

# THE SET FREE LIFE

## Doing Right Saves More than Money

In 1994, Jabbar Collins was 21 years old with a GED and an unfocused life. His father had died when he was 12 and, while his mother worked two jobs and went to school, he'd played around. He was attempting to get his act together by taking some college classes when the entire course of his life changed in a moment: he was arrested for the murder of Rabbi Abraham Pollack, who had been shot at a building in Brooklyn where he was collecting rent.

Three witnesses said they saw Jabbar do the murder. He sat through the trial, listening to their lies, unable to comprehend what was happening. He was convicted and led away to prison, where he spent the next 15 years giving himself a legal education by scouring the law library.

Jabbar learned how to file requests for the records related to his trial. He was frequently denied, but after unfathomable persistence, he ended up with boxes of documents and audio tapes. He contacted 2 of his accusers and listened to the 911 tape of the third, who had testified he saw Jabbar running away from the scene; none of the calls on the tape sounded like the voice of the witness.

What he discovered was something that unfortunately does not surprise us: the lead prosecutor, Michael Vecchione, had pressured the witnesses. One had violated probation and was promised it would not be revoked if he testified against Jabbar Collins, later signing an affidavit attesting to this unholy deal, but that affidavit was not provided to Jabbar's attorney during the trial. Another witness, arrested as an accessory to a robbery and impaired by the drugs he'd been taking for weeks, was given a charge with a sentence far less punitive than what it would have been had he refused to sign a statement implicating Jabbar.

Jabbar made progress, but it took many years. He found a lawyer to help him when he reached a point where he did not have the standing to file particular requests. That lawyer found a judge who reviewed Jabbar's meticulous work and granted a request for additional information from the prosecutor's office, which yielded a document from the 911 witness indicating the testimony had been recanted. This document, too, had not been turned over to Jabbar's defense counsel.

Jabbar and his lawyer filed a motion for a new trial based on evidence that had been withheld. The D.A.'s office then offered to reduce the charge against him, allowing him to go free immediately. Jabbar refused. Then the prosecutors stated they would not

fight the overturning of the conviction but the case would be retried. Jabbar's lawyer went to the judge, arguing against retrying the case because of Michael Vecchione's misconduct, and brought out the 911 witness, who told of Vecchione's threats and coercion. Testimony from Vecchione and the other prosecutors was scheduled when suddenly, the D.A.'s office backed down completely, indicating that even though the office stood by its belief in Jabbar's guilt, there were now clearly "weaknesses" in the case and it would not retry.

The judge overturned Jabbar's conviction, and he walked out of prison this past June. He's filing a 60 million dollar lawsuit against the state of New York. No one has done anything about Michael Vecchione, which seems the real crime in this story.

I ask you: do values matter in the workplace? Do they make a difference in an organization's management? Does integrity truly mean something to the bottom line? Does hiring people who exhibit honesty, fairness, prudence, and leadership benefit a company, giving it powerful business value? One person who read the account of this ordeal noted that the consequences of Jabbar Collins' conviction were a long time in prison and a hands-on legal education forged in the furnace of affliction. The consequences for the Brooklyn D.A.'s office are a reputation of corruption and the certain cost to the taxpayers of millions. (Not to mention the concern of potentially devastating evidence of Vecchione's misconduct in other cases.)

"But none of my people are in a position like Michael Vecchione's," you might say. "I just deal with everyday workers, people who don't hold other people's lives in their hands." So I won't go into the story of Tyrone Montgomery, who stalked Gayle Isleib and shot her in the head with a gun he'd purchased illegally with the help of the sporting goods manager at the Wal-Mart in Manchester, Connecticut. The manager destroyed evidence of the transaction and then lied to police. An everyday kind of worker. At Wal-Mart.

Character matters for you, your employees, and your business. How are you addressing it? 🧑



*Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her work on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused companies and business organizations throughout the country to value her consulting skills. She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.*

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Hachiko: A Dog's Story

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# Teddy Bear Says...



We dogs are known for our characteristic of loving unconditionally. Humans throughout the ages have written and spoken of it. "Thorns may hurt you, men desert you, sunlight turn to fog; but you're never friendless ever, if you have a dog," wrote Douglas Malloch, a poet and short story writer born after the Civil War.

We simply can't help our devotion. Oh, sure—there are dogs who aren't loving or friendly, but mostly this is a result of some unfortunate breeding or training. It really is our nature to love. We relate to the commitment of the famous

[Hachiko](#), known and revered throughout Japan, who waited every day for his professor at the train station. After his beloved master died suddenly at work, Hachiko continued to wait—for nine years. The Akita died in 1934 and is memorialized in a statue outside of Tokyo's Shibuya railroad station.

Many dog lovers know of [Greyfriars Bobby](#), a little terrier in Edinburgh, Scotland in the second half of the 19th century who stood vigil at his master's grave for fourteen years. Shep, a Montana shepherders dog, waited for his dead master for more than five years during the Great Depression, and he has a statue, too, in Fort Benton. Homer, the great Greek poet, told of a dog who waited for 20 years to see his master come home from war: "Takes a last look, and having seen him, dies; So closed forever faithful Argus' eyes." There are probably scores of stories like this, never documented, that have no statues or plaques to mark the depth of affection of a canine for a human being.

It doesn't matter, because our love is our reward. It makes us feel good to love. We'll do what we can to communicate to you we think you are all that. "You can say any fool thing to a dog," says humorist Dave Barry, "and the dog will give you this look that says, 'My God, you're right! I never would have thought of that!'"

While dog love is often viewed as exceptional, there is a love that can be generally communicated in dealing with others in everyday settings. It's the love of valuing close relationships with others, of sharing of one's self, of caring about others. It's viewing creatures for what they often are: stumbling, flustered, insecurity-ridden, clueless travelers who can't always see themselves from another's

## Quotable

The more I see of men, the more I admire dogs.

*Madame Roland (1754-1793)*

Contact Sue today to learn how she can meet your business needs

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perspective. It's the forgiveness of a manager who overlooks the non-talent of a subordinate while recognizing the true gifts he or she brings to the job. It can be the high expectations that demand the best of one who needs to be challenged. It is the recognition that pretty much everyone is doing the best they can with what they have; quite often, that best is not a whole lot, but it may be all they've got.

You might not be able to express the unending, far-reaching, nearly divine love of a dog, but your capacity to value others even in their weaknesses is an important tool wherever you operate. After all, any old dog can communicate the timeless message: "I'm listening. I won't run from you." That message can change a mood, lighten the tension, help someone open up. It can transform a working relationship. It can cause you to see when someone is doing their most to say, "I'm sorry," even if they are clumsy about it.

Dog trainer Charlotte Schwartz, writing of how dogs help humans, wrote: "For perhaps, if the truth were known, we're all a little blind, a little deaf, a little handicapped, a little lonely, a little less than perfect. And if we can learn to appreciate and utilize the dog's full potentials, we will, together, make it in this life on earth." As a dog, allow me to add that if humans can learn to appreciate and emulate dogs in compassion, in a willingness to forgive people for not being more than they are, in an inclination to wait patiently, then life will be made a bit easier for everyone.

Dogs know it, and you can, too. 🐕

## Image is Everything Except When it's Not

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