

UP YOUR GAME: A LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE



Prepared by
The Leadership Initiative
Kenan-Flagler Business School
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partnership with the
Association to Advance
Collegiate Schools of Business International



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL



Overview and Instructions

In the simulation, **Up Your Game: A Leadership Challenge**, you will play the role of an **associate brand manager** in a consumer products company. The simulation poses a variety of organizational, interpersonal, customer and teamwork challenges presented as emails from various stakeholders. Your objective is to address these challenges making the best use of the available time and information. This simulation does not require marketing expertise and is an effective learning tool for pursuing all types of business careers.

The leadership competencies that will be assessed during this exercise are critical to being successful in an associate brand manager's role. **They include communication, managing conflict and influence.**

For the purpose of this exercise, please assume that this is your first job following graduation with an MBA degree. You have been on the job for 11 months. Today is Sunday, September 15. You will be attending a Strategic Marketing Seminar in Mexico all week, so your boss expects you will reply to your email today.

Take **20 minutes** to read the materials provided and complete your responses. Focus on **what you see as the most critical priorities**. While you might like to have more information, don't let this stop you from taking action. **Focus on how to demonstrate competencies important to effective leadership, rather than simply solving the business problems.**

Respond to the emails in the space below each email. Communicate directly with people you respond to rather than state what you would do.

For the purpose of this exercise, your name is **Alex Carson**, an **associate brand manager** with Universal Snack Foods, a global snack food manufacturer.

The name of the company and the people associated with it are fictitious.

Universal Snack Foods (USF), founded 50 years ago, is based in Chicago, Illinois. The company's annual revenue is \$7 billion in the United States and \$12 billion globally. The annual revenue for the overall industry is \$70 billion in the United States and over \$350 billion globally. Worldwide revenue is projected to rise to \$380 billion within five years. USF's global strategy is to grow non-U.S. revenues from \$5 billion and 42% currently, to \$16 billion and 70% within five years, while maintaining U.S. annual revenue.

Your Division

You work in the Healthy Snack Division of UFS, which includes trail mixes, breakfast bars, seeds and nuts. The Healthy Snack Division is currently a small part of the overall business but aims to grow the fastest over the next five years.

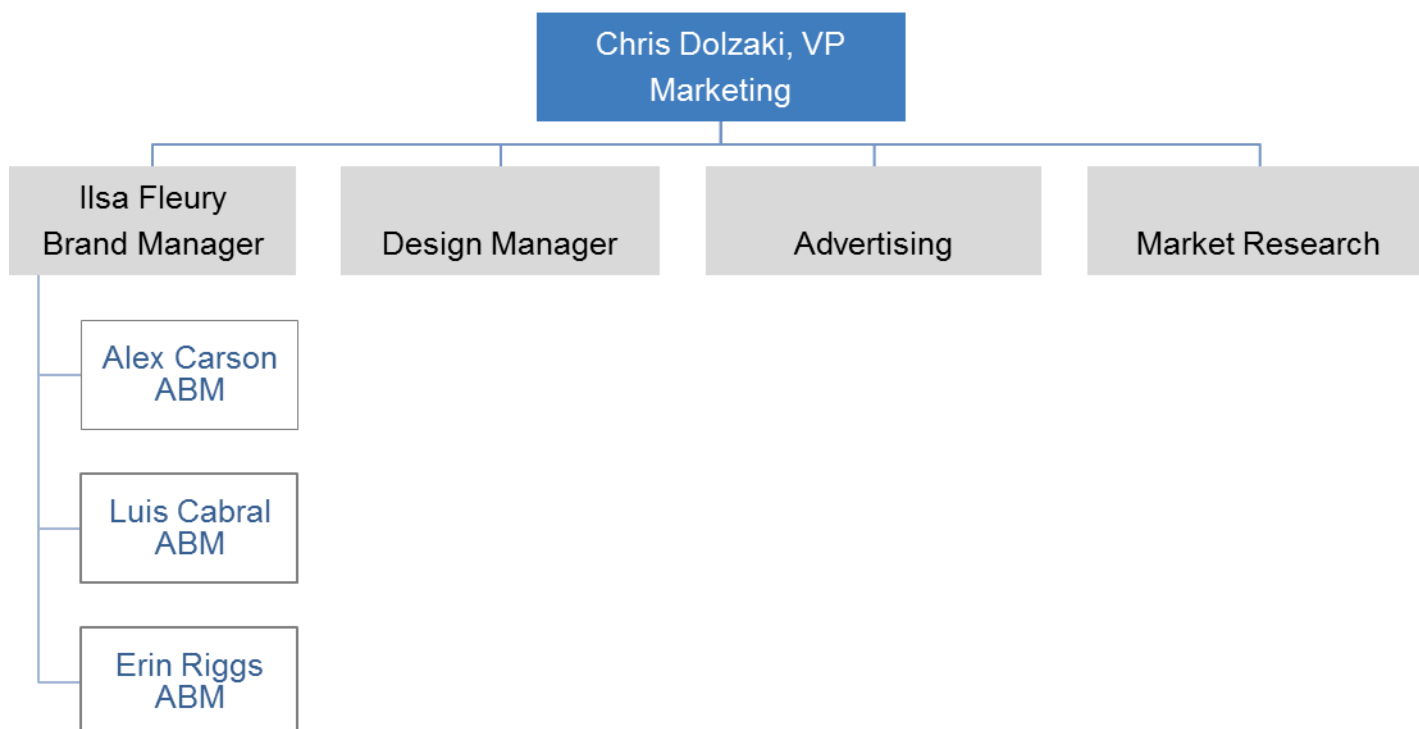
Global Sales, profitability and market share for the last 3 years by snack type:

	Two Years Ago			Last Year			Year-To-Date		
Snack Type	Sales	Profit	Share	Sales	Profits	Share	Sales	Profit	Share
Trail Mixes	\$125m	11.0%	4.0%	\$150m	9.8%	3.5%	\$130m	8.0%	3.5%
Breakfast Bars	\$75m	10.5%	5.0%	\$100m	11.0%	6.5%	\$145m	12.0%	9.0%
Seeds	\$60m	12.0%	5.0%	\$90m	10.5%	6.0%	\$120m	9.4%	7.0%
Nuts	\$40m	9.0%	6.0%	\$70m	8.0%	9.0%	\$80m	7.1%	9.0%
Total/Average	\$300m	10.6%	5.0%	\$410m	9.8%	6.3%	\$475m	9.1%	7.1%

Growth targets for the current year:

	Targets		
Snack Type	Sales	Profit	Share
Trail Mixes	\$175m	9.0%	3.5%
Breakfast Bars	\$190m	11.0%	11.0%
Seeds	\$145m	10.0%	8.0%
Nuts	\$90m	8.0%	9.0%
Total/Average	\$600m	9.5%	7.9%

USF Marketing Team:



Chris Dolzaki:

With 15 years of marketing experience, Chris has been in this role for five years, having been recruited to UFS from a brand manager role at a major competitor. Chris' strengths revolve around creative strategies to increase sales, not market research and pricing.

Ilsa Fleury:

She started her career with USF six years ago, recently becoming a brand manager when her predecessor moved to a regional sales manager role. She is a consummate multi-tasker but has a short attention span. Ilsa delegates a lot, partly because of her tendency to take on too much. As a result, it is difficult to get her time and attention for anything but the most critical issues.

Alex Carson:

You have been with the company for 11 months and are already the most senior associate brand manager on this team due to recent promotions and turnover.

Luis Cabral:

Luis joined six months ago and this is his first job. He is not very confident but works hard and is happy to do whatever he is asked. Luis tends to ask for advice and support frequently, and gets anxious if he isn't sure what to do and Ilsa isn't around to answer his questions.

Erin Riggs:

This is Erin's first job and he joined three months ago. He's very bright and has lots of creative ideas but he's a little unfocused and has trouble finishing things before starting something else. He's very enthusiastic but not well organized.

Note: Other brand management teams are not shown on the above organization chart and we have only included descriptions of key players you will interact with. Your team focuses on healthy snacks, as opposed to chips and other traditional types of snack food.

Email: Pricing and suggestions to boost sales

To: ALL BRAND MANAGEMENT STAFF
From: Chris Dolzaki, VP, Marketing
Sent: Tuesday, September 10, 10:55 a.m.
Subject: Pricing and suggestions to boost sales

Good morning everyone! Hope you enjoyed your Labor Day week or weekend!

