

# HOW WE BEAT WAL-MART

Our troubles with Wal-Mart began when a woman e-mailed the company complaining about its policy of encouraging its employees to say "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas." The response she got, from a Customer Service employee by the name of Kirby, was astounding. Here's what Kirby said (we are reproducing his statement exactly as it was sent, errors and all):

"Walmart is a world wide organization and must remain conscious of this. The majority of the world still has different practices other than 'christmas' which is an ancient tradition that has its roots in Siberain shamanism. The colors associated with 'christmas' red and white are actually a representation of of the aminita mascera mushroom. Santa is also borrowed from the Caucuses, mistletoe from the Celts, yule log from the Goths, the time from the Visigoth and the tree from the worship of Baal. It is a wide wide world."

The woman then e-mailed Kirby's statement to us. Our first reaction was that this was obviously the work of some underling. Wal-Mart, being a behemoth of an organization, could not possibly police everyone in every department. But we decided that Wal-Mart's top public relations person should know about this; we were curious to see what he or she might say.

So we e-mailed Kirby's remark to Dan Fogleman, Wal-Mart's senior manager in public relations. To our surprise, Fogleman not did not disagree with Kirby, and even proceeded to give us a lecture on diversity. Here is part of what he told us (again, we are not correcting the errors):

"As a retailer, we recognize some of our customers may be shopping for Chanukah or Kwanza gifts during this time of year and we certainly want these customers in our stores and to

feel welcome, just as we do those buying for Christmas. As an employer, we recognize the significance of the Christmas holiday among our family of associates...and close our stores in observance, the only day during the year that we are closed."

After being insulted again, we then decided to do one more thing: to see how Wal-Mart treats Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Christmas. What we found was revealing.

By typing Hanukkah into the search engine of its website, 200 items appeared. Typing Kwanzaa yielded 77 items. But when Christmas was entered, here's what appeared on the screen: "We've brought you to our 'Holiday' page based on your search."

That was it. On November 9, we issued a news release titled, "Wal-Mart Bans Christmas; Boycott Launched." In it, we said that when we initially read Kirby's statement, we assumed "he might be drunk." We also said, "It's nice to know that Wal-Mart is closed on a federal holiday." We immediately contacted 126 religious groups spanning seven faith communities asking them to join with us in the boycott.

On November 10, worldnetdaily.com flagged this story on its website as the lead news story. This led to a string of interviews on talk radio around the nation. In every case, listeners were livid: they felt betrayed that the "family-friendly" retailer would do this. So they e-mailed Fogleman to let him know what they thought. Bill Donohue e-mailed Fogleman his own missive: "Now that Wal-Mart is standing by its position, I hope you're ready for our next move. Don't forget, we have the next six weeks to pull out all the stops, and we will."

Meanwhile, Wal-Mart spokeswoman Jolanda Steward told the press that the store was just trying to help its customers "celebrate their individual needs and wants." To which Donohue said, "I thought Wal-Mart was a department store—not a

Wellness Center.”

Then Donohue got hold of the e-mail address of a senior Wal-Mart official, Ryan Loken, sending him the following note:

“Wal-Mart has made a huge mistake taking us on just at the start of the Christmas buying season. Why you are keeping Fogleman on as your PR man is mind-boggling. Have you seen worldnetdaily.com? Are you aware that our staff has been doing one radio talk show interview after another all day, with many more scheduled? Ask Fogleman how many e-mails he has received and what people are saying.

“The Left has unfairly attacked Wal-Mart for years. But now you’ve angered your base—conservative Christians.

“To put an end to our boycott, read the news release I wrote today. I’m not asking for the moon. But I will tell you this much: we have the money, time and determination necessary to keep this up for the next six weeks. In other words, the ball is in your court.”

The November 10 news release listed three demands: “We want a) an apology for insulting Christians by effectively banning Christmas b) a withdrawal of its insane statement regarding the origins of Christmas and c) a revision on its website.”

When Donohue got to work early on November 11, news reports were carrying the Wal-Mart apology, saying that Kirby had been fired. Then Donohue checked Wal-Mart’s website and found that by typing Christmas in its search engine, customers were taken to the Christmas site. We thus declared victory and an end to the boycott.