

Steelcase woes inspire 'Company Man'

CEO struggles with layoffs,
family troubles
and a murder mystery

BY ANN BYLE

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Research is key to "Company Man" (St. Martin's, 528 pages, \$24.95), Joseph Finder's newest novel due in stores Tuesday. Finder, author of six other books, found his inspiration in Steelcase and his information throughout the Grand Rapids area.

He lurked and listened in restaurants

ids," said Finder in a recent interview from his Boston home. He will be in Grand Rapids next week to talk about his book.

While hostility may be rippling through West Michigan as more layoffs are announced, Finder found a more vulnerable side to the situation.

Executives who live in the area must face the anger and sadness of people on the street, while working to save a struggling company.

"I expected to meet someone who was very defensive and guarded, but I found someone who is very introspective and sensitive and very, very thoughtful," said Finder of his meeting with Hackett. "He really believes that Steelcase has to transform itself from a company that makes file cabinets to one that makes offices and office buildings."

"It's an impossible dichotomy," Finder added. "It's impossible to rec-



Joseph Finder

hard by Stratton layoffs.

Everywhere Conover goes, people remind him his is responsible for layoffs that cost them or a family member a job. Even school events become a gauntlet of guilt. But worse than that is the invasion of

his home by an unknown graffiti artist. Words are one thing, but when his children discover the eviscerated body of their dog, things take a turn for the worst. That turn becomes murder when a mysterious former employee is shot outside Conover's home.

Conover has shut himself off in a gated community in a house created by his now-dead wife, as well as from the reality of his company.

IF YOU GO

Author visit

Joe Finder will talk about and sign copies of "Company Man:"

- noon April 26 at 28th Street Schuler Books & Music
- 6:30 p.m. April 26 at the Wyoming branch of the Kent District Library, 3550 Michael Ave. SW.

"People asked how I dare make the hero of the book a CEO. People said the workers had really gotten screwed and that I was taking the side of Jim Hackett," Finder said.

"I didn't have to go to Grand Rapids to write this book. I could have completely made up a town," he said. "But meeting the factory workers, experiencing the flavors, textures and smells made the story come across in