As you know, we are faced with a huge challenge to make our numbers by the end of the year. We are 8% behind where we should be at this time of year on our sales target, 9% behind on profitability and 11% short on market share to the end of August so we need to pull out all the stops if we are going to achieve our numbers by the end of December. The last quarter needs to be massive for us this year.

I know everyone's doing all they can to boost sales but we can't buy market share if that means missing our profit target. As you'd expect, we're under a lot of pressure from sales to cut deals on big orders with major retail chains but we need to resist the temptation to give more than 5% reductions on our prices, while not alienating our sales colleagues if we can help it. We need them as much as they need us after all! However, we mustn't give any discounts, at all, on orders that are less than \$600,000.

I'm looking for creative suggestions from our associate brand managers on how we can increase our sales for the rest of the year. Please let me have your thoughts by the end of the day on Monday, September 23.
Thanks!

We can do it!

Best wishes
Chris

Your Email Response:

Email: Sales opportunity

To: Alex Carson, Associate Brand Manager
From: Fernando Gomez, Regional Sales Manager, Spain
Sent: Thursday, September 12, 9:33 a.m.
Subject: New Sales Opportunity

Hi Alex:

I don't think we've met as I was recently promoted to a regional sales management position for Spain.

I have a big opportunity for a \$500,000 breakfast bar sale to Carrefour. As you know, they are one of the world's largest supermarket chains, based in France with operations primarily in Europe, the Middle East and South America. Carrefour hasn't carried any of our healthy snack lines before so this is a great opportunity for us to expand our presence outside the U.S.

I spoke to your manager, Ilsa Fluery, to see what sort of discount we could offer them and she said that you are in charge of pricing for breakfast bars. I don't believe that we will get this business unless we can offer them 10% off of our price.

I made it clear to them that this would only be an introductory offer. They have assured me that, if sales go well, they would double their order for next year and introduce it in some of their stores in France.

I need your reply urgently as they want to get stock into their stores by the end of September.

Hope to meet you soon!

Thanks for your help in landing this order!

Fernando

Your Email Response:

Email: Boosting sales in California

To: Alex Carson, Associate Brand Manager
From: Ilsa Fluery, Brand Manager
Sent: Thursday, September 12, 11:45 a.m.
Subject: Getting sales back on target

Sorry to bombard you with so much when you're away but I got some sales figures for our breakfast bars in California. We are 12% behind our target for the year-to-date in California and we need to do something fast if we are going to turn this around before the end of this year. The sales manager for that region, Sylvia Palumbo, will be in our office the week of the 23rd. Please arrange a meeting with her as a matter of urgency that week to brainstorm what can be done to get our numbers up for her region.

Thanks,
Ilsa

cc: Sylvia Palumbo

P.S. Sylvia emailed me saying:

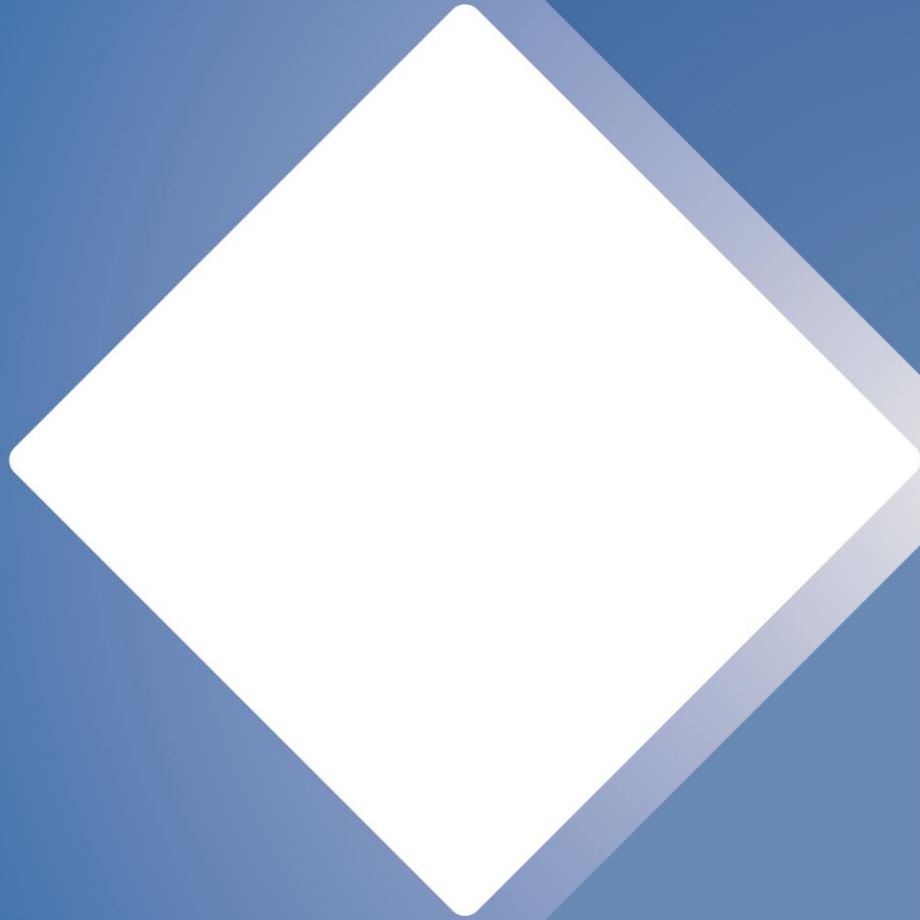
I appreciate your concern regarding sales of breakfast bars in California but I'm going to be extremely busy the week I'm at headquarters, especially in meetings with Chris Dolzaki to explore some ideas he's got for ramping up our trail mix sales in my region.

Our trail mix line is not doing as well as we'd like in California because the competition is incredibly fierce, especially among health conscious snackers, our target market.

Unless there is a really compelling reason to meet with Alex Carson the week I'm in headquarters, I'm afraid I'm just going to have to let breakfast bars take care of themselves for the rest of this year in my region.

Your email response:

Please refer to the Evaluation Workbook to evaluate how you performed on this challenge.



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SELF-EVALUATION WORKBOOK



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Purpose of the Workbook and Instructions

This workbook will help you structure your reflection and learning after you complete the UP YOUR GAME: A LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE simulation.

Your objective is to record and assess your performance during the simulation, identifying areas of strength, as well as development opportunities.

It is important to invest time in the exercise to reflect on your work and the lessons learned. The more time you reflect on your experience, the greater the opportunity you have to identify future learning experiences that will effectively prepare you for your career. By objectively looking at your strengths and vulnerabilities, you will gain newfound confidence and skills that enhance your development as a professional.

As you complete the workbook, record what you feel you handled well for each issue and what you could have handled more effectively. Then, indicate what emerges from this reflection as your strengths and areas for development. Finally, indicate how you plan to build on your strengths and address your development needs.

This Workbook has four parts:		Page
I	Evaluate Your Approach: Tackling the Business Challenges	3
II	Self-Assessment	5
III	Strengths and Action Plans	7
Appendix A	Email Response Analysis	8

I. Evaluate Your Approach: Tackling the Business Challenges

A number of issues were identified in this simulation. Here is a summary:

- Strategy suggestions are needed for fourth quarter.
- Sales opportunity in Spain clashes with demand to minimize discounts.
- California sales targets are not a priority for sales manager.

These challenges could take weeks to fully resolve, so evaluate how much emphasis you placed on initiating action in these areas. Assess what you handled well and what you might have handled more effectively, by considering these questions:

- How much did you convey a sense of urgency to tackle these problems?
- What could you have placed more emphasis on?

For each of the following leadership and business challenges, use the questions below to evaluate your performance. Refer to the simulation you completed.

Appendix A

Includes a list of all the emails, strategies to consider and examples of responses that might assist you as you evaluate your performance.

I. Evaluate Your Approach: Tackling the Business Challenges

1. Strategy suggestions needed for fourth quarter.

Describe how you handled this challenge and your effectiveness.

What could you have done differently?

2. Sales opportunity in Spain clashes with demand to minimize discounts.

Describe how you handled this challenge and your effectiveness.

What could you have done differently?

3. Need to improve sales in California but the sales manager has other priorities.

Describe how you handled this challenge and your effectiveness.

What could you have done differently?

II: Self-Assessment

Now that you have evaluated how you managed the critical leadership and business issues, evaluate how effective you were in demonstrating specific skills and behaviors.

