



## Sushma's Quandary: A Microcase on Delegation

Sushma Gupta worked as the Assistant Manager (AM) of operations for Mega Shopping Arena (MSA). MSA, a popular store, sold everything from food, clothes, and shoes to stationery, furniture, household items, electronics, and toys. The store advertised itself as a one-stop whop where the customer could find everything hi or she needed. Sushma was happy that she was working with such a reputed, well-established store.

Sushma loved her job and had worked hard to get to the position of AM.

Her life revolved around her work, so much so that she had to be forced to take leave or a vacation. Her seniors were happy with her work, and Sushma was looking forward to the performance appraisals in March.

She was sure that she would be promoted. She had excelled at her work in the four years she had bee at the store, and she felt that she definitely deserved to become Manager.

In March, as she had expected, Sushma was promoted and made Manager. Her job profile now was different – she was no longer required to do the day-to-day administrative tasks that she had been doing till then.

Neither was she required to deal with customers. Her new role involved managing the supply chain, and taking care of the advertising and marketing plans of the store.

In her new role, Sushma had a team of four Ams, who were each required to present a daily report to her at the end of each day. The Ams were required to handle the administrative duties, including dealing with counter staff, as well as to handle customer complaints.

However, Sushma being the perfectionist that she was, insisted on taking all the decisions herself, even when they had to be made at the AM level. Because of this, the Ams did not have a sense of ownership. They shied away from taking decision, leaving them to Sushma, besides asking for her guidance even on small issues.

One day, Sonal Kapoor, a regular customer, came to return a pair of wrinkle-free trousers that she had bought a week earlier. Mrs. Kapoor, amember of store's loyalty program, was quite upset because the trousers had shrunk in just one wash, and she wished to return them.



She produced the original bill, and asked for a full refund, pointing to the notice hung on the wall which clearly stated the store's return policy of giving full refund if the customer returned the product within a week along with the original bill.

At this point, Sushma was not in office, as she was attending an offside meeting. Rajeev, the AM handling the matter, refused to take a decision as he was not sure how to ascertain the number of days from the day of purchase – whether he should include the day off purchase or not! He asked Mrs. Kapoor to come back the next day to meet Sushma. Mrs. Kapoor first tried to argue and then said she would agree to an exchange.

However, Rajeev refused to commit himself and kept asking her to meet Sushma. An irritated Mrs. Kapoor then raised her voice, drawing the attention of other shoppers.

She said she was surprised that there wasn't a single competent person who could help her out. Rajeev tried to calm her down but this only annoyed her further. She dashed to the exit, flinging both the pair of trousers and the loyalty card to the floor, vowing never to come back to the store. Rajeev knew the store had lost a loyal and valuable customer, but at the same time did not want to take any decisions without consulting Sushma first. He felt frustrated and helpless.

Ever since Sushma had been promoted, she had been working late, sometimes till midnight. However, most of the work that she was doing was something that she should have delegated to her juniors. She preferred to do the work herself, as she did not have enough trust in her juniors.

So in actual fact, only her title had changed – her attitude and focus had not. She was still doing the same work that she had been doing before her promotion! All this additional work, however, left her with very little time to attend to her own responsibilities.

On another occasion, when Sushma heard a customer complaining about the quality of fruits and vegetables at the store, she immediately went to the woman to sort out the issue, forgetting that she had an appointment with a senior official from Techtron Electronics who wanted to discuss his company's plans of running a promotional event in association with MSA.

It was a great opportunity for Sushma to get additional business. The marketing manager of Techtron, Vishal Anand, waited about 45 minutes for



Sushma, but she was busy pacifying the woman who had come to complain. Anand ultimately grew tired of waiting and left; he then went to Stop & shop, MSA's prime competitor.

In the evening, Aravind Sinha, Director, MSA, came to know that Techtron had gone to their rivals. So he called up Anand to know why he had changed his mind and tied up with MSA's rival.

Anand then told him, "Your store was our first choice, but it seems your Manager was too busy to see me. I thought I should go elsewhere where they would appreciate my time." Sinha was taken aback.

On learning what had happened, Sushma was worried that she had disappointed Sinha. From being a star performer and everyone's favourite employee, Sushma had suddenly become the one person no one wanted to work with.

Her juniors thought she interfered too much, while her seniors thought that she was not focused enough. Sushma was confused. She liked to think of herself as indispensable, and thought she was working her way toward becoming exactly that for her organization.

The way she saw it, she was being helpful to everyone, working harder and longer than ever, and doing more than she was expected to do! What then, was she doing wrong?

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What in your opinion was Sushma doing wrong? What do you suggest she do now in order to rectify the situation?
2. Should the company have trained Sushma for her new role? What should Sinha do now?