

## Washing Duty Laundry Teaching Notes

### *What Are the Relevant Facts?*

1. The brand, Endirt, is doing well. It is the brand leader in a growing market, though a much larger competing company is quite capable of beating Endirt with its brand.
2. The message has a high recall and a high level of association with the brand. It is believed that the message is at least partially responsible for the success of the brand.
3. On the other hand, the message is regarded as offensive. All unsolicited letters (approximately one per week) are negative and from women, some saying they will not buy the brand because of the ad message. Women are the primary decision makers and buyers of the product.

### *What Are the Ethical Issues?*

1. What obligations do advertisers have in mass media marketing?
2. Are the rights of women being infringed? If so, should the campaign be stopped?
3. How would a decision to stop the campaign affect the brand's market share and competitive position and, therefore, the company?

### *Who Are the Primary Stakeholders?*

- Consumers
- Employees (managers)
- Shareholders (market share)
- Women who are offended
- TV networks that air the ad

### *What Are the Possible Alternatives?*

1. Continue the existing message
2. Stop the existing message
3. Modify the message
4. Do nothing until the issue is studied further

### *What Are the Ethics of the Alternatives?*

1. *Utilitarian.* Ask questions with a “utilitarian” perspective. Which decision would lead to the greatest good for the greatest number?
2. *Theory of Rights.* Questions from a “rights” perspective: What about the right to be treated

with respect? Right of free speech? Right of due process?

3. *Theory of justice.* Is it fair to show this commercial? Who is harmed? Who is benefited? Are these justifiable?
4. *Conflict between theories.* Whereas the utilitarian theory might indicate that the brand share considerations might prevail, the rights theory may indicate otherwise.

### *What Are the Practical Constraints?*

1. Bruce, a recent recruit still in his probationary period, needs the job and money.
2. Priscilla, his boss, is against the commercial.

### *What Actions Should Be Taken?*

1. What actions should Bruce take?
2. Which alternative would you choose in his position? Why would you make that choice?
3. Which of the ethical theories (utilitarian, rights, justice) makes the most sense in this situation? How would you resolve the conflict between the theories?

## **Additional Material**

### *Objective*

This vignette is intended to illustrate an ethical dilemma and the process of resolving it.

The crux of the problem is expressed in the case. On the one hand, the brand was doing well. On the other hand, were the rights of women being infringed? All the letters seemed to imply that. Bruce was a believer in the profit motive, but not at the cost of condoning unethical behavior. He had been asked to make a recommendation for the commercial for the next TV season.

### *Recommended Strategy for Case Discussion*

1. Review the facts of the case.
2. Use the rest of the Seven-Step Method for Analysis and Solution: This provides the opportunity to debate the rights of the women who were offended versus the rights of the stockholders. Each of the three theories may cast a new perspective on the resolution. Bruce's

dependence upon the job and Priscilla's attitude towards the commercial are additional practical issues.

3. Obtain responses from women students and men students; watch for any differences between their recommendations.

*A Possible Solution*

1. Assess the extent of the dissatisfaction. How many women are offended? One letter a week means approximately 52 women a year.
2. Conduct marketing research of women (the primary market). If only a very small proportion of women surveyed in a study are offended, the rights

of women in general are not being violated. Some minor modifications may be made on the basis of the survey, but the message could be preserved without violating the rights of women in general.

*Additional Notes*

1. In classroom tests of this vignette, no significant difference has been found between the recommendations of men and women students.
2. A quick survey of women could be done. (The author's findings are that less than one percent of women were offended by this approach, but this finding may differ widely from institution to institution.)