A competency is a group of skills and behaviors which contribute to performance. The competencies listed below are important factors of success as a leader, as well as other competencies. We identified these as particularly important to this simulation.

Read the description of the competencies and performance indicators listed below. Rate your level of performance using the following scale based upon how effectively you demonstrated the positive indicators:

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree 2- Disagree 1-Strongly Disagree

COMPETENCIES

Communication – Expresses self clearly; specific and concise; seeks to understand the views of others; reaches out to people to get to know them and to build working relationships and structured communications logically. Difficulties might indicate that your communication style might be affected by time pressures or other issues and that under these circumstances you might focus more on the task than on relationships.

Positive indicators of my performance	Negative indicators of my performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• concise, confident and clear emails• sticks to the point, few digressions• conveys a willingness to listen• suggests spending time with people to get to build relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• uses vague language• offers too much detail• too brief, thus unclear• demanding, one-way tone• overly focused on task rather than relationships

SELF-RATING __

Influence – Helps others understand your point of view, often convincingly; assertive in a diplomatic, sensitive manner; shows leadership by striving to influence the course of the business; and takes the initiative to get “buy in” from key stakeholders. Difficulties might indicate that you need to learn how to consider the needs of others when trying to influence them.

Positive indicators of my performance	Negative indicators of my performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• confronts objections assertively but diplomatically• makes definite suggestions to gain support• doesn't hesitate to contribute ideas• takes opportunities to show leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• takes “no” for an answer• confronts objections aggressively• hesitates to offer advice• adopts a deferential tone• depends on others for support

SELF-RATING __

Managing Conflict – Addresses conflict confidently and in a timely manner; defuses emotional tension; shows respect and takes ownership by using “I” statements. Difficulties might indicate that you approach conflict as something to avoid; view it as personal and allow emotions to take over; and/or see the other person as an adversary.

Positive indicators of my performance	Negative indicators of my performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• seeks to understand the needs of others involved• engages stakeholders in the search for mutually satisfactory solutions• manages own emotions and has a calming effect on others• understands how to gain agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• delays action on conflict or shows a lack of confidence in approach• ignores needs of others, focuses only on own needs and solutions• loses control of own emotions• assumes that others will buy into resolution

SELF-RATING _

III: Strengths and Action Plans

My strengths and how I can use them to my advantage:

1.

2.

Skills or behaviors I want to further develop and my plans on how to do so:

1.

2.

Email Response Analysis

Each email has been copied into this workbook for your reference. The discussion of each item begins with a statement of the main issue in the email. Then, a few options for dealing with the matter are suggested. There are several ways of being effective, but this workbook cannot cover all possibilities. The options listed are by no means exhaustive. However, they provide a clear guide to the major issues and some of the more positive leadership actions that could be taken.

Email 1 – Pricing and suggestions to boost sales

From: Chris Dolzaki, VP Marketing

Good morning everyone! Hope you enjoyed your Labor Day week or weekend!

As you know, we are faced with a huge challenge to make our numbers by the end of the year. We are 8% behind where we should be at this time of year on our sales target, 9% behind on profitability and 11% short on market share to the end of August so we need to pull out all the stops if we are going to achieve our numbers by the end of December. The last quarter needs to be massive for us this year.

I know everyone's doing all they can to boost sales but we can't buy market share if that means missing our profit target. As you'd expect, we're under a lot of pressure from sales to cut deals on big orders with major retail chains but we need to resist the temptation to give more than 5% reductions on our prices, while not alienating our sales colleagues if we can help it. We need them as much as they need us after all! However, we mustn't give any discounts, at all, on orders that are less than \$600,000.

I'm looking for creative suggestions from our associate brand managers on how we can increase our sales for the rest of the year. Please let me have your thoughts by the end of the day on Monday, September 23. Thanks!

We can do it!

Issues:

- How to boost sales and get them back on target by year-end.
- How to increase sales while maintaining profit margins.
- How to avoid alienating sales colleagues who want to offer discounts to get sales.
- What creative suggestions can be offered to increase sales?

Minimal or potentially negative options:

1. Decide that no reply is necessary until you have time to think about it.
2. Reply by saying that you will give it some thought.
3. Reply by saying that you don't have any ideas to offer because you are so new on the job.

