

It was to be the worst winter of my entire life. Part of it was the environment, of course. Winters in Denmark are cold. This is not news. A personal on-street sales consultant has to be on the street and in the cold. This too is not news. Now maybe because we were a trifle aggressive in generating revenues from the sales consultants so that they felt compelled to stay out in weather that was not the best for their health, or mortality status, then perhaps we too at the company should shoulder some of the blame. Not a large part, and certainly not a legally liable part.

But a part.

And let's be totally honest, street waifs had been freezing to death for eons on the streets of Denmark LONG before ICE Girls and the Danish Match Company DMC and Mr. Hans Christian "I smell a story that will get me noticed" Anderson. In fact in a sense we were a victim of our own success. Before us, no one even saw the Urban Dregs or particularly cared who they were. Because of us, suddenly they were noticed. Now when one, or then two, or then several of them turned up frozen on the street in the morning suddenly it was a big deal. Because we had created the relationship with them. We were the ones who made these people visible. In the midst of all the subsequent hullabaloo that was about to break over our heads, I honestly think we never got the proper amount of credit for that.

At first we didn't even know there was a problem, to tell the truth. The first real cold snap of the winter came and went, and sales went up as usual and things were all as they should be. Maybe in retrospect we should have realized that T-shirts were not the most appropriate in winter wear. And again in retrospect, the decision (driven primarily by the numbers guys) to delay the ICE Girl's winter parka look until spring when we could get the parkas at a highly discounted rate, was a poor one.

The first inkling of a problem actually came from Mr. Anderson himself. He was ushered into my office late on a Friday close to Christmas and I must admit at first glance I was not impressed. He was little chinned big lipped man with a fairly pronounced comb over and I assumed that he was here to write what had become a fairly standard "How the Danish Match Industry and the ICE Girls project are rewriting the social contract between rich and poor" and maybe an added wrinkle about the joy of Christmas and giving and ho de hoh ho ho.

Of course that shows how much I knew.

"Mr. Anderson, How nice to meet you and welcome to the hallowed halls of the Danish Match Company DMC. You know it would take over 10 million matches to make a building this size. Or over 20 million if you use Finnish matches. Ha ha ha. Ah."

(No response. Well Hello Mr. Scrooge. OK serious it is.)

"I understand you have a few questions about our ICE Girls program."

"Yes, thank you."

"I see you have our press package there. I think it's pretty complete. Photos, endorsements, testimonials, contact information to the various agencies through which we contract our onstreet sales consultants, ICE Girls apparel...."

“Actually it was that I would like to ask you about?”

“The apparel?”

(Why would a reporter care about T-shirts?)

“Yes, more specifically...”

“Well in keeping with our company policy of supporting Denmark First we at the Danish Match Company DMC are very pleased to state that ALL items of the ICE Girls line are manufactured here in Denmark using the finest of Danish material and labor.”

(At least as far anyone can trace.)

“Well actually I was more specifically interested in the holes.”

“I beg your pardon, the holes?”

(Huh?)

“In the T-shirts.”

“Oh I see.” (At least I thought I did.) “So you are interested in the *Chemise de fille d’allumette*. Would you like some free samples for you and your family?”

“No.”

(Well then what the heck is this guy fishing for?)

“Well then can I interest you in a series of pictures of our most popular ICE Girls in their *Chemise de fille d’allumette*?”

“Well I will take them.”

(A ha, I thought as I handed some over, so that’s it!)

“But that’s not why I am here.”

(Crap.)

He began to quickly fan through the pictures and spread them on my desk.

“It seems that each T-shirt has the hole in the exact same position, over the shoulder and showing a hint of a bare midriff.”

(Don’t guess. Just acknowledge.)

“Yes that is correct.”

“Why is that?”

(Again I thought I knew where he was going.)

“Well we wanted all our sales consultants to have a similar look and we achieved this by having uniform *Chemises de fille d’allumette*. These chemises are congruent with the street-wise persona that we were trying

to project while at the same time keeping the integrity of Danish Match Company DMC image intact. It has proven to be tremendously popular.”

(And why is he writing all this stuff down?)

“Thank you. Are you aware of the average overnight low temperatures for the past 10 nights in the major cities where the majority of the ICE girls work?”

(I was confused, again.)

“Honestly, Mr. ...”

“Anderson.”

“Anderson, I can assure you that no where on this desk is that information. Heh heh heh.”

(That was weird, usually I at least get a smile when I refer to the mountains of paper that live, some say literally, on my desk.)

“So would it be fair to state that you are sending out children onto the streets in winter with company clothing that you know has holes in it not even knowing the temperature outside?”

(Hello, this is it. Huh has it been cold, hmmm? Hell if I know. Well, time to bring out “Mr. Consultant.”)

“Noooooo, I think it would be more accurate to state that the Danish Match Company DMC contracts with various social service agencies to provide girls of a certain class an opportunity to learn the psychic and financial advantages of hard work. In turn, the Danish consumer reaps the benefits of a superior product delivered directly into their hand by a fellow Dane.” (God, I love Mr. Consultant!)

“But in doing so do these girls wear this T-shirt ...

“This *Chemise de fille d’allumette* please.” (Throw the bastard off balance a bit.)

“All right then, these girls are wearing this skimpy *Chemise de fille d’allumette* in the midst of winter bearing the distinctive logo of the Danish Match Company. Doesn’t this suggest some sort of link?”

