

...Columbia Sportswear

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and we're flexible," said Plater, who was by then reading from some notes. "A third party coming in between us here at Columbia is not what I feel we need. We will be engaging some external consulting resources to come on site this week to talk to you," Plater said. "These consultants are longtime union experts."

Within days, consultants from The Crossroads Group (TCG) of San Clemente, California, were giving presentations, which every worker on all three shifts was scheduled to attend. Presentations took place in front of groups of 15 to 20 and lasted up to two hours.

"We frequently run into the Crossroads folks," said Thom McKibben, the Teamsters organizer assigned to help Columbia workers organize. "But it's unusual for a company to bring them in so early, before we'd even really gone public or announced a campaign."

Crossroads Group charges \$375 an hour plus expenses for its services, according to federally required disclosure forms. That means the consultants most likely earned more at each meeting than the 15 or 20 warehouse workers combined.

What was the magic of their message? Judging by the accounts of workers who attended, it was the same anti-union boilerplate trotted out in nearly every union-busting campaign: The union is an outside third party that can't promise anything except collecting your dues; unionizing will destroy the nice open relations workers have heretofore

enjoyed with managers; wages could go up in bargaining, but they could also go down.

But union-buster Steven A. Beyer brought his own brand of charm, several workers said. If workers choose to unionize, Columbia Sportswear won't "play nice," Beyer said. Beyer was once friends with Cesar Chavez, he told workers. At one point, Beyer wandered around chanting "Union Bad" in an area of the warehouse where mostly limited-English workers put clothing on hangers, attach anti-theft devices, and change price stickers.

Beyer used to be a union leader himself, he told workers, but left after he came to the realization that unions are just another business, mainly interested in dues. Back in 1992, the *Los Angeles Times* told the story of his exit from the labor movement a little differently. Beyer, the *Times* reported, was voted out as president of HERE Local 681 in Anaheim after he became too cozy with employers, showed insensitivity to Spanish-speaking members, and fired a union rep who was raped on the job.

After about three weeks, Columbia Sportswear's outside anti-union consultants departed. But the workers' union campaign continued.

March on the boss

On Dec. 4 at 2:25 p.m., 13 Columbia employees wearing yellow-on-blue Teamsters Local 162 T-shirts marched into Plater's office. A two-and-a-half minute video documenting the visit can be seen at the union's Tougher Together Facebook

page, launched the same day (named for Columbia's long-running "One Tough Mother" ad campaign.) In the video, workers find the office door open, and standing in the doorway chatting with Plater is Jeanette Williams, the Columbia exec who Gatto couldn't persuade to restock first-aid kits. Since then, Williams had been promoted to Columbia Director of Distribution.

"Do you mind if we have a moment of you guys' time?" Gatto asks.

"Well, we're kind of busy," Williams replies.

"Is that a yes, or a no?" Gatto asks.

"I was very nervous. But the closer we got to the door, the calmer I got. When it was done, it was like a huge weight had been lifted. We were done. The campaign had started."

— warehouse worker Ivan Mikhaylov, describing the Dec. 4 "march on the boss."



"That's pretty much a 'no,'" Plater responds, "but I think you can schedule an appointment to actually come and talk to us."

Warehouse worker Ivan Mikhaylov then hands Plater a petition signed by 47 co-workers, and Gatto explains what it's about: They want a union, and they want the company to stop trying to bust it.

"They were hating what we were doing," Mikhaylov told the *Labor Press* later. "The look they gave us: It was almost like they were despising us."

"We are a very responsible company," Plater told the workers in his office. "Your documents will be reviewed and responded to."

"I was very nervous," Mikhaylov told the *Labor Press* about the visit. "But the closer we got to the door, the calmer I got. When it was done, it was like a huge weight had been lifted. We were done. The campaign had started."

A visit from CEO Tim Boyle

Soon after workers visited Plater, it was announced that Columbia Sportswear CEO Tim Boyle would be coming to the warehouse at 2 p.m. Dec. 19 to speak to workers.

