

# UP YOUR GAME: A LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE



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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. It will test your readiness to assume more responsibility and demonstrate leadership capability. 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 planning and organizing; problem-solving and decision-making; performance orientation; teamwork; 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 have been away on vacation for the past week and, starting Monday, you will be attending a Strategic Marketing Seminar in Mexico for a full week. Because you have been away from work for a week and will not be back in the office next week, your boss has asked you to spend some time today going through your emails and taking action on those matters that you regard as the highest priorities in terms of the business and leadership issues.

September						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

Your objective is to do as much as you can today because you will not be able to meet with anyone or make phone calls during the week you are in Mexico. In addition, you will be doing work in the evenings during the seminar and you won't have time to do any of your own work during that week.

Importantly, the more action you take now, the more you will learn from the exercise.

You will have **15 minutes** to read the materials provided and **60 minutes** to complete your responses and action plans. The emails are in the order in which they were received. It is to your benefit to read all before responding. 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 your inbox and/or initiate separate emails based on your analysis of the challenges facing this organization. You may reply to emails individually or to several at once and you also have the choice of creating an email (space is available at the end of the exercise for any additional emails or plans you wish to outline.) Communicate directly with people you respond to rather than state what you would do.

# Your Background, the Snack Food Industry and Business Information

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.

## The Snack Food Industry

Snack foods include both sweet and salty snacks.

Sweet snacks include the following:

- Candy: Chocolate candy and non-chocolate candy
- Cookies and Bakery Snacks: Cookies, cupcakes/brownies
- Food Bars: Nutritional/intrinsic health value bar, breakfast/cereal/snack bars
- Fruit Snacks: Dry fruit snacks, dried fruit

Salty snacks include the following:

- Salty Snacks: Potato chips, tortilla chips, other salted snacks (no nuts), cheese snacks, pretzels, corn snacks
- Crackers: Crackers with fillings, saltine crackers, breadsticks
- Nut Snacks: Snack nuts, nutritional snacks, sunflower/pumpkin seeds, chocolate-covered salted snacks, yogurt-coated snacks and toasted corn nut snacks
- Popcorn and Rice/Popcorn Cakes: Ready-to-eat popcorn/caramel corn
- Dried Meat Snacks: Jerky, all other dried meat snacks

Market factors driving the snack sector include less frequent dining in restaurants, hurried lifestyles that lead to on-the-go eating, a growing tendency to replace meals with several smaller snacks, and marketers' efforts to address the obesity epidemic by developing healthier snack foods that still taste good.

As consumers seek ways to achieve healthier lifestyles, snack foods that are marketed as "better for you" will be popular. Companies are realizing that they must highlight attributes such as vitamins, minerals, fiber content and lower sodium to both educate consumers and take advantage of demand for such products.

While potato chips are still the dominant snack of choice, options like dried fruit and nuts are growing very quickly. As products that emphasize health and wellness continue to grow in importance in the U.S. market, these types of snacks have benefitted.

## Your Division

You work in the Healthy Snack Division of UFS, which includes products such as health value bars, breakfast/cereal/snack bars, snack nuts, nutritional snacks, sunflower/pumpkin seeds, chocolate-covered salted snacks, yogurt-coated snacks and toasted corn nut snacks. The Healthy Snack Division is currently a small part of the overall business but aims to grow the fastest over the next five years.

# Financial Overview – Healthy Snack Division

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

Snack Type	Two Years Ago			Last Year			Current Year		
	Sales	Profit	Share	Sales	Profits	Share	Sales	Profit	Share
Trail Mixes	\$125m	11.0%	4.0%	\$150m	9.8%	3.5%	\$180m	8.0%	3.0%
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%
<b>Total/Average</b>	<b>\$300m</b>	<b>10.6%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>\$410m</b>	<b>9.8%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>\$525m</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>7.0%</b>

## Growth targets for the current year:

Snack Type	Targets		
	Sales	Profit	Share
Trail Mixes	\$200m	9.0%	6.0%
Breakfast Bars	\$190m	11.0%	14.0%
Seeds	\$145m	10.0%	8.0%
Nuts	\$90m	8.0%	8.0%
<b>Total/Average</b>	<b>\$625m</b>	<b>9.5%</b>	<b>9.0%</b>

## 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: Losing a major retailer

To: Alex Carson, Associate Brand Manager  
From: Ilsa Fluery, Brand Manager  
Sent: Tuesday, September 10, 8:45 a.m.  
Subject: Key retailer discontinuing our product

Alex:

Hope you enjoyed your week off! Thanks for taking time to get some things going on Sunday before you go to the Strategic Marketing Seminar!

