

Product Code A0250-F

DR. J'S PEOPLE

**A FULL-LENGTH DRAMA
BASED ON REAL-LIFE EVENTS**

by Robert L. Kinast

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

PRINCIPLES

JAYLENE JAMES; *early to mid-thirties, "Dr. J" of the title, energetic, resourceful, committed to helping others, not afraid of confrontation but prefers cooperation, assumes (too easily perhaps) that people speak and act honestly*

AL JAMES; *early to mid-thirties, husband of Jaylene, lobbyist for the Organic Farmers of America, sounding board and support for Jaylene, has a slightly sarcastic sense of humor*

DARIUS; *fiftyish, African-American, ex-felon, street-wise, straightforward, unofficial leader of his peers and interpreter of events*

LOIS; *fiftyish, influential member of her church, has a somewhat righteous attitude, controlling if not manipulative, enjoys having and using power*

LORENZO; *late twenties, African-American, ex-felon, independent almost cocky attitude, resistant to (white) systems and rules, difficult to trust*

MINOR CHARACTERS

THE "CHORUS"; *six-eight actors who deliver commentary as a group throughout the play and portray the minor characters listed below*

BETSY; *Human Resources director for a major, local hotel*

KATHY; *supervisor with the Parole Commission*

ISAIAH; *thirtyish, African-American, ex-felon, eager to begin a new life*

BILL REYOLDS; *opinion columnist for local newspaper*

WILLIE; *thirtyish, African-American, ex-felon, a victim of circumstances*

JAKE HOLMQUIST; *fiftyish, Human Resources director for a large, local university*

MR. GIFFORD; *fortyish, owner of a construction company*

REPRESENTATIVE ROTH; *fortyish, Caucasian, Congressional Representative*

CLYDE FERGUSON; *fiftyish, owner of a body repair shop*

MARK; *staff coordinator for the Chief Justice of the United States*

EMPLOYERS; *hiring, contemplating hiring, or refusing to hire ex-convicts*

SETTING

Washington, DC in the late 1970s.

Playwright's Background Note

In 1977 a church in Washington, DC hired a young woman to find two jobs a week for ex-felons. With little more than a telephone and her determination, she transformed that goal into a successful program that gained national attention and eventually led to a new project under the sponsorship of the Chief Justice of the United States. With one exception the people and events portrayed in this play are all drawn from the actual history of the original program, called Liberation of Ex-Offenders Through Employment Opportunities or LEEO for short. "Lois" who is the antagonist in the play is fictional, introduced only for dramatic purposes. As a matter of fact, the church and its members were extremely supportive of the efforts of Dr. J, the nickname given her by the ex-offenders she worked with and for. This play, therefore, is in part a professional memoir and in part a personal tribute to Dr. J, who is also my wife.

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ACT I; SCENE 1

(AT RISE: JAYLENE and AL seated outside an office where LOIS and two male church members played by TWO CHORUS MEN, are seated at a conference table interviewing an APPLICANT for the new inmate employment placement program at the church. JAYLENE, who is applying for the position as well, nervously waits her turn. The two areas are separated by a partition. LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE and AL discussing the situation. The LIGHTS REMAIN DOWN on LOIS and the MEN at the conference table.)

Jaylene

(Paces nervously, looks at her watch, drums her fingers on her arm) I wish I still smoked.

Al

Take some deep breaths; they're a lot better for you.

(JAYLENE inhales deeply two or three times then begins pacing again.)

You weren't this nervous before your dissertation defense last month.

Jaylene

That's because I was totally prepared for my defense. I knew more about my research project than the whole dissertation committee combined. This? I don't know what to expect.

Al

It's only a job interview, Jay. If you don't get this one, there'll be others.

Jaylene

But I **want** this one.

Al

I know, I know. We've examined it a dozen different ways and the answer always comes out the same: "it speaks to you."

Jaylene

Well, it does.

Al

And we both know what that means.

Jaylene

But this time I don't get to make the decision. It's up to them, and I don't know what they're really looking for.

Al

Sure you do. You've read the job description.

Jaylene

"Seeking a self-motivated individual who can take initiative and has a high tolerance for frustration." That can mean almost anything.

Al

You left out the part about finding two jobs a week.

Jaylene

For ex-felons no less. Only members of a church would think that's possible.

Al

You think it's possible, and you're not a church member—of this church anyway.

Jaylene

I don't know if that goal's possible or not, but the idea of a program to help ex-felons find jobs is just the kind of practical, results-oriented work I'm looking for. *(Pause)* How much longer do you think they'll be with the guy they're interviewing now?

Al

(Puts his ear to the partition and listens for a few moments) He's still describing his experience as a job developer.

Jaylene

Oh great! I hope they don't ask me if I have that kind of experience.

Al

I'm sure whatever they ask you, you'll answer just fine.

Jaylene

Not if I have to pee, which I do right now. If they call for me, tell them I'll be back in a minute. Unless you want to take the interview for me.

Al

Go pee.

(JAYLENE exits. AL listens at the partition, takes out a small notepad and jots down what he hears. After a few moments JAYLENE returns.)

Jaylene

Did I make it?

Al

With time to spare. Here are a couple questions they just asked while you were . . . away.

(JAYLENE takes the notepad and walks slowly back and forth, formulating her answers to the questions. During this time the APPLICANT exits the conference table. INTERVIEWER crosses to the waiting area.)

