

FEUP – M.EIC

Management and Entrepreneurship

'PASSWORD!' – MIKE'S STORY

I applied to Securecorps on the off-chance. I attended an interview in their fortress-like headquarters on the Thames Embankment. It lasted all of five minutes. I would get my first job the following week. What I had to remember, at all times, was SECURITY, they said. I would be given a secret password, which would be changed each night. All communications with HQ, and with any caller to the place I was guarding, had to use the password.

I left HQ with my free kit under my arm: an ill-fitting blue uniform, a cap with a peak, a whistle, and torch and a truncheon.

A week later I turned up to my first job. It was the US Navy stores depot in an isolated spot in North London. As far as I could tell it contained things like Coca-Cola, soap and paper towels. I could not figure out why the US Navy should have such a place in London. I felt self-conscious – a bit of a nerd in my new uniform. A Securecorps supervisor met me to show me around. The rules the supervisor told me were these:

- Keep everything locked.
- Patrol the building and the perimeter wire once an hour.
- Ring in and report to HQ after each patrol. They'll chase you if you don't call.
- Get the password from HQ at the start of each shift, and use it in all calls.
- Don't smoke on patrol.
- Don't let anyone in unless they give you the password.
- Don't fall asleep on the job, or you will be sacked.

The supervisor left. The guard I was replacing packed up his stuff. As he was leaving he winked at me and said: 'Listen. Skip a patrol or two and get all the sleep you can.' I was puzzled.

I got through the first night, exhausted. It was really scary going around the dark buildings. The very thought of using my truncheon on a human being filled me with horror. I decided the best thing to do was to run it against the wire fence and along doors as I patrolled. It made a hell of a racket but that should deter an intruder – I hoped.

Night two. I realized that I could easily skip a few patrols – as long as I rang HQ on time. Also, I found myself plotting other ways of bucking the system. Surely you could do a deal with another guard, elsewhere, to ring HQ on your behalf? You'd then get more sleep some nights, and he could sleep while you were doing it for him. I later learned that such a dodge was well known, but no one had prevented it.

I found myself falling asleep between patrols, so I kept an alarm clock to wake me on time to report to HQ. In the middle of such a slumber, at about four in the morning, I was jolted awake by the loud, persistent hooting of a car horn. I

scrambled for my uniform jacket, and grabbed my truncheon. I dashed outside, my heart racing.

I was facing the headlights of a van, shining through the wire mesh, of the locked main gate. In front of the lights was a silhouette of a tall man. 'Christ, where the hell have you been? Let me in!'

I got a bit closer and saw the guy was wearing a Securecorps uniform. I plucked up courage and shone my torch in his face. I recognized the supervisor. What a relief! I fumbled for my keys – and then hesitated. Hell, this could be a trick, I thought. Toe test me out. I'd better watch it. 'Oh, hi', I said. 'Could you tell me the password please?'

The man looked confused. The he shouted at me: 'Like hell I can! Open these bloody doors and let me in. Just stop fooling around!'

I fingered the keys nervously. What on earth should I do? I was sure he was OK, but I was breaking a cardinal rule if I let him in. And he still might be tricking me. I tried very hard to sound authoritative: 'I can't let you in unless you tell me the password. Rules are rules.'

'I don't know the bloody password for tonight', he retorted, getting more and more wound up.

Fearing for my physical safety, I eventually phoned HQ, who were not in the slightest bit interested in the man's identification. I should let him in. He marched past me, saying not a word. He left the same way – after a very cursory check.

I did not last long in this job.

In Yyannis Gabriel, Stephen Fineman and David Sims, *Organizing and Orgnaizations*, 2nd edition, 2000, Sage Publications,

Assignment:

The Board of Secure Corps has come to know of Mike's story and is concerned with the impact it may have on the quality of the company's service and on its reputation. As such, it decided to establish a task force with two tasks. First, to provide a detailed report of what happened and the management pitfalls that led to this situation. Second, to define a set of improvement measures to solve and avoid future situations such as this one.

1. Organize the class in groups, representing and role playing the following stakeholders
 - a. Security workers
 - b. Supervisors
 - c. HRM department
 - d. Headquarter (password definition and control)
2. Meet within each group to identify, from the perspective of each stakeholder (45 minutes):
 - a. The management problems that are the root causes of this situation
 - b. Improvement measures to solve the problems and avoid future situations
3. Meeting with each group's representative and the board members (Professor) to present the report and propose the improvement measures (45 minutes).