



## Human Resource Management

### Case Study Sample 204.02

Growing numbers of air and sea passengers and expanding amounts of cargo, along with illegal smuggling and drug trafficking, have brought added pressures to the jobs of United States Customs Service employees. Coupled with these stress inducers is the added pressure of an expanding work force that has been characterized as being more diverse, yet less well trained. In addition, the work week of many employees can average eleven hours a day for six days. These stress factors can increase the number and intensity of personal pressures, such as child-care issues and financial problems.

Heightening these challenges is the fact that roughly one-half of U.S. Customs employees also serve as law-enforcement officials. These people face the pressures of shift work, exposure to society's worst social illnesses, frustration in dealing with a bureaucratic criminal justice system and long periods of boredom followed by adrenaline-pumping excitement.

Another common complaint of employees is that their managers lack good supervisory skills. Employees describe the work environment as one of criticism, negative feedback and an emphasis on mistakes. At the same time, good performance is taken for granted and goes unrecognized and unrewarded.

During stress-management training classes at the U.S. Customs Service, employees identified five factors as the major causes of their workplace stress:

- Supervisory pressures
- Deadline/time pressures
- Boredom and meaninglessness of work duties
- Frustration with co-workers
- Working conditions

## **YOUR CHALLENGE**

Your presentation to the judge(s) should address, at a minimum, the following issues:

1. In what ways could the U.S. Customs Service help reduce or eliminate on-the-job stress inducers for employees?
2. How might the U.S. Customs Service help reduce or eliminate the personal off-the-job stress factors that will ultimately affect job performance?
3. What steps could the U.S. Customs Service begin taking to improve the effectiveness of managers, in turn improving the work environment?

NOTE: The judge(s) for this event are not playing any particular role. They are simply evaluating your plan to handle this situation.

Resource for this Case: Lawrence T. Woodburn and Suzanne Simpson, "Coping with the Stage of Job Stress", *EAP Digest* No. 18, May/June, 1998.