As you know, we have a big push on our breakfast bars for the next two years and we have been advertising them aggressively on the Internet and TV. Unfortunately a major grocery chain, Safeway, has just discontinued them, citing too many brands with insufficient sales. Safeway's new person in charge of purchasing for snack foods, Craig Verma, is a big fan of Nature Valley, Quaker and Safeway's own label brand, so we need to persuade him to buy our product.

You helped develop our marketing plan for breakfast bars this year so I'd like you to email Craig to promote our brands and see if you can set up a meeting for one of our sales people to visit him. Make sure he knows about our advertising campaign and customer reviews, which rated our breakfast bars highest for nutritional value and low salt content. Our breakfast bars are the best sellers among health conscious consumers because they have 10% more fiber and protein than the next best bars. I emailed him myself but he hasn't replied and he isn't returning my phone calls so I'm hoping you can come up with an idea to turn him around. Safeway is obviously a big distributor and we have challenging growth targets for this year and next.

I should also tell you that I had some dealings with Craig when he worked for another large supermarket chain previously. We seem to have had a personality conflict or something. Anyway, he complained about how difficult I was to contact for marketing-related support so that may partly explain his negative attitude toward our products.

Best,  
Ilsa

**Your Email Response : Losing a major retailer**

## Email: Market Research for breakfast bars

To: Alex Carson, Associate Brand Manager  
From: Paul Morin, Market Research Manager  
Sent: Tuesday, September 10, 9:18 a.m.  
Subject: Market research for breakfast bars

Hi Alex:

Hope you enjoyed your holiday. I heard that you were going to be reviewing some issues this Sunday. I thought I would let you know that the market research you wanted done to help promote our breakfast bars for next year won't be finished by the end of September as you requested. In fact, as I have lost two key people this month, I can't see getting it done before the end of the year at the earliest.

Further, Chris Dolzaki, VP of Marketing, has us pretty tied up on a big project for our trail mix line. As you know, he's really into trail mix products himself so he is enthusiastic about promoting them.

Sorry about that!

Paul



**Your Email Response: Market Research for breakfast bars**

## 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: Pricing and suggestions to boost sales**

## Email: Leading a cross-functional team

To: Alex Carson, Associate Brand Manager  
From: Luis Cabral, Associate Brand Manager  
Sent: Tuesday, September 10, 2:15 p.m.  
Subject: Would you like to lead a cross-functional team?

Hi Alex:

I left you a phone message today, but thought I should email you as well.

Ilsa asked me if I would like to lead a cross-functional team of specialists to look at redesigning some of our breakfast bars to cut costs. The team will include people from manufacturing, purchasing and someone from Jake Fong's design department. Our design people have some new ingredients in mind to replace the peanut butter, honey, sweetener and milk powder we are currently using. Lower cost ingredients would improve profitability but we need to watch the brand image, which is very high on quality.

Ilsa says it would be good for my development but she said I could ask you to do it if I didn't feel that I could lead such a project. As I have only been on the job six months, I'd rather learn from your experience for now.

Please let me know as soon as possible if you'd like to do it. The first meeting is Monday, September 23 at 1 p.m. I think it's going to last all afternoon. If you think you could lead this important project, you'll need to draft an agenda for the meeting as soon as possible. If you send me your agenda, I'll see that it gets distributed first thing this Monday as you're away all week at the Strategic Marketing Seminar.

I'm sure you'd be good at leading this project.

See you after you get back from the seminar. Hope you enjoy it. I'm looking forward to attending it next year.

Many thanks!

Luis

**Your Email Response: Leading a cross-functional team**

## Email: Meeting to review sales ideas

To: Alex Carson, Luis Cabral and Erin Riggs, Associate Brand Managers  
From: Ilsa Fluery, Brand Manager  
Sent: Wednesday, September 11, 9:55 a.m.  
Subject: Pulling together our best thoughts

Hi All:

You got an email from Chris asking for our creative thoughts on how we can make our numbers by the end of the year.

