

MIT Case Study
Patricia Chang

Situation: In late November 2004, KSSG (student government) ordered 40 fleeces from HBS Ventures, who were working with the vendor, Turfer fleece. Promised that the fleece would be delivered in two weeks time, the shipment actually arrived in three installments throughout the next four months, with the last shipment arriving in March 2005.

<u>My Thoughts and Feelings</u>	<u>What We Said</u>
<p>Are you kidding me? You promised that it would come in 2 weeks time. I even <u>emailed</u> you directly asking you if it would be two weeks and you said yes.</p>	<p>Rebecca: Hi Patricia. This is Rebecca from HBS Ventures. Unfortunately many of the colors that you've ordered have been backlogged and we estimate that it might be January or February when the backlogged colors arrive.</p>
<p>I chose Turfer fleece? What? Why is she passing the buck?</p>	<p>Me: What? I don't understand. You had promised the fleece would be in by two weeks though, before the Christmas break</p> <p>Rebecca: Everything on the HBS Ventures side is fine. It's because you chose a vendor, Turfer fleece, and Turfer has had a backlog of orders, so some of the colors you ordered were out.</p>
<p>Great. This is going to cause even more delay. We shouldn't have switched over. What can I do now? Should I switch back to the Harvard Shop? No, that's just going to cause even more lost time.</p>	<p>Me: This isn't good. KSSG had switched over from the Harvard Shop to HBS Ventures only because you had promised to deliver the fleece in two weeks time. I mean, it's the same fleece, and there was no difference between these shops...In fact the Harvard Shop told us that the fleece would be delayed, and that's why we switched over to HBS Ventures ...because you promised that you could deliver it in two weeks time.</p>
<p>Why didn't you check a more current inventory before promising a delivery?</p>	<p>Rebecca: Yes, at the time, when I checked inventory, the vendor had given me the stock from two weeks ago, and it appeared that all the colors were in, but the fleece is popular this time of year, and so a lot of people ordered from Turfer....</p> <p>Me: I don't know what to say. The 2-wk</p>

I can't believe she's still not apologizing, and is blaming it all on Turfer. Maybe if I explain why this is so important, she'll get it, and help me think of a solution.

Or not.

Maybe if she writes out an email, she can explain why this happened and take some responsibility for it.

This is not worth fighting about. I'll just do it.

Or maybe it will never freaking arrive.

There's got to be some way of making someone accountable.

This is really sketchy. How the heck are they accountable then?

turnaround is really important to us. I mean, some of the students had ordered them as Christmas presents for their families, and we had promised them that they would arrive before then, based on your assurances.

Rebecca: There's nothing that we can do, it's basically on Turfer fleece side. I mean you can ask the students if they want to switch colors, and that might be faster.

Me: Can you send out an email from HBS Ventures to me, telling me why there's been a delay and retake the orders?

Rebecca: My job is not to retake the orders. There's so many students, and it's really not my job to do so.

Me: Fine. I'll retake the orders and then send it to you. When are the fleece supposed to arrive?

Rebecca: In January; maybe the second week.

Conversation number 2:

January

Rebecca: Hi Patricia. There's been another delay, in the maroon and red colors. We're not certain when they are supposed to arrive, but perhaps in mid-February.

Me: Is there any way I can get the vendor's name or phone number just to find out what's going on?

Rebecca: It is really not our policy to give out the vendor's name.

Me: You can't give me Turfer's fleece's phone number?

Rebecca: You're certainly free to check it out yourself, but it is not our policy to give out our vendor's name.

I know she's just the middleman, but honestly, she can do more.

I cannot believe this! Does this happen to HBS students?

She's placing the blame on someone else, again! Like it's our fault that we "chose" Turfer.

I stink at negotiation. Why did I just ask if she could do something, rather than demand it? Of course, she's going to say no.

Why the heck is she bringing this up? She should talk with the student about this. It's not like I set up the student to write her an angry email. And please, this whole thing *is* really unprofessional. It's really ridiculous that she said we wouldn't have had the fleece at all. I mean we still don't have the fleece!

Me: I'll do that. I should let you know though that students are asking me where their fleece are. Also, KSSG is using the fleece as a fundraiser, so our Dean wants to know why there's a delay. I've been forwarding them your emails.

Rebecca: I'll be in touch for when the shipment does arrive.

Conversation number 3:

In February

Rebecca: Hi Patricia. There's been another delay in the remaining shipment of fleece.

Me: This is ridiculous.

Rebecca: I have never had this problem before. In the future, you may want to work with HBS Venture's more established vendors, like Patagonia.

Me: Is there any way that we could get some assurance when the shipment will arrive, like a written contract? There has to be a hard deadline of when we finally get this fleece. Or is there something you can do, like free shipping or a discount, or anything?

Rebecca: No. Also, I received an angry email from one of the Kennedy School students that called me unprofessional. I've never been called unprofessional in my life! I don't appreciate it at all. If it weren't for HBS Ventures, you wouldn't have even had the fleece at all!

Me: I think that's something you should address with that student.