

### Mini-Case Study: Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Nasira was 25 years old and less than a year out of graduate school, but had found a good job as a Procurement Specialist. Money was tight and she wasn't able to save much, but her job paid enough to pay her bills and afford a small studio apartment in the city. She liked her work and was on track to receive a promotion at her next evaluation – with any luck, she wouldn't be working paycheck to paycheck much longer.

She worked for K9 Dura-Corp, a small but growing firm that manufactured pet supplies like dog beds, cat scratching posts, and pet carriers, among other items. Because K9 Dura-Corp (also known as K9DC) was based on Michigan, the company relied heavily on “Made in America” marketing for its products. In reality, the products were put together in their Michigan plant, but K9DC didn't make its own parts – just the final product. That's where Nasira came in; as a Procurement Specialist, it was her job to source the parts.

For some parts, this was easy, but her job was important because some parts were far more challenging to find – especially at a cost that fit their product line. This week, Nasira was working to find a new source for the fabric lining for their dog cots. Their old manufacturer had gone out of business, and they were going to be at risk of manufacturing delays if she didn't find a new source immediately.

As she researched, Nasira actually found two sources for the style they needed. One supplier was actually located in the Midwest too, while the other was overseas. The overseas fabric, made by Fab-Right Inc., was cheaper, and was touted as chew-proof, but Nasira had significant concerns about the labor used to manufacture it. From what she could tell, Fab-Right paid its workers almost nothing and exploited its employees in terrible working conditions. There was almost no information available about the environmental impact of their manufacturing process, and Nasira suspected they were hiding something.

But the Midwestern supplier, All-Fabric Inc., left her concerned, too. The fabric seemed to be less durable from the samples the company had sent her, and the manufacturing process seemed to be less than desirable. There were reports that the company was contaminating the local water source, and local residents were trying to get the government to intervene. Nasira was also concerned that a less durable fabric means it would be a chewing hazard for dogs.

Neither company seemed ideal, and Nasira resolved to keep looking. But when she walked into work on Thursday, she had an email from her supervisor that if they didn't find a new source

immediately, they were looking at production delays. When she replied that she didn't have a good source yet, her boss called her. "Nasira, I'll be honest – we're operating on incredibly thin margins right now. Sales have been down, and we can't afford a manufacturing delay. If you can't find a source, we're looking at lay-offs, at best."

Her boss doesn't say it, but as Nasira reflects on the call, she unhappily realizes her job is probably at stake too. As one of the newest employees in the company, with less than 6 months at K9DC, she doesn't have seniority.