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Case Analysis #1: Dick's Sporting Goods

At Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018, a gunman opened fire, killing 14 high school students and injuring another 17. Nikolas Cruz was the leading suspect in the wake of the shooting. Quickly after the shooting, now referred to as the Parkland shooting, many large companies and corporations decided to take action against the selling of guns in their stores - and Dick's Sporting Goods was at the front of the debate. Cruz had previously purchased a gun from Dick's Sporting Goods. On February 28, 2018, Dick's Sporting Goods announced that they would immediately stop selling all assault weapons and ban the sale of all guns to people under the age of 21 in 125 of their 700 stores across the country, with the intention of removing these weapons from all stores within the coming months.

Dick's Sporting Goods released press releases and social media posts on February 28, 2018, saying the following: "We deeply believe that this country's most precious gift is our children. They are our future. We must keep them safe," in addition to outlining their new policies of eliminating assault rifles in their stores. Every major media outlet picked up the story, most including quotes from CEO Ed Stack about the company's reasoning into the decision, and how they hope to pave the way for other major gun retailers. The company expected to lose a quarter of a million dollars in sales following the decision to remove the guns from their stores. "By the end of the year, Dicks attributed a sales decline of \$150 million, or 1.7% of annual

revenue, to the new policy. Stack continued to defend his stance and said the economic cost was absolutely worth it for the company” (Think Progress).

CEO Ed Stack appeared on Good Morning America the morning of the announcement; he said, “The systems that are in place across the board just aren't effective enough to keep us from selling someone a gun like that. And so we decided we wouldn't sell assault-style rifles anymore...there is no chance that we will reverse this.” Also, Stack and his family made personal visits to Parkland, showing their support for the high school students, the victims’ families, and the greater community. On GMM, Stack also stated, “If the kids can be brave enough to organize [protests] like this, we can be brave enough to take these [products] out.”

While there was initial backlash from the community on social media and through protests across the country, Dick’s Sporting Goods stood by their decision. Many pro-gun and pro-Second Amendment consumers and the National Rifle Association began protesting the decision, saying it broke citizens’ constitutional rights. Throughout the protests, Stack and the communications team continued to serve as advocates for their anti-gun choice. Sixty-two employees across the county in Dick’s Sporting Goods’ various stores quit in protest of the ban.

On the other side, many anti-gun advocates began to gain more respect and loyalty to Dick’s Sporting Goods, and they were able to gain more visibility and support from groups that hadn’t previously supported them. In the first quarter of 2019, sales rose 3.2%, as more members of the community began backing the company’s decision. In addition, the internet blogging community had a lot to say about the decision. Some bloggers and influencers were standing at both sides of the debate. Still, either way, social media and the internet were easy ways for regular citizens to be involved in the discussion. For example, many bloggers commended the

decision via social media, showing their loyalty for the Dick's Sporting Goods brand because of the decision.

In my opinion, Dick's Sporting Goods did an excellent job of sticking by their decision and standing their ground on managing the crisis. Although their initial decision was a controversial one, they portrayed an utterly united front, and they stuck by their choice throughout the whole process. Stack noted in an interview with NPR that Dick's Sporting Goods primarily "always tried to fly below the radar from a PR standpoint," but that it was important to them to be outspoken on the gun crisis, as it affects so many people across the country.

Fast forward to 2019, Dick's Sporting Goods destroyed five million dollars worth of assault weapons to be turned into scrap metal, continuing to stand their ground on the issues surrounding gun safety in America. Stack, along with 144 corporate executives, signed a letter urging Congress to expand background checks and issue stronger gun control laws in September 2019. As this issue continues to face our society, it will be interesting to see if any other major retailers that sell these types of guns and assault weapons will make similar choices for their stores. While the decision has cost Dick's Sporting Goods some of their business and customers, Stack and the corporate team have been taking a stance and making a statement about the importance of their moral values. This gun debate is still a massive issue in 2020, and many of these businesses who are making decisions like Dick's Sporting Goods' choice to remove assault rifles from their stores could affect the political decisions that have yet to come.

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