More effective options:

1. Ask questions about what is being done now and what other companies are doing; gather facts about market trends or any other information.
2. Make a list of creative suggestions immediately since you will be away next week.

Recognize the implications of this email for the potential deal in Spain, where the regional sales manager says that a significant discount will be necessary to win this business. There is also the connection to the company's stated objective of growing its non-U.S. business significantly over the next 5 years. However, at this stage, it is best not to make any suggestions when considering Ilsa's most recent email requesting a coordinated response from her team as a whole. Still, it's a good relationship-building opportunity and you could reply with enthusiasm that you will give it a high priority and develop some creative ideas.

Email 2 – Sales opportunity in Spain

From: Fernando Gomez, Regional Sales Manager, Spain

I don't think we've met as I was recently promoted to a regional sales management position for Spain.

I have a big opportunity for a \$500,000 breakfast bar sale to Carrefour. As you know, they are one of the world's largest supermarket chains, based in France with operations primarily in Europe, the Middle East and South America. Carrefour hasn't carried any of our healthy snack lines before so this is a great opportunity for us to expand our presence outside the U.S.

I spoke to your manager, Ilsa Fluery, to see what sort of discount we could offer them and she said that you are in charge of pricing for breakfast bars. I don't believe that we will get this business unless we can offer them 10% off of our price.

I made it clear to them that this would only be an introductory offer. They have assured me that, if sales go well, they would double their order for next year and introduce it in some of their stores in France.

I need your reply urgently as they want to get stock into their stores by the end of September.

Hope to meet you soon! Thanks for your help in landing this order!

Issues:

- Great opportunity to grow the business in Europe and elsewhere outside the U.S.
- Problem with the requested discount in light of Chris Dolzaki's directive to limit them.
- Need for an urgent decision and reply.

Minimal or potentially negative options:

1. Reply that the discount isn't possible or that it must be a lower amount, simply repeating Chris Dolzaki's policy directive.
2. Forward the email to Ilsa for her attention.
3. Advise Fernando he will have to wait until you gather more information or until you return from your weeklong seminar.

More effective options:

1. Ask Fernando what he can do to get the business without a discount. Engage him in planning an approach based on product features and benefits compared to competing products.
2. Reply by requesting that Fernando reflect on the need to maximize both sales and profitability. Encourage him to sell the customer on the benefits of USF's breakfast bars and the marketing support you will provide.

This leadership opportunity addresses the question of how to sell Fernando on doing what's best for the business as opposed to passing along information about company policy. It is a matter of encouraging him to do his best to convince the customer purchase USF's breakfast bars without a discount, but leaving the door open for a small discount as a last resort. It's not about telling him what to do but rather persuading him to think about what is best for the business. To influence him, praise his efforts, and stress how important this business is to the company's plans, and that he has your full support in landing this sale. Show that you appreciate his position; sales people are motivated to increase sales and sometimes they can give less thought to profitability.

Email 3 – Boosting sales in California

From: Ilsa Fluery, Brand Manager

Sorry to bombard you with so much when you're away but I got some sales figures for our breakfast bars in California. We are 12% behind our target for the year-to-date in California and we need to do something fast if we are going to turn this around before the end of this year. The sales manager for that region, Sylvia Palumbo, will be in our office the week of the 23rd. Please arrange a meeting with her as a matter of urgency that week to brainstorm what can be done to get our numbers up for her region.

Thanks,
Ilsa

cc. Sylvia Palumbo

PS. Sylvia emailed me saying:

I appreciate your concern regarding sales of breakfast bars in California but I'm going to be extremely busy the week I'm at headquarters, especially in meetings with Chris Dolzaki to explore some ideas he's got for ramping up our trail mix sales in my region.

Our trail mix line is not doing as well as we'd like in California because the competition is incredibly fierce, especially among health conscious snackers, our target market. Unless there is a really compelling reason to meet with Alex Carson the week I'm in headquarters, I'm afraid I'm just going to have to let breakfast bars take care of themselves for the rest of this year in my region.

Issues:

- California is a big market and the company has advertised the product there, so the firm needs to capitalize on this investment.
- Problem with Sylvia Palumbo having no time to meet and not seeing breakfast bars as an immediate priority
- Question as to why the company is pushing its trail mix in California if the competition is so fierce for that product and it's not doing well generally. (See the figures provided in email #3.)

