

## Between The Rock and a Hard Place<sup>1</sup>

It was 4:15 on Wednesday, October 15, when Department Chair Jones reached for the computer disks and toppled a stack of exams on to the floor. As she bent to pick them up, her office door opened and the departmental secretary, Mary Granite, walked in.

"Have to go. I've got to pick up Mikey from the Day Care Center. Everything is under control in the office. A student assistant will be here in fifteen minutes to answer the phones. Here are your messages. The one on top is from the President. He called this morning about some kind of budget meeting tomorrow. You might want to give him a call before you leave. By the way, I have a doctor's appointment tomorrow so I'll be gone all day. But I've made sure that we have student coverage from about eleven o'clock on."

Chair Jones, still picking up the spilled exams, mumbled, "Okay. That's fine."

Mary turned to go, hesitated then turned back. Friday? There are some problems I need to discuss. Can we talk sometime on Friday?"

"Sure, whatever. I have class all morning. But, yes, how about after lunch?" Chair Jones paused, wondering if the problems would keep until Friday, and said, "Can you give me an idea of what you want to talk about?" Remembering Mary's appointment with the doctor, the Chair added, "is it something personal?"

"No. I'd rather not go into it right now. ... Well, it's that new fellow we hired, Dr. Rockowski. He's hypercritical. I don't know where he was last year, but he expects me to work miracles. He never gives me his work on time and thinks he's the only professor I have to support. I'm really fed up. But we'll talk about it on Friday. I have to pick up Mikey."

Before Chair Jones could reply, Mary left.

Not fifteen minutes later Dr. Rockowski knocked on the door and walked in. "You need to do something about Mary! She's never in the office. She never gets my exams finished on time. She helps out the tenured faculty, but I'm lucky if I get my phone messages. Lord knows how many I've missed because of her lies and incompetence. Last month my colleague in Denver said he left a message for me with Mary. She claims he never called. All the other assistant professors agree with me. It's past time you did something."

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<sup>1</sup> All characters, situations, and stories described here are fictional. No reference to actual persons, events, or institutions is intended or assumed. Drs. Peter and Noreen Facione developed and refined these hypothetical cases based on the experiences gained through their many decades of service as faculty, administrators, workshop presenters, and leadership consultants to colleges and universities throughout the nation.

Chair Jones sighed, hit the document save button on the computer, and turned in her chair toward Dr. Rockowski. "What happened this time?" she asked, wearily.

"I came in after lunch to check on the letter of recommendation I gave her this morning. She was late, as usual. So, I went to her computer, found my disk, and started editing the file. When she came back from lunch, she glared at me, put her purse in the desk drawer and slammed it closed. She was real snippy and rude. That's ridiculous! I mean it is departmental equipment, and I told her that I needed that letter to out in this afternoon's mail."

"Did the letter go out?"

"Yes! But it wouldn't have if I hadn't stood right over her to make sure. She would have put it at the bottom of her stack of projects."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Chair Jones.

"I don't know. You're the Chair!"

### **Questions:**

- 1) What are the issues here?**
- 2) What should the Chair do, if anything?**
- 3) How might these difficulties have been avoided, or resolved?**
- 4) What is the role of the Chair in the supervision of staff and in creating a climate of cooperation among staff and faculty?**
- 5) What information pertaining to a staff, faculty, or student's personal or family health situation or disability status may you inquire about within the law?**