

From the point of view of the International Institute, this kind of job sharing is one of the most successful and satisfying new approaches in the whole resettlement process. Says Cathryn Rogers, Director of the Institute, "the International Institute has been in the business of helping all kinds of American new-comers get the right start since 1916. Since 1975, we have been the prime sponsor in resettling some 600 Indochinese refugees. To date, I have found nothing better than this job sharing idea; it restores pride and confidence to the refugees; it rebuilds their family life; it keeps them off the welfare roles; and helps them build the kind of life they dreamed about while they were in the asylum camps."

Polo management is also convinced that job sharing with Indochinese refugees is thoroughly good business. Bruno Costalia, President of Polo, had this to say "the average productivity of the Indochinese worker here is more than 20% higher than the overall factory average; and they don't need to be pushed by their foremen. Their attendance record is excellent. They keep their work places clean. They take care of their machines. They take advantage of the facilities we offer; and they appreciate them. The Indochinese are important to us. We stress quality in our product and we are growing fast, so we need people who can meet high standards. We need people we can promote. The Indochinese have proved they can fill these needs." Polo continues to hire Indochinese under its job sharing plan. Polo is so pleased with its Indochinese workforce that the company has purchased a bus and offers free transportation to refugees who live as far as 37 miles away.

There are other examples where the productive private-public partnership has worked well for New England companies of various sizes. Wilmark, President of Van Curen Company says "we have found refugees to be excellent workers. Their
attention and concentration on the job has been most gratifying." Edward Blank, co-owner of the Cycle Factory which builds custom made bicycles says, "refugees are diligent, really diligent. They use their heads and are very good with their hands." Edward Auger, Superintendant of a large landscaping company, says, "the refugees who work here are rugged. They will tackle the hardest jobs; but they also have a sure touch that makes things grow." Cynthia Ferrar, Personnel Manager of GTE Laboratories, says, "these Indochinese have proved to be excellent workers for us, despite their lack of English. They try hard to learn their jobs well. They try to surpass production goals. Michael Jaw, President of QPL Electronics, Inc., says, "Indochinese refugees are a continuing asset to my company; and I must say, I find personal satisfaction in helping these people become productive Americans."

These are just a handful of employers who have hired Indochinese refugees with very satisfying results. Now, we ask you to take a moment and consider your own possible participation as a corporate sponsor in Indochinese resettlement. "Jobs for New Americans," it might be the best opportunity you ever have to do something important for your fellow man and to do it in such a way that benefits your own company as well.