

**BUSINESS DILEMMA EDITION****CAN YOU LOVE YOUR EMPLOYEES?**

By John D. Beckett

Samantha thought the advice of her graduate school professor was a little unusual – words offered as she was about to launch her business career: “Don’t get too close to your co-workers,” he said. “You never know when you’re going to have to fire someone, and you don’t want to fire your close friends.”

Soon after starting her career, Samantha began moving up the ranks at Agile, a large pharmaceutical firm, and had several associates reporting to her. While reading a book on leadership, she was drawn to the story of Vince Lombardi, the legendary football coach of the National Football League’s Green Bay Packers in the late 1950’s.

She was surprised to discover that Lombardi coached members of his team to have genuine caring for each other: “We don’t like one another, we love each other,” he said at an awards banquet in 1961. “If you play together as a team, you’ve got to care for one another, you’ve got to love each other, then you know you’ve got a team.”

Prompted by Lombardi’s example, Samantha had to make a decision. Would she keep co-workers at a safe distance, following the advice of her college professor, or would she begin extending care and compassion – love – the kind she knew she felt deep in her heart toward others?

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. Is there a difference between a business and a sports team as it relates to Samantha’s dilemma? If so, what is this difference – and how should it affect her decision?
2. How can you love employees, and yet deal with significant, even difficult performance issues when they arise?
3. If a manager gets close to fellow workers, and later has to release them, can he or she do so within the context of love? If so, how do you think this could be done?
4. What human interaction guidelines should we establish within our organizations? What effect could these have on the relationships we form with the people we report to, our coworkers, and those who report to us?

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## **BEST PRACTICES**

Considering God's amazing love for each of us, we have every reason to extend love to others, including coworkers. This does not mean blind sentimentality, nor does it require that we would be too weak to exert proper authority and provide clear direction when needed.

By working creatively and proactively, we can promote positive organizational cultures in which individuals are profoundly respected, letting them feel genuinely loved and valued, but whenever necessary, discipline and accountability are also utilized and maintained.

## **FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

- One of the unifying themes of the Bible is that of unconditional, sacrificial love. Jesus emphasized this with His followers. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another"* (John 13:34).
- We tend to look to business experts – "gurus" – for principles in operating our organizations and dealing with people. Their insights are usually very helpful, but sometimes human "wisdom" needs to be discounted in favor of applying principles from the Bible. *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord* (Isaiah 55:8).
- There are those who believe, as the college professor stated, we should not get too close to those with whom we work, fearing strong relationships could compromise our judgment. This can be a problem, but if we keep in mind our decisions are being made in the best interests of everyone, not only the company but also the individuals, love for others does not mean having to sacrifice good judgment. *"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son"* (Hebrews 12:5-6).