

Just When You Think You've Heard It All

Ronald M. Hendrickson

After nearly a decade of professional involvement with the chiropractic profession, I had begun to think I had heard it all. When ICA members began to call and write concerning a terribly offensive article about chiropractic by this profession's only full-time critic and detractor, William Jarvis, in the May 1990 edition of Ministry magazine, I was offended, but not surprised. When an article appeared in the employee newsletter of America West Airlines, likening a chiropractic adjustment to a "shampoo and set," making you feel good but doing absolutely nothing for your health, I was offended, even angry this time, but not surprised.

I was, however, completely surprised to hear on the radio airwaves, in advertising for a major American corporation, a commercial for Ford Motor Company's Lifetime Service Guarantee Program, which included a cynical, derisive, and mocking depiction of a doctor of chiropractic.

This commercial, a 60-second spot, played on radio stations across the nation beginning in early June. Ogilvy and Mather, the advertising agency that was responsible for the creation of the ad, provided a copy of the actual transcript which reads:

This is Daniel Pinkwater. My psychiatrist went on vacation so I thought I'd go see this Chiropractor.

So I go there; he's a strong looking little guy. And he grabs my neck and gives it a fierce yank. Then he says, "come back next week and we'll do it again."

"If I come back next week there's no charge, right?" I ask. Where did you get an idea like that?" he says.

I say, "Participating Ford and Lincoln-Mercury dealers only charge for a covered repair once. If it ever needs fixing again it's free for as long as you own the car."

"This is different," the doc says. "Listen," I tell the doc, "just ask a participating Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer about the Lifetime Service Guarantee. Doesn't matter if your car is new or used and the guarantee is free. Free parts, free labor. It's not a service contract you pay for."

"Are you sure you feel alright?" he asks.

"I feel fine," I say. "Actually, I don't think I'll be coming in next week. Ever since I found out about the Lifetime Service Guarantee, I've been feeling much better."

The commercial depicted the adjustment the person speaking in the ad received as traumatic, violent and shocking, and further implied that care would have to go on forever, unlike the one-time, lifetime guarantee for repairs by Ford.

We at the International Chiropractors' Association take all such attacks on chiropractic very seriously and respond in ways that we feel will effectively get the chiropractic message across. This was doubly true with the Ford Motor Company radio campaign.

Upon contacting the Ford Motor Company, we learned that the commercial campaign consisted of broadcast time purchased in major markets in all 50 states, and was scheduled to run from June 3 to July 1, 1990.

The response to this commercial from practicing doctors of chiropractic was about what one might expect. The reaction from Dr. Fred H. Barge, ICA's president, was both concise and emphatic:

"A broadcast commercial that implies that only mental patients see chiropractors, depicts the chiropractic adjustment process as violent and painful and leaves the impression that chiropractic care goes on in perpetuity, is not something to be taken casually. It deserves our immediate and emphatic condemnation."

Dr. Barge practices in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, and first had this commercial brought to his attention by his patients.

The potential damage a campaign like this could do to the public perception of the doctor of chiropractic was alarming, not only to us at ICA but to DCs across the country who began contacting us to ask what could be done. The ICA immediately communicated an official protest to Ford, asking that the ad campaign be suspended.

ICA's response, which was supported by spontaneous, parallel efforts by other groups, such as the North Carolina Chiropractors' Association, got the chiropractic message across to Ford rather quickly. We were notified by telephone on the afternoon of June 13 that Ford had ordered the campaign suspended. On June 14, we received a letter from Mr. A.L. Merritt, advertising and sales promotion manager at Ford's Parts and Service Division, confirming the decision. In his letter, Mr. Merritt expressed Ford Motor Company's regrets for "any embarrassment which may have been caused the chiropractic profession by our recent radio commercial." Mr. Merritt also applauded "the fervor displayed by your organization in response to an issue of concern to your members." In stating that they would immediately discontinue running these commercials, Mr. Merritt asked to be advised of radio stations who continue to play the spots over the next few weeks so that Ford can take appropriate action.

Should you hear this commercial, it is imperative that you note the station on which it was played, along with the date and time of the broadcast, and relay this information immediately to the ICA Communications and Media Relations Department at 1-800-423-4690, or directly to the Ford Motor Company, in care of Mr. Merritt at the address shown below.

ICA asks the support of DCs nationwide in an effort to further educate one of the major consumer manufacturers in this country of the value, status, and widespread utilization of chiropractic care in America.

ICA urges all chiropractors to immediately write the Ford Motor Company expressing disappointment at their negative depiction of doctors of chiropractic and explaining the health care benefits chiropractic care has given to millions of Americans over the past 100 years.

Clearly, if Ford Motor Company receives a deluge of positive communication from the chiropractic profession, this unfortunate incident may serve to advance chiropractic's image in both Ford's and the American public's eyes.

Address letter to:

Mr. A.L. Merritt
Advertising and Sales Promotion Manager

Ford Motor Company
3000 Schaefer Road
P.O. Box 1902
Dearborn, Michigan 48121

JULY 1990

©2024 Dynamic Chiropractic™ All Rights Reserved