

## Lauren Bacall, Gregory Peck, and Chivas Regal Scotch: A True Story

By Arthur Shapiro



*Lauren Bacall and Gregory Peck – Designing Women*

Have you ever heard the term “Cause-Related Marketing?” It started when American Express coined the phrase in 1983 during its campaign to restore the Statue of Liberty.

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is a strategy that combines product sales or promotion with support for charitable or social causes. This strategy benefits both the company and the chosen cause. Celebrities play a significant role in enhancing the effectiveness of CRM campaigns.

This is a story about one such effort I was involved with in the 1990s as the Chief Marketing Officer for Seagram Americas. In the Spirits (liquor) business, access to mainstream advertising/marketing was limited, so making a brand “come alive” through events was important, even more so if the event was cause-related. And, over the top, if there was celebrity involvement.

The idea was to bring attention to a brand or product that helped both the charity and the brand. This effort was more worthwhile than advertising and run-of-the-mill publicity. At Seagram, despite the bootlegger origins (or maybe because of it), the owners and my management supported my cause/charity focus.

We were involved in dozens of charitable events, but one stood out.

It was the Spring of 1998, and my PR people came forward with a proposal. We were all concerned about AIDS and supported organizations working to find a cure and support those who had the dreaded disease. They told me about a fundraising event run by Bradway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. Here is how they describe themselves:

*Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS is the philanthropic heart of Broadway, helping people across the country and across the street receive lifesaving medications, health care, nutritious meals, counseling and emergency financial assistance.*

I stopped the presentation because I had known this organization for some time. All I needed to know was what, when, and where. “We are on board,” I said.

The answer was that the fundraising event would be at the Cipriani in Lower Manhattan, with “A” list celebrities. We would donate the space and food and make a substantial contribution. “Done,” I said. My only question was, which brand would they suggest as the sponsor? Absolut, Glenlivet, Captain Morgan, or what? The answer was Chivas Regal Scotch, a brand with heritage and allure to those attending. It sounded great to me.

It was an amazing evening. Marlene and I had been at incredible charitable events, but this was special. During the cocktail hour, as the head of marketing, I was asked by the PR people to participate in what is known as “Step and Repeat,” a backdrop on which a promotional logo is displayed in a design and used as a background against which celebrities attending an event, are photographed.

So, I stood beside Lauren Bacall and other celebrities (I can’t remember who exactly, but Vera Wang and Richard Gere come to mind) while the cameras clicked away.

When they were finished, I thanked them all for their presence and the opportunity. Before I could move on, however, Lauren Bacall grabbed me by the arm and said, “I like Chivas Regal; please send me a case.” I turned to our PR person and asked them to get the address where we would send the case. “No problem, Ms. Bacall. It would be a pleasure,” I replied.

No thanks, no smile, no nothing. Without missing a beat, she said, “My friend, Gregory Peck, also likes Chivas. Please send him a case as well.” I turned to the PR folks, asked them for the contact information, and assured Ms. Bacall that he would also receive a case.

I found it strange but shrugged it off. She was a star, married to Humphrey Bogart, and an Academy Award winner. Besides, she grew up in the Bronx, and I got it as a lifelong New Yorker—a tiny price to pay for her involvement.

The scene shifts. A week later, I learned that the cases had been delivered, but we had yet to receive an acknowledgment from Ms. Bacall. Hey, I thought, that’s showbiz.

But, shortly after that, I got a letter from Gregory Peck (see the attached copy) that said:

*Dear Arthur,*

*Our thanks for the beautiful gift of a case of Chivas Regal. I am a great admirer of this beverage.*

*Contrary to popular belief, our friend Mr. Sinatra did not partake exclusively of Jack Daniels. In his desert retreat, he sometimes joined me in a Chivas and Perrier, with perhaps a lemon twist or a dash of bitters.*

*With appreciation and best regards,*

*(Signed)  
Gregory peck.*

I was blown away. But still, not a word from Lauren Bacall.

A few months passed, and I was having lunch with a good friend who owned an ad agency.

I told him the story about Gregory Peck's graciousness and Lauren Bacall's silence. He laughed and told me of his encounter with Ms. Bacall.

His agency had the Morris the Cat (9 Lives Cat Food) ad campaign and hired Bacall to do the voice-over of Morris. At the end of the shoot, Ms. Bacall asked the agency (in the same brisk manner) to send her a case of each cat food flavor, half a dozen cases, as I recall. They did, of course.

Shortly after that, they learned she did not have a cat!

In NYC, we had a term for this behavior. We called it a Schnorrer. Here's the definition:

*The Yiddish word schnorrer translates to "freeloader" or "cheapskate." It can also mean someone who takes advantage of others' generosity by mooching or cadging.*

But you know what? Who cares. She gets a Hall Pass. Here's what Wikipedia has to say about her:

*Betty Joan Perske, professionally known as Lauren Bacall, was an American actress. The American Film Institute named her the 20th-greatest female star of classic Hollywood cinema. In 2009, she received an Academy Honorary Award for her contribution to the Golden Age of motion pictures.*

We should have given her a truckload of Chivas Regal.

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90077

May 26, 1998

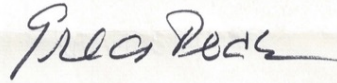
Mr. Arthur Shapiro  
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New York, NY 10022-7699

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With appreciation and best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Greg Peck". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper.

Gregory Peck Letter



Lauren Bacall



Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall



Gregory Peck