Chris has asked you to send in your ideas independently but I'd like to develop a coordinated brand management response. I would therefore like the three of you, or at least two, to meet with me Monday, September 23 at 2:30 p.m. It shouldn't take more than an hour to pool our best thoughts.

Please send me your ideas by Friday the 21st so I can begin reviewing them before our meeting on the 23rd. Even if all of you can't make the meeting, I still want really compelling, fresh ideas from all associate brand managers.

Also, next month we'll be presenting our strategy suggestions, for next year, to Chris. I would appreciate it if you would take a look at our numbers and give me your thoughts on what you think our focus should be for next year.

Thanks!  
Ilsa

**Your Email Response: Meeting to review sales ideas**

## 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: Sales opportunity**

## Email: Help with marketing campaign

To: Alex Carson, Associate Brand Manager  
From: Erin Riggs, Associate Brand Manager  
Sent: Thursday, September 12, 10:08 a.m.  
Subject: Do you have time to help me?

Hi Alex:

Ilsa asked me today to develop a new marketing campaign for our salt-free, shelled sunflower seeds. As you know, this is my first job and I've only been here 3 months, so I haven't done this before. She said I should ask you for help as you did such a good job on the campaign for breakfast bars.

What help can you offer me? I really need to get started next week but I understand you're at some course all next week. Is there anything you can suggest to get me started? Can you spend a couple of hours with me early the week you are back in the office, preferably Monday the 23rd or Tuesday at the latest?

I want to do a good job on this but I really need some help from someone with a little more experience than me.

See you.

Erin

**Your Email Response: Help with marketing campaign**

## Email: Boosting sales in California

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

Hi again Alex:

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: **Boosting sales in California**

## Email: Can you be an informal team leader?

To: Alex Carson, Associate Brand Manager  
From: Ilsa Fluery, Brand Manager  
Sent: Thursday, September 12, 2:55 p.m.  
Subject: Informal team leader

Hi Alex:

As you know, our two senior associate brand managers were promoted last month to regional sales manager roles and we are really short staffed at the moment. For budgetary reasons, we will be hiring new graduates to replace them rather than experienced people.

Because I'm out of the office so much, I need someone to be an informal team leader for our newer staff. I know that Erin and Luis have only a few months less experience than you but the little extra time you've been here seems to have made a big difference to your confidence.

I was meaning to sit down with you before you left to talk about this but I was just too busy. I know that Erin and Luis already look to you for advice and support so I want you to be a little more proactive in helping them. Not only are they lacking in confidence, they don't get along very well. Both are a little too competitive and they don't share information or help each other if they can avoid it. As a result, there is no real teamwork in the office at the moment.

I would appreciate it if you would email them with your thoughts on how they can work together more effectively as a team. Also, please set up a meeting with them for some day as soon as possible after your return to discuss how the three of you can support each other and the two new associate brand managers who will be joining us in a couple of weeks.

This is an informal role for now but it would be great for your development and your future career!

Finally, please suggest a time to meet with me early the week you are back in the office to discuss this idea in more detail. Please copy me on the email you send to Erin and Luis.

Thanks a million!

Enjoy the Seminar!

Ilsa

**Your email response: Can you be an informal team leader?**

## Email: Website updates

To: Alex Carson, Associate Brand Manager  
From: Denise Hanna, Design Manager, Interactive Communications  
Sent: Thursday, September 12, 4:25 p.m.  
Subject: Updates to brand information on your website

Hi Alex:

I trust you enjoyed your week off.

As promised, we will complete the changes that you and your team requested for the breakfast bar section of your website on Monday September 16. You said that it was critical that the changes be ready to go live by noon on Friday the 21st.

Can you review the changes no later than 5 p.m. on Tuesday the 18th to give us time to make any further changes or fix any errors before Friday's launch? I'm bearing in mind your need to get the details right on these changes because of the trouble caused by errors made on previous changes.

Thanks! It's been a pleasure working with you!

Denise



Your email response: **Website updates**

## Additional Emails and Action Plans

Write any additional emails, as you see fit, over and above the replies you have already written. You may also use this space to outline any plans you would like to consider when you return to the office.

**Note: Please ensure that you saved your work to your computer when you have finished.**