Dear Mr. Doan:

Business has cast itself in the role of the doting parent, soarings corporate head and asking: Now where have I gone wrong? We on the other side of the mythically generation gap can readily answer your question. The question isn't our--and the one you must answer--is more difficult: What does, and what will, business do right?

The image that the corporate world has created in the academic world is a highly negative one. Business, which has sold us everything from living space to living bras, has been unable to sell itself. Hopefully our dialogue will help dispel the "business myth"--although all myths are based on varying degrees of truth.

And what exactly is this image? It's that of a potential vehicle for social change, overcome by its own inertia. Business has an immense social responsibility which is exceeded only by its inadequate social commitment. This is not to deny that many major corporations are involved in health research, agricultural improvement, etc. But what we question is whether business is really carrying--its share of the social burden.

A psychologist's association test, for instance, would yield such verbal gems as "business" and "air pollution," "business" and "profiteering," "business" and "war," "business" and "pollution," etc. Business has cast itself in the role of the doting parent.

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Dear Mr. Chess:

I agree with you that business has done a wretched job of selling itself. We need to feel that our role in developing the highest living standards in the world is self-explanatory, and doesn't need much selling; and we are so busily engrossed, in what we're doing that we don't really have time to "sell" what we do.

Simple explanations of why a company is producing a product in the national interest don't provide the answer to "selling" business, as we at Dow are all too well aware. The fact that in the judgment of our military leaders the tactical use of napalm is effectively saving lives of our troops, and serves an indispensable role in accelerating the end of a dirty and unpopular war... the fact that there simply is no truth to reports of massive casualties among Vietnamese women and children resulting from napalm... the fact that hundreds of American doctors who have volunteered their services in Vietnamese hospitals report not having a single civilian napalm burn case, all are documented facts blandly ignored by those not responsive to reason. But I have yet to hear criticism of napalm from any returning combat veteran.

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You yourself know only too well the two-syllable association responses generated by "Dow Chemical." It is hard for us to applaud a new measles vaccine juxtaposed with such immorals.

Thus, many of the qualities we associate with business are--contrary to our very way of life. We have awakened from the slumber of a long nap, learned to challenge both political and social issue. And we question our involvement in a more-than-questionable war, business, without proper prices, taxes and pens.

This is what troubles us. As corny as it sounds, we hope to change the world. Business, meanwhile, is trying to change its image. But in so doing, it is merely creating a battle of antibacterial stereotypes.

Thus unless it decides to give itself--and not merely its image--a major overhaul, business can continue to write off the growing segment of college youth. Perhaps our dialogue will help give the corporate world the rectal kick it so desperately needs.

Sincerely,

Stan Chess
Journalism, Cornell

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