

***BUSINESS DILEMMA EDITION*****ACCOUNTABILITY IN A COMPASSIONATE ENTERPRISE**

By John D. Beckett

Dr. Gonzales was a highly skilled dentist who presented himself to his patients as unusually caring and compassionate. He took extra time so clients were reassured and understood the procedures they would be experiencing. He occasionally provided services without charge for those who could not afford them, and typically followed up to make sure his patients were making good progress after major procedures.

However, there was a problem with some members of his staff. They took advantage of their boss's tender nature, cutting corners in ways that would never be permitted in a demanding, no-nonsense workplace. These workers felt no accountability to him and did not fear having to incur any disciplinary action from him.

Dr. Gonzales decided he needed to make some changes, knowing that if he did not, eventually his patients and the reputation of his practice would suffer. He had to command the highest level of respect and professional diligence from his co-workers, without compromising his gentle and caring nature. But just how to accomplish this was another matter. He simply was not sure.

***QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION***

1. How might Dr. Gonzales establish greater accountability in his practice? Could he change the overall culture to more clearly align with his personal values and demeanor, while at the same time maintaining an efficient business model? If so, how?
2. Should he be willing to terminate and replace members of his staff to achieve this goal? Why or why not? And if so, how do you think he could best go about doing that?
3. What kinds of measures should he institute to assure sustained compliance by his staff to the standards he desires to maintain?

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## **BEST PRACTICES**

Compassion and accountability are parallel truths. They are like twin rails on which trains run. Both are necessary, even if some feel compassion and accountability are in conflict and cannot coexist. Wise business leaders strive to make certain that both qualities are fully functioning in their organizations, never emphasizing one to the exclusion of the other.

## **FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

- A passage from the Old Testament book of Proverbs clearly expresses the importance of blending both compassion and accountability in a business context: *"Let not mercy and truth forsake you"* (Proverbs 3:3).
- Jesus, in addressing a group of leaders prepared to stone a woman caught in the act of adultery, offered a classic example of how to effectively merge compassion and accountability in a real-life situation. He said to them, *"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."* After all of the woman's accusers departed, Jesus said to her with compassion, *"Neither do I condemn you."* He did not stop there. To hold her accountable, He added, *"Go, and sin no more"* (John 8:1-11).
- In my book, *Loving Monday*, I explain how, when utilized properly, compassion and accountability can serve as two sides of the same coin: "Compassion without accountability produces sentimentalism. Accountability without compassion is harsh and heartless. Compassion teamed up with accountability is a powerful force." They must be kept in balance, applying equal measures of both as needed.