

SECTION 1

Face It



Chapter 1

Trouble

Relieved to be finally on his way, Jon sighed as he settled into the backseat of the yellow taxi. Half smiling, he turned to wave to his wife and nine-year old son, Ben.

Anne's right, he thought, I should be here for Ben's All Star game; he's the starting pitcher. But I have no choice. This trip might just save my job.

The last few months had been difficult for Jon. After 20 years of working at Provident Hospital, his promotion to Director of Human Resources should have marked the high point of his career. And at first, it had. Less than a year ago, he initiated a daring new program he called "On a Mission," geared to eliminate certain problems that had long plagued the hospital, such as low morale and high turnover. One of the keys to the program's success was a new mission statement that put patients at the top of the hospital's priorities. At the time, the program sparked a renewed energy and excitement throughout the medical center. In particular, the physicians, nurses, and other medical staff seemed pleased to have received permission to do whatever it took not only to provide the best treatment possible to their patients, but to make their stay comfortable, dignified, and personalized. Jon had

received tremendous kudos for his innovative thinking, including a feature in a national business magazine that pegged him one of America's top-ten "Ones to Watch."

Lately, though, enthusiasm for the program was waning. Staff morale, and hospital revenue, were declining rapidly. Turnover was higher than before the program's implementation, and Jon had no idea why. For the first time in decades, the hospital was hit with a malpractice suit. Ultimately, the suit was dismissed but the incident left everyone involved, including Jon, badly shaken. The hospital was in trouble. And if the hospital was in trouble, Jon was in trouble.

"Face it," Donald Olsten, the hospital's president, had told him the day before, "your program is failing. I'm seeing the same old problems all over again."

"I know," Jon quickly interjected, "but I think with a little time and patience . . ."

Donald went on as though Jon hadn't spoken. "I was hoping to explore solutions during the annual executive retreat, but now I have to attend an emergency meeting of the board. Normally I'd send the Executive VP," he looked away from his computer and directly at Jon, "but considering it was at your insistence that we adopt this new program, it seems to me that it's up to you to find a way to make it work. Otherwise, we'll have to start

considering layoffs. I'm sending you on the retreat in my place. That's not a problem, is it?"

Jon knew that it would, in fact, be a problem, considering the last-minute nature of the trip. But he simply nodded and started making plans to leave the next day.

Then, out of nowhere, a thought hit him like a ton of bricks: *Oh, my goodness. Donald was interviewing for an executive position here and we don't have any openings budgeted. Oh no!* He felt his face flush, his pulse elevate, and the thump, thump, thumping of his heart as he considered the possibility that Donald was interviewing for his replacement.

Jon felt a huge storm of fear and betrayal. *I couldn't have put more of myself into this job if I did nothing else in my life. How could they do this to me? What am I going to do? Who can I talk with about this? At this point, I don't know who my friends are or whom I can trust.*

His wife, Anne, was furious when he came home and told her he was leaving. "Again?" she stormed, "You just got back from that conference in Georgia. And what about the opening?"

Jon winced. Before she had decided she needed to spend more time with their son, Anne had been the director of a prominent art gallery in town. Eager to put her professional experience to good use, for the past two years she had volunteered

countless hours as an art buyer and consultant for the new children's hospital. The grand opening was that Friday.

Anne pursed her lips. "I know you didn't ask for this, but I feel like you never say no to anyone but Ben and me. No matter what the hospital asks of you, you agree to it. All day, all night, sometimes weekends, too. Try to understand, I've worked hard for this. It's a major media event, and I want you to be there with me."

"I know, Anne. The timing is terrible. But Donald is right, the program is my baby. I'm the reason we implemented it at the hospital. No one knows it better than I do, and it makes sense for me to be the one to fix it. And another thing. . . ." He held his tongue before saying, "My job is so much on the line that Donald is probably interviewing my replacement."

Then he said something he wished he could take back. "Besides, my job is the reason you were able to take on this project in the first place. It has to come first."

Anne stood still, pale. Jon had never seen her so angry.

"So, your work is more important than mine, is that it?"

"Well, no, but . . ."

"Please, don't say anything else." She turned to go up the stairs. Over her shoulder, she said,

“You know, it’s not just the opening. You’re also going to miss Ben’s game.”

For Jon, facing his young son’s disappointment was even more difficult than dealing with Anne’s understandable wrath.

“Benny-boy, I’m sorry. You know I wish I could be here for your game. Pitch a good one for me, will you? We’ll do something special when I get back, I promise. Whatever you want to do. Okay, buddy?”

His son’s silence had said just as much as his slumped shoulders.

In the taxi, Jon sat up straight as he thought to himself, *I’ll make it up to them as soon as I get back. Right now, I’ve got to stay positive and focus. I know I can get the hospital back on track. I have to. I really don’t want to get fired.*

With a half hour to go before arriving at the airport, Jon refocused his mind on the upcoming retreat. *A week with a group of the most successful business leaders in America might not be so bad. Maybe their success would rub off on me. Maybe they can help me to find a solution to the hospital’s problems.* He closed his eyes and tried not to think about the flight ahead.