Interviewer I

Miss James? We're ready for you.

(JAYLENE stops pacing, inhales deeply, and looks at AL who gives her a thumbs-up signal. LIGHTS down on waiting area and up on the other side of the divider as JAYLENE enters the conference room. During the interview, AL listens at the partition.)

Lois

Good evening, Miss James . . . or should I say "Doctor James?"

Jaylene

Actually, Jaylene is fine with me.

Lois

I'm Lois Burch. I chair the Board that will oversee this program, once it begins. These two gentlemen are also Board members. Shall we get started?

Interviewer I

Thank you for meeting with us tonight, Jaylene.

Jaylene

Thank **you** for inviting me. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this position with you.

Interviewer II

Why are you interested in this job?

Jaylene

I've always wanted to help people, especially the ones nobody else seems to care about.

Interviewer II

That might classify you as a do-gooder, in the eyes of some.

Jaylene

I don't consider myself a "do-gooder," if you mean that in a negative or pejorative way. I want to do good, though, as I assume you do in starting this program.

Interviewer I

Why do you want to help ex-offenders, specifically?

Jaylene

Because of an experience I had recently at the women's federal prison in Alderson, West Virginia. I had never been in a prison before or even met an inmate. It was all new to me and to tell you the truth, I was actually kind of scared about going into a prison, even with supervision.

Interviewer I

Then why did you go?

Jaylene

I was invited by my dissertation director to be part of a team she put together to visit the women and identify some of their needs. She thought it would be a good opportunity to apply my book learning to real problems, but it turned out to be much more than that.

Interviewer I

In what way?

Jaylene

As I met the inmates, I realized that they were just ordinary women who had made a mistake or used bad judgment or trusted their boy friends too much. They didn't need to be in jail; they needed help to avoid those same mistakes in the future.

Interviewer II

So, you had this one experience with women prisoners and now you want to work with ex-offenders.

Jaylene

It was only one experience, yes, but it wasn't just any experience. As I listened to their stories, I realized those women were victims as much as victimizers. Some of them hadn't seen their children in over a year because there's almost no way for poor people to get to that prison and nowhere nearby to stay.

Interviewer II

But what does that experience have to do with finding jobs for ex-felons?

Jaylene

Being with those women made me realize how hard it must be for any of them to come out of prison and fit right back into society. Having a job has got to be the key factor, and I felt a strong desire, I'd even say a calling, to do whatever I could to help them make that transition from cell to society.

Interviewer I

Your doctorate is in special education, isn't it, Jaylene? How do you see that qualifying you for this position?

Jaylene

Reflecting on my experience at the women's prison, I see several parallels between helping children with learning disabilities and helping ex-inmates find jobs.

Interviewer I

Could you elaborate?

Jaylene

Both require the same kind of approach. First of all, you have to identify the source of the problem. Next, you have to search out the available resources to deal with it. Then you design a program or system, try it out, evaluate it, and make changes for improvement. That's what I did for my dissertation anyway.

Interviewer I

What differences do you see?

Jaylene

Probably the biggest difference is that children are expected, even required by law, to learn. Nobody's required to hire ex-offenders.

Interviewer II

So how do you propose to get employers to hire them?

Jaylene

I'd take a similar approach, find out what an employer is looking for in an employee and do everything possible to meet, or exceed, those expectations.

Interviewer II

What if you can't?

Jaylene

Then I'd assume that employer isn't right for this program.

Interviewer II

Have you had any experience in the business world?

Jaylene

I don't have any professional business experience, but I've watched how my father runs his firewood and patio company. Everyone who calls or comes into his shop is treated as the most important person in the world. He's even sold wood to customers who dialed his number by mistake.

Interviewer II

And you think that's all it takes?

Jaylene

Obviously, that's not **all** it takes, but it's where it starts. After that, you have to deliver. And I'm into delivery of services.

Interviewer I

How do you feel about working in a church-sponsored program, Jaylene?

Jaylene

Actually, that's one of the aspects that appeals to me about this job. I assume we have a shared value system in wanting to help those in need.

Interviewer I

What's your own religious affiliation, if I may ask?

Jaylene

I was raised Catholic, but at the moment I'm searching for a spiritual home.

Interviewer I

Perhaps we can provide it for you.

Jaylene

If you could provide that, I'd welcome it very much.

Interviewer I

I'm afraid we can't provide much more, in terms of salary, benefits, even resources for the job.

Jaylene

I'm aware of those limits, sir, but I live a simple life and have few financial needs—at this point.

Interviewer II

You're married, aren't you?

Jaylene

Yes, I've been married for three years.

Interviewer II

Any children?

Jaylene

No, no children.

Interviewer II

You do realize that we expect the person we hire to complete a two-year commitment.

Jaylene

If I'm hired, I'll work for the full two years—at least.

(A long, somewhat awkward pause. LOIS looks at both INTERVIEWERS whose gestures suggest they have nothing further to ask.)

Lois

Well, I think that about does it. Thank you again for your time, Jaylene.

Jaylene

Thank you for **your** time, and for wanting to start a program like this. I hope we'll be able to work together.

Lois

We'll be in touch.

(JAYLENE stands, exits, and greets AL on the other side of the partition. HE gives her a big, tight hug.)

Al

You were great, at least the parts I could hear. Some of the questions were kind of muffled.

Jaylene

Some of the questions were kind of testy, especially from that one interviewer. Implying I'm