Hunter-Worth Case Study

Christmas was fast approaching. Just a short while ago, Chuck Moore, national sales manager for Hunter-Worth, a New York–based multinational toy manufacturer, was confident the coming holiday was going to be one of the company’s best in years. At a recent toy expo, Hunter-Worth unveiled a new interactive plush toy that was cuddly, high-tech, and tied into a major holiday motion picture expected to be a smash hit. Chuck had thought the toy would do well, but frankly, the level of interest took him by surprise. The buyers at the toy fair raved, and the subsequent pre-order volume was extremely encouraging. It had all looked so promising, but now he couldn’t shake a sense of impending doom.

The problem in a nutshell was that the Mexican subsidiary that manufactured the toy couldn’t seem to meet a deadline. Not only were all the shipments late so far, but they fell well short of the quantities ordered. Chuck decided to e-mail Vicente Ruiz, the plant manager, about the situation before he found himself in the middle of the Christmas season with parents clamoring for a toy he couldn’t lay his hands on.

In a thoroughly professional e-mail that started with a friendly “Dear Vicente,” Chuck inquired about the status of the latest order, asked for a production schedule for pending orders, and requested a specific explanation as to why the Mexican plant seemed to be having such difficulty shipping orders out on time. The reply appeared within the hour, but to his utter astonishment, it was a short message from Vicente’s secretary. She acknowledged the receipt of his e-mail and assured him the Mexican plant would be shipping the order, already a week late, in the next ten days.

“That’s it,” Chuck fumed. “Time to take this to Sato.” He prefaced his original e-mail and the secretary’s reply with a terse note expressing his growing concern over the availability of what could well be this season’s must-have toy. “Just what do I have to do to light a fire under Vicente?” he wrote. He then forwarded it all to his supervisor and friend, Michael Sato, the executive vice president for sales and marketing.

Next thing he knew, he was on the phone with Vicente—and the plant manager was furious. “Signor Moore, how dare you go over my head and say such things about me to my boss?” he sputtered, sounding both angry and slightly panicked. It seemed that Michael had forwarded Chuck’s e-mail to Hunter-Worth’s vice president of operations, who had sent it on to the Mexican subsidiary’s president.

That turn of events was unfortunate, but Chuck wasn’t feeling all that apologetic. “You could have prevented all this if you’d just answered the questions I e-mailed you last week,” he pointed out. “I deserved more than a form letter—and from your secretary, no less.”

“My secretary always answers my e-mails,” replied Vicente. “She figures that if the problem is really urgent, you would pick up the phone and talk to me directly. Contrary to what you guys north of the border might think, we do take deadlines seriously here. There’s only so much we can do with the supply problems we’re having, but I doubt you’re interested in hearing about those.” And Vicente hung up the phone without waiting for a response.

Chuck was confused and disheartened. Things were only getting worse. How could he turn the situation around?

Questions

1. Based on Vicente Ruiz’s actions and his conversation with Chuck Moore, what differences do you detect in cultural attitudes toward communications in Mexico as compared with the United States? Is understanding these differences important? Explain.

2. What was the main purpose of Chuck’s communication to Vicente? To Michael Sato? What factors should he have considered when choosing a channel for his communication to Vicente? Are they the same factors he should have considered when communicating with Michael Sato?

3. If you were Chuck, what would you have done differently? What steps would you take at this point to make sure the supply of the popular new toy is sufficient to meet the anticipated demand?

Sources: