

(Continued from page 6)

again. But I can assure you and every single person who has ever supported us that... Toms will become a better, well-managed and stronger organization because of it.

Many of the blogs have been tough. Has there been any impact on business?

**BM:** No. There have been very few bright points in my life for the past six or so days, but one of them has been the unbelievable support from retailers and partners. That's been the case because I have been very involved in the business, and I have personally built very strong relationships with these people. When you do that, people get to know your heart and who you are as a human being, and when they read something that is vicious or negative by someone who has never met me before, they have reassured me that they know who [I am] and what Toms is about.

Who have you been speaking with in the footwear industry?

**BM:** I haven't spoken to people myself. I have only spoken to our head of sales, who has received comments and feedback from different people. I don't think she'd feel comfortable saying who she has or hasn't heard from, but she has assured me that it has been very positive.

Did this experience make you angry?

**BM:** Mostly I was just hurt. I have never been attacked like that before. I was hurt that the attacks would potentially be misconstrued and hurt the feelings of the people I work with and I love and I support every day.

Was this a paid speaking obligation?

**BM:** No. This was not a paid speaking obligation. Sometimes they are, sometimes they aren't.

Have you ever turned down a speaking opportunity?

**BM:** We get lots of offers to speak and, because of my schedule and running the business, we have to turn down engagements.

You've built a large gay following. Is there anything you'd say to clear the air?

**BM:** It's just that I have and always will believe in equal rights for everyone, regardless of your beliefs, religion, sexual orientation. We are all human beings and I believe that we all should have equal rights.

Is there any sort of gesture people are encouraging you to make?

**BM:** At this point, I'm trying to get through this. But as you know, when you're in the fire, it's hard

to have really deep reflection time. So one of the things I'm looking forward to — and it is very serene — is that this is happening — I'm about to leave for a scheduled shoe drop in Honduras. I've never been so excited to get back to what I love and what this company started with.

Focus on the Family still hopes to air your speech. Are you trying to get them to cancel it?

**BM:** I really don't know, to be truthful, where we are with that. I've been so focused on trying to respond I really don't know the answer to that.

How will this impact your Sept. 6 book launch?

**BM:** In looking at everything that I have unfortunately been reading, which is probably a mistake, the story seems to be dying down. I've made very clear statements about how this happened and I will put out another statement in the next couple of days further clarifying and hopefully bringing some closure to this. I hope people will see that it was never my intention and I will never let it happen to me again, to be dragged into an issues debate that I have no desire to be a part of. Hopefully this book will be a celebration of what has happened in the last five years both at Toms and for a lot of other social entrepreneurs in the book. I hope people will focus on that. — *With contributions from Natasha Bodily and Alesca Pizzi*



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