“Well of course we are pleased that they choose to wear the officially sanctioned apparel of the Danish Match Company DMC, but since the waifs in question are not the direct employees of the Danish Match Company DMC we have no control over the conditions of their employment, including dress codes, if any.” (Dance like a butterfly...)

“But as a practical matter, if a waif were try and sell matches NOT in this T-shirt what would you expect the result to be?”

“Well, we in marketing are pleased to note that there is a certain connection in the mind of the public between the orange and grey of the ICE Girls T-shirt and a quality match product. We have worked hard to make this connection and we think it works to the benefit of both the company and the consultant.” (Sting like a bee.)

“But sending out children in winter in T-shirts with holes in them, surely you can see the problems associated with that?”

“Again, these are on-street personal sales consultants not under the direct employment of the Danish Match Company DMC. The contracting social service agency and the waif’s parents themselves, of course, provides direct supervision of the waifs. We merely exist to provide these deserving waifs an opportunity to better themselves as they learn important economic and social skills.” (This guy’s got nothing.)

“Like miming?”

(OK, that was good. Throw the guy a bone. We’re way ahead on points anyways.) “Well maybe they went a bit too far with the street mime thing street, but you know kids and mine... What can you do but wait till they grow out of it?”

“What does the expression ‘Draggers’ mean to you?”

“I beg your pardon?” (Huh?)

“In doing some research on the ICE Girls project here at the Danish Match Company, I ran across some documents that seemed to refer to the poor as “Urban Drags.”

(Thank God no one around here can spell.) “No, I think ‘Urban Drags’ might refer to some of our friends in certain parts of Copenhagen. He heh heh. Not that we at the Danish Match Company DMC have nothing but the highest amount of respect for all members of our cosmopolitan society in which we live, including sexual orientation or fashion sense. But to more directly address the issues you raised with your question, which I think is ‘do we respect the working poor here at the Danish Match Company DMC,?’ I think our commitment to the poor is demonstrated by the fact that we have actively reached out to them. To suggest that we use derogatory terms such as “Draggers” to describe valuable members of the Danish Match Company DMC family is quite frankly, vaguely insulting.”

“So you have never used the term ‘Urban Drags’ or ‘Draggers?’”

“No, never.” (Now ask me about Dregs and I might have to lie.)

“Well I have just one more question before I go.”

“Please, ask away.” (You got nothing, sonny boy.)

“Does the Danish Match Company DMC care to comment on reports of ICE Girls freezing to death in the streets of Denmark?”

“I beg your pardon?” (Huh?)

“Within the past several days and nights sources at the morgue have reported several waif like bodies wearing ICE Girls T-shirts, er excuse me, *Chemise de fille d’allumette* being delivered there.”

(Crap. Stall. Think.) “Well ICE Girls apparel is extremely popular among a certain element of the population. Just because they were wearing our t-shirt does not necessarily mean they were an ICE Girl.”

“They were found clutching matches in their frozen hands.”

“Are you sure they are...”

“They all had traces of Red Dye #6 on the match head.”

(Crap. Squared. On a stick. Talk.) “Mr. Anderson we have had no such reports here, but as independent contractors, any climatically induced body temperature decrease episodes experienced by any one of our independent contractors would be more the responsibility to the contractor herself, her parents, or the contracting agency that was her direct employer. The Danish Match Company DMC of course deplores the loss of any Danish life and thus we encourage Danes to have a ready supply of sturdy Danish matches ready to provide heat and warmth at a moment’s notice. Matches that can be purchased from a variety of sources, including their very local ICE Girl on-street personal sales consultant.” (Smile.)

“So what you are saying is that you are not responsible for little girls freezing to death.”

(Time to take off the gloves.) “Mr. Anderson, I can not help to notice an adversarial tone in your questioning. This is the first we have heard of this. We true Danes react to facts, not speculation. As I have already explained, no direct employee of the Danish Match Company DMC has experienced anything like that which you have described. Let us get to the bottom of this and I am sure that there is a plausible answer that will be found. You are new to the journalism field, aren’t you Mr. Anderson?”

“Yes.”

“And this is your first job, isn’t it?” (No more Mr. Nice Dane.)

“Yes sir.”

“You like writing, Mr. Anderson?” (Time to show him not to play mean with the big dogs.)

“Oh yes sir.”

Well I hope you have a very long career doing that. Remember that contacts and first impressions are crucial in this Danish journalistic world, oh and which paper do you work for again, Mr. Anderson?” (Welcome to the big leagues, son.)

“The Esbjerg Daily News.”

“A fine newspaper, a fine newspaper indeed. I have always enjoyed its distinctive soccer coverage. First rate.” (Ease back a little.)

“Yes I have noticed.”

“And they have an overall reputation of probity in terms of the news, do they not?” (Wind up with the left.)

“They do.”

“A hard won reputation that can easily be lost if any unsubstantiated stories were to come out. Oh and please give my best to Fredrik Julius.” (And...)

“Mr. Kaas?”

“Yes, your advertising manager, he and I go way back with our commercial relationship.” (Kapowie! And goodnight, sweet Prince. Who was a Dane. Nice irony. Or is it satire? Doesn’t matter.)

“I see.”

“Now let us find out what is going on here, Mr. Anderson, and we will get right back to you. You have my word on that.” (Notice the smile, boy. Always put them down with a smile.)

“That relieves me greatly, sir.”

“Now is there anything else we can get for you, Mr. Anderson?” (Firm handshake. Now get the hell out of my office. Smile.)

“No, what I have now is quite sufficient.”

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