

TALE OF ABIGAIL: ATHLETIC DIRECTOR'S ETHICAL DECISION*

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Abstract

A strength and conditioning coach at a Division I university is given some unfortunate news about his wife and unborn child. His grief escalates to an ethical dilemma in his career.

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Conflict Case Study
The Tale of Abigail

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2.1 The Tale of Abigail

Early Monday morning, July 2006, Abigail Cook was born 1lb. 10 oz., nearly 3 months premature. A week earlier, Brianne, Abigail's mother, suffered complications with the pregnancy and was rushed to an area hospital. Brianne and Clay Cook, worried parents, desperately awaited a prognosis for their baby from the doctor. The news was grim, but the proud parents remained strong and optimistic.

Brianne's womb had suddenly weakened and began leaking amniotic fluid, the precious source for life of her unborn baby. Abigail, physiologically underdeveloped and too weak to survive without advanced medical intervention, was given a series of treatments to strengthen the immune system and rapidly develop the capacity of the lungs in the event that the womb become toxic for survival and emergency delivery was the only viable option.

The next 48 hours were crucial, the doctor explained to the two young parents, and the hospital staff was directed to monitor the baby around the clock. Several days passed and the hour grew closer to a mandatory premature delivery. The events of Sunday evening indicated it was imperative that little Abigail be transported from the womb to the care of nurses and doctors who dedicated themselves to her survival. Chances for death were high, but Brianne and Clay relied on their faith in God that he would provide Abigail

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with the gift of life and the doctors with the ability to provide necessary treatments. Family and friends encouraged support, prayers and good wishes be bestowed upon the young Abigail Cook.

Monday was a roller coaster of emotions for Brianne and Clay as they awaited updates for their daughter every hour from the nurse on duty. Brianne began to experience severe mood changes and Clay looked for guidance from the doctors who explained that the young mother was suffering from post-partum depression. Clay remained strong for his wife and young daughter and confident for their full recovery.

Clay, the strength and conditioning coach for a Division I institution 50 miles north of the hospital, was preparing his athletes for their upcoming football season when he received word of the complications with the pregnancy. Brianne a stay at home wife and mother relies on the financial support and benefits of her caring husband. Clay, feeling a strong sense of obligation to both his career and wife, chose to return to work early Tuesday morning for his routine 5:00 a.m. practice.

Against much opposition, from his colleagues, family and friends, for his return Clay held strong to his commitment to the university. With very little sleep, Clay made the journey from the hospital 4:00 a.m. Tuesday morning and returned to his wife and daughter 4:00 p.m. After another long night filled with anxiety, desperation, lack of rest, Clay reported to workouts Wednesday morning at 5:00 a.m.

Again his staff and athletes pleaded with Clay to return to his wife and young daughter, assuring the coach that they can conduct the sessions without his direct supervision. Clay felt he owed a duty to his team and ultimately the university, yet at the same time struggled with his feeling of obligation to his family. He frantically attempted to fulfill each role as a husband, a father and his professional career paying little attention to his health and emotional well-being. After a similar routine of emotional ups and downs throughout the night, Clay again travels 50 miles north to the university Thursday morning.

The events of this day proved different than the days preceding. Clay, functioning on a total of 6 hours of sleep in 3 days, was ill tempered and short-fused during the 5:00 a.m. drills. He argued with his assistant in front of 25 football athletes over a common drill and the order in which it should be conducted. He then proceeded to confront the contractor who had been working on necessary improvements to the weight room requested 2 weeks earlier by Clay himself.

The confrontation escalated from conversation to shouting as a weight room full of athletes and coaches watched in disbelief. Clay was angry that the contractor was in the weight room working while Clay was conducting strength sessions. Clay believed the contractor to be a nuisance and requested that the contractor leave while his work out was in session. After several minutes of shouting, the contractor instructed his son, who was helping his father during his summer break before his senior year, to collect his tools so that they may leave.

In the meantime, Clay, now in a rage, clenching a ten-pound weight in his fist, hurled the dumbbell in the direction of the two workers striking the young boy in his chest. As the athletes stared in dismay, the assistant coach rushed over to the young boy who lay on the floor both in shock and in pain.

Immediately after the smoke cleared in the weight room, Clay was summoned to the athletic director's office for a meeting.

Questions:

1. What are the ethical concerns involved in this case? How do these concerns create conflict?
2. What do you believe is the correct and ethical course of action for the athletic director?
3. Should the athletic director consider the pressure faced by Clay Cook in his decision to relieve him of his duties at the university?