Minimal or potentially negative options:

1. Insist on taking a few minutes of Sylvia's time; perhaps imply that you would take the matter to Chris Dolzaki to resolve.
2. Confront Chris or Sylvia with the argument that there is no sense in pushing trail mix in California when breakfast bars present a much better opportunity.

More effective options:

1. Work at influencing Sylvia by stressing the importance of her region to the future of the business and offering to speak with her on the phone. Stress the value of the breakfast bar business and the opportunity presented by the advertising campaign.
2. Offer to meet her for breakfast or fly out to her location, thereby showing your enthusiasm and determination to succeed while acknowledging that she is very busy and that her time is important.

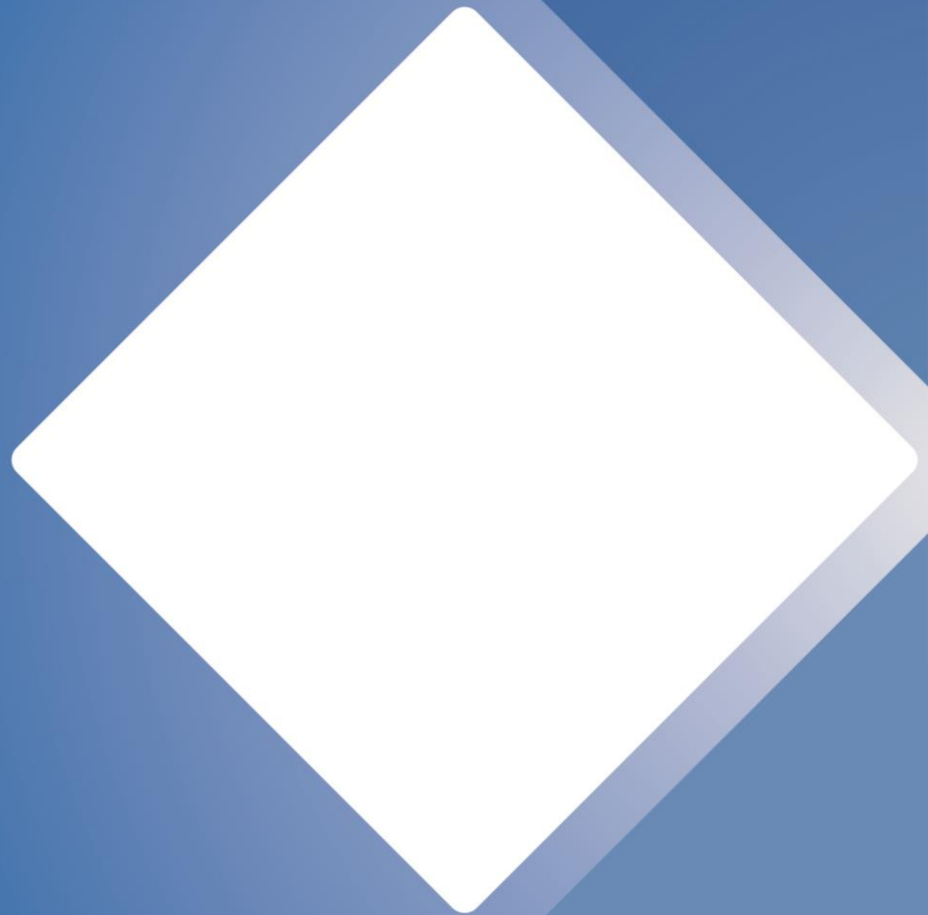
This issue presents a significant leadership opportunity. You could just tell Ilsa that Sylvia will be tied up and there is nothing you can do about that. A more positive approach is to write to Sylvia, suggesting that you work with her to identify a way that she can achieve both objectives: improve sales for trail mix to please Chris Dolzaki and improve breakfast bar sales at the same time. The key is to emphasize the benefit for Sylvia rather than focus on your own need to meet your targets. If she is too busy during her trip to headquarters, ask her for suggestions on how you and Sylvia could best collaborate on this opportunity and, at the same time, make your own suggestions such as a conference call or a visit from you to her office. Since you have invested so much in advertising breakfast bars, a trip to California won't add much extra cost. Explain that you understand how busy she is and that you are willing to adjust your schedule to fit in with hers.

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