For most of the warehouse employees, it would be the first

two minutes. "I don't get a chance to get here very often," he said, in an audio recording shared with the *Labor Press*. "All I can say is, thank you very much. Your hard work is much appreciated, and you guys rock."

"I'm happy to answer any question about any topic," Boyle said. The questions came. The first few were innocuous. Then came one that sent a murmur out among employees. Boyle repeated the question: "When somebody says union, what do I think?"

"Well, the company has had unions in the past," Boyle said. "We had a union in our sewing facility we had here in Portland, and we had a union in our distribution center in the past."

"I think unions have a place. I am a union member. I'm a member of the Screen Actors Guild. [Workers laughed, but it's true: Boyle had to join in order to perform in Columbia television ads, like the one where his mother put him through a car wash to show the toughness of a jacket.]

"I think personally you don't need a union here," Boyle continued. "We have relationships. There's places where it's appropriate. I don't believe it's appropriate."

Next, a worker asked what Boyle thought about the fact that his warehouse employees are going to food banks because they don't make enough money. Judging by his answer, Boyle was pretty unprepared for the question.

"That bothers me, honestly," the billionaire began. Boyle had two suggestions for those em-

time they'd ever set eyes on Boyle, whose net worth *Forbes* magazine estimates at \$2.7 billion. For his role as CEO of the company that his grandfather bought and his father and mother ran, Boyle took \$3.3 million in compensation in 2018, 130 times the company's median salary, according to SEC disclosures.

With employees assembled in the break room, another senior manager warmed up the crowd for Boyle, announcing to cheers that "super-large" fans will be installed in two areas, and that the company is developing a new "safety academy."

Boyle's speech was short, just

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For a brief moment, Columbia Sportswear was union and American made

Gert Boyle, the public face of Columbia Sportswear since the 1980s, died Nov. 3 at age 95. Nita Brueggeman remembers Boyle as a business owner who fought the union, reneged on a union agreement, and closed her factory after workers voted to stick with their union.

Brueggeman was head of the Pacific Northwest Joint Board of Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) in the 1980s, representing clothing and textile workers in Oregon and Washington. In August 1982, workers at Columbia's St. John's apparel factory joined ACTWU.

After lengthy bargaining, the two sides reached agreement, and workers voted to ratify it. Then Gert Boyle arrived on the scene and repudiated the agreement.

"I'd never seen that happen before," Brueggeman says.

Workers responded by going on strike in July 1983; when they later made an unconditional offer to return to work, Gert wouldn't take them back. The two sides eventually signed a three-year agreement. But Boyle immediately started looking for a cheaper alternative, Brueggeman recalls. She looked into using Oregon prison in-

mates to make clothes, but that didn't pan out. In 1984, Columbia began to move production to South Korea and Taiwan.

"I attempted many times to sort of make nice with her," Brueggeman says. "But all those ads about her being one tough mother? That's who she was, and she didn't give a damn about the people who worked for her. As soon as we got a contract she started getting rid of the workers."

In August 1985, Columbia closed the St. John's apparel factory, and laid off 85 workers, most of them refugee women from Cambodia and Vietnam.

By then only 25-30% of the company's apparel was made in Portland.

"What it boils down to is that the American consumer doesn't really care where it's made," Tim Boyle told *The Oregonian* at the time.

Even as it was ending the livelihoods of its Portland manufacturing workers, Columbia was already cheating the U.S. Customs Department. In 1991, Columbia Sportswear and its manufacturing vice president were indicted on 114 counts of import smuggling and conspiracy, in a case the U.S. Attorney's office described as a

"long-term, massive and deliberate scheme to defraud the government." The case—which followed a five-year Customs investigation and raids on company offices and a warehouse—included charges that Columbia had undervalued goods and falsified documents to evade quota restrictions on clothing it imported from South Korea and Taiwan. The company faced up to \$57 million in fines, but settled voluntarily in 1993, pleading guilty to a felony charge of conspiring to avoid paying import duties and paying \$970,000 in fines, duties and restitution.