

Dan Hardy is a teacher of U.S. history, the only subject he has taught during his 5 years at a high school in an upper socioeconomic community. The students are highly motivated to do well and to continue their education at the top universities in the state. Mr. Hardy is well liked by most of his students. He spends a lot of class time providing examples of how to relate concepts in history to current events. He also uses group work during class, such as debating a controversial historical issue and predicting what would have happened if a particular event had not occurred. Mr. Hardy assigns homework that typically involves thinking and writing about issues discussed during class. Because his assignments are thought-provoking and because most of his students are eager to learn, Mr. Hardy rarely has problems with students completing assignments.

At the beginning of Mr. Hardy's third-period class, he asks students to pass their homework to the front person in each row. As he reaches the third row, he notices that Jason's assignment is missing from the stack. This is the fourth day in the past 2 weeks that his assignment has not been completed. Jason was told after missing his last assignment that one more incomplete grade would earn him a trip to detention.

After class, Mr. Hardy asks Jason to stay for a minute. Mr. Hardy asks, "Why didn't you turn in your homework assignment today?"

"I don't know," Jason answers. "I guess I forgot about it, Mr. Hardy."

Mr. Hardy wonders whether he really forgot about it or instead was having difficulty understanding the material or organizing his thoughts. "Well, you will need to spend 1 hour in detention after school today to complete the missed work. Please be sure to stop by the office and notify your parents that you will be home late today," Mr. Hardy requests.

"I can't stay today—I have basketball practice," Jason replies. "If I miss practice, I will have to miss the game Friday night."

"Well, I warned you after your last missed homework assignment that you would be sent to detention if you missed another assignment," Mr. Hardy states. "You were aware of this classroom rule. I suggest you spend your hour today completing your missing assignments for the class."

When the last bell rings at the end of the day, Jason walks to Coach Gil Hanson's office and tells him why he will not be at basketball practice. Coach Hanson, upset that Jason's detention would mean facing the school's archrival without a star player, offers to discuss the issue with Jason's teacher and with the principal, Ms. Alice Krug.

In the principal's office, the coach makes his case to Mr. Hardy and Principal Krug. "I understand that Jason has missed some assignments in history class and is now in detention," he says. "As a result, he is missing basketball practice today and, by the rules, cannot play in Friday night's game. Is there something we can work out as a compromise?"

Principal Krug turns to Mr. Hardy and says formally, "What is your class rule about completing assignments and detention?"

"The rule is four incompletes result in detention until the student no longer has four incompletes. I rarely need to enforce this rule, but Jason is missing four assignments," Mr. Hardy explains. "I gave him a

warning when he had missed three assignments, but he came to class again today without his homework.”

“Can’t you make an exception in this case?” Coach Hanson suggests. “Jason is overall a good student and an excellent athlete.”

Principal Krug interjects, “I believe that a rule is a rule. If this is the system that Mr. Hardy has set up for his class, then we must all support his efforts. Jason will not be at practice and hence cannot play in the game Friday night.”

“Well, the no practice/no game rule is my own team rule, not a school rule. I am willing to bend the rule in this case. The rule has been bent before for cases of illness and family vacations,” Coach Hanson replies.

“I was not aware of that,” the principal says. “I suggest that you change the rule to better reflect the practice. However, you and I can discuss this issue later, in private.”

Back in detention, Jason begins to gather his notes for the assignments he did not complete during the past few weeks. He quickly realizes that he has not taken good notes and cannot remember clearly Mr. Hardy’s demonstration of how to complete the assignment, nor has he really participated with his classmates during the group work. Jason remembers that he did not do well in history during middle school because he wasn’t good at keeping dates and facts straight.