



## Coast Guard Flag Voice 49

### RESTORING THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE, PART 2

**OUR PLAN:** A few months ago, we briefed the Chief of Staff on current issues and proposed a plan for success. Recap of the issues: 1. The civilian workforce will not be restored by 2000; it takes too long to fill a vacancy, currently about five months. 2. Two FY94 assumptions did not occur. A new human resources information system won't be on line until much later than originally planned -- even today, DOT's plans for delivering this system are still under review. And, since streamlining, all workload measures are up. 3. The restructured civilian personnel management system, or "hub and spoke" concept, was not adequately staffed nor provided with sufficient promotion opportunities; turnover rate has become extraordinary and some employees are at the burnout stage. All this will make it even more difficult to fill our vacancies if we develop a reputation as a poor home for Federal personnel specialists. 4. Important policy initiatives have been delayed. **Desired action:** We presented a plan to adequately staff the civilian personnel function to perform our mission. The plan recommended upgrades, new positions, contract support, and continuing the current OPM contract. We requested investing more than \$1M recurring to build civilian personnel management capability. The plan recommended adjusting staffing levels to realign workload. A new staffing and classification branch would assist with the increased workload in the staffing and classification area and also reduce supervisory ratios. The plan included critical upgrades and capabilities for the entire civilian personnel program. Because filling new positions will take some time, we recommended additional help to restore the workforce to its authorized levels. We further proposed to immediately attack the significant workload backlog through direct contract support in the staffing, employee relations, and classification areas. **RESPONSE:** At an HQ civilian All-Hands Town Meeting, the Chief of Staff announced he approved our plan. As a result, if we can steadily rebuild our civilian personnel management capability, we should reach the natural vacancy rate by next April. As of this Flag Voice, the contract support already has been aboard for several weeks. We are optimistic the additional resources, in time, will reduce turnover, workload, and the time it takes to fill positions; improve the quality of candidates we attract to civilian personnel; and most importantly improve the working environment for all our people. **EPILOGUE:** In May, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) finished a detailed on-site review of our civilian HRM function, including field visits and discussions with more than 150 civilian employees and managers. Several of OPM's findings aim directly at our efforts to improve civilian personnel management capabilities:

1. We are not recruiting effectively in a tough labor market; necessary programs are not in place. The CG needs a recruitment strategy involving the manager in the process. Workforce diversity is an issue. Superior qualifications, recruitment bonuses, and other tools for managers either don't exist or are too burdensome and complex for them to use.
2. Restrictive control of funding negatively affects HR management.
3. Civilian managers' HR training must improve to enable them to do their jobs better.

4. The current awards process doesn't truly recognize top performers; for instance, payouts are small.
5. Little funding is available for general employee development, a perceived deterrent to promotion opportunities. This is related to the issue of career ladders - we don't have enough programs to "grow our own." Internships and similar programs could help.
6. Management directives impose a Mount Everest of limitations on potential telecommuters, effectively discouraging telecommuting. Though available and used, flextime and compressed work schedules are limited to one type, compared to the large number of options actually available.

Barriers to good service remain. We need to delegate more authority to lower levels and collaborate more and in more detail with managers and the HRM staff on recruitment, career ladder, civil rights, and training issues. We must adopt a more customer service-oriented approach and top management must support it. The "hub," while not broken, needs to be more visible to and make its customers aware of what it's doing.

Needless to say, improving the capabilities of our civilian personnel management system presents many, many challenges. We've just taken a giant step forward with the approved recommendations for the hub and spoke. Part of that effort will address some of OPM's findings. The civilian personnel management strategic study discussed in [Flag Voice #42](#) will deal with others, especially those about civilian career development opportunities.

Regards, FL Ames

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