

Spheres of Influence

Dylan is an international pop star and has millions of fans around the globe. Dylan's fame makes him a big target for companies that would like celebrities to endorse their products, and who are willing to pay millions for Dylan's support. Dylan, however, does not wish accept these offers as he feels his fans will be easily convinced to buy the products due to his endorsement alone. Dylan likes many of these products and even uses some of them himself, but believes that people should purchase products based on their own assessments of the products' merits and not because he says they should. Dylan has always been a believer in people making choices based on their own beliefs and values. Whether something is a good decision all depends on the person making that decision, and everyone is different. Dylan does understand that most decisions to purchase any product he would endorse does not depend solely on his endorsement but knows that it would be a major factor for most of his fans, a thought that makes him uncomfortable.

However, Dylan is a very charitable person and gives the majority of his money to charities like Make-A-Wish™, Save the Children, and the Polaris Project. There is one charity that is especially close to his heart, Catherine's Corner, a place in Dylan's hometown dedicated to allowing autistic children to experience music. The program almost shut down due to lack of funding but now, thanks to Dylan's support, the program is stronger than ever and able to serve more people better. Likewise, the other charities he funds are able to very effectively help many people due to his generous donations, but many of these survive almost solely on Dylan's support. He knows this and wishes to continue donating generously to ensure their continued success. Every pop star's singing career has an end, and he feels that his time is approaching fast. The millions in endorsement contracts would allow Dylan to continue funding these charities even after his pop career is complete.

While Dylan is considering all these factors, he receives a call from his agent. Dylan has been offered a 150-million-dollar, five-year endorsement contract with Halden Global Systems. Dylan has always admired this company for their fair business practices, including their commitments to equal pay for women and equal opportunity for minority advancement, and their dedication to use only ethically sourced materials in their products. Furthermore, Dylan find the CEO is "a man after his own heart," so to say. The CEO, Sara Ellis, is known for funding many charitable organizations out of her own payroll including organizations that work against sex trafficking, child labor, and third-world hunger, and along with those that help refugees who have escaped from the rule of tyrants.

The product Dylan is being hired to endorse is a revolutionary personal translation device that is meant to bridge any gaps created by language barriers. Dylan knows that using his influence to promote the product could result in millions of people who can communicate with people they could barely understand before. Yet, Dylan still feels uncomfortable with the thought that his endorsement would be a major factor for people to purchase. Dylan has been given two weeks to decide before the contract is offered to the company's second choice.

Study Questions:

1. Are Dylan's concerns about his influence being the key factor in people's decision making ethical in nature, or are they matters of personal taste?
2. What are the strongest considerations for or against Dylan taking the endorsement deal?
3. How would this case be different if Dylan was being asked to promote a specific social cause?
4. Under what conditions, if any, should people with public influence publicly support products or ideas?