

A FRIEND AS AN EMPLOYEE

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This case reviews a difficult situation between an employer that ends up having to reprimand and potentially fire their neighbors' daughter. The employee, Wanda, was the daughter of the employer's neighbor. The employer had known the employee since she was 11 years old. The families had been close. The employer, a general dentist, had even paid Wanda to baby sit when she was a teenager. Now Wanda is a college graduate and her first job as an adult is as the front desk receptionist in his dental office.

Dr. Whittaker had been advertising for an open front desk position in his dental office for many months with no luck in filling the position. During a neighborhood gathering everyone was discussing their work woes and Dr. Whittaker mentioned his open position and the troubles he was having filling the position. One of his neighbors informed him that their daughter was coming home after graduation from college in June and she did not yet have a job. She had majored in business and needed a job. Dr. Whittaker asked that the next time she was home to let him know and he would arrange a formal interview. The next day he mentioned it to his wife, and she asked him if he thought that might be a little tricky if anything went wrong. Dr. Whittaker reminded his wife that they had both written Wanda recommendations for her very prestigious business program and had entrusted her to baby sit their children even when they were out of town for a long weekend.

After interviewing Wanda, Dr. Whittaker gave her a job offer. Wanda accepted the offer and started working in the office shortly after college graduation. Wanda was an eager employee and picked up on the job quickly. Dr. Whittaker felt reassured that he had made the right decision and confidently gave Wanda more and more responsibility with the front desk collections.

After nearly a year of Wanda working in Dr. Whittaker's office, he noticed a decrease in collections at check out. When he attempted to ask Wanda about office issues, she had started closing all of the open windows on her desktop of her computer including the daily office schedule. Dr. Whittaker at first brushed it off and thought that Wanda was just nervous working at her first full time job.

The dentist even discussed the collection issues with Wanda and had some additional training sessions for her with the practice manager. After a couple of months, Wanda seemed to have become more distant and things were not improving. Over the past year Wanda had already been reprimanded for poor performance twice. Dr. Whittaker was faced with the potential of having to fire Wanda. Dr. Whittaker brought her in his private office for a third reprimand along with his partner. During this session Wanda was informed if her behavior did not change that according to their protocol, outlined in the office operations manual, her employment would be terminated from the office. As all new employees, she had been given a copy of the operations manual upon acceptance of the job and had signed that she had read and understood all protocols in the manual. When asked if she understood the consequences if her performance did not improve, she acknowledged she understood. Wanda next began to cry uncontrollably. Both of the doctors tried to help her calm down before returning to work.

Once she calmed down, she started by stating her parents were going to kill her. Dr. Whittaker responded that if she changed, she would not be fired and that they would not know anything had happened that reflected poorly on her in his office. Wanda went on to explain that it was not work she was talking about. Her attention had been shifted away from work because she had been researching everything she could about pregnancy, aborting pregnancy, and adoption. Dr. Whittaker looked confused. Wanda finally came out and told him she was pregnant. Dr. Whittaker was shocked. Even though he was several years younger than her parents he felt as if Wanda was somewhat a part of his family.

Now Dr. Whitakker had reached a crossroads. What should he do? Should he tell her parents? Should he hold Wanda to her three reprimands? Should he fire her if she did not change her behavior? What advise if any should he give her? Will he be seen as playing favorites if he keeps her on if reprimanded again? *What should Dr. Whittaker do?*