

Beaver Tips: Date Auctions

Much discussion has taken place recently on the subject of "date auctions." Various opinions have been expressed regarding whether or not date auctions are appropriate activities for student organizations. Clearly, everyone is entitled to his/her own opinion. The purpose of this statement is to discuss briefly three aspects of date auctions. It is not our intent to propose that the organizations that have sponsored date auctions in the past had any intentions of promoting or endorsing these issues. Rather, it is our intent to promote awareness of these concerns and point out potential problems and liabilities for future consideration.

- **Racial insensitivity:** Date auctions tend to have the appearance of and the "trappings" of slave auctions. Slave auctions were a very real and tragic part of the history of this country. They devalued the dignity of human beings to the level of merchandise. Regardless of the intent of a date auction, it still involves one person "bidding" for the services of another person. Whether the services consist of work or time or something else, an auction of this type consists of one person paying a second person (or organization) for the services of a third person. The bidding process invariably involves a comparison of the relative "value" of each person being auctioned. On a campus where equality, openness, and sensitivity are valued, any activity that suggests the auctioning of one human being's services to another is inappropriate.
- **Gender insensitivity:** An extension of the issues above is the need for us all to respect the rights of others and to know that a person cannot be bought. One of the dangerous attitudes that continue to exist between men and women is the concept of "whoever pays is entitled." Many date rapes result from the assumption on the part of the man or the woman or both that whoever pays for the "date" is entitled to more than the other person wanted. Date auctions can tend to create an environment where those expectations may be used to the disadvantage of one or the other participants.
- **Personal safety:** A date auction often involves a "well known" person spending time with a stranger on a "date" that he or she otherwise might not have chosen to spend time with at all. The organization sponsoring the auction has no way of knowing the motivations of the persons doing the bidding. A "fatal attraction" circumstance is possible, where the date auction becomes a very convenient means by which a person has the opportunity to "buy" some time with the person to whom he or she is attracted. Although the possibility of this scenario may seem extremely remote, it has considerable liability implications for the organization sponsoring the event.

Date auctions are usually held to raise money for good causes. The organizations have very good intentions in sponsoring the activity. Given the above concerns, which expose the potential for persons and/or groups to be offended or hurt, date auctions may be perceived to be an ill-conceived way to raise money. If an organization should want to hold an auction, we would encourage the auctioning of items, such as tickets to an event or dinners at a particular restaurant, rather than auctioning individuals. With the many positive and imaginative alternatives for raising funds, we feel date auctions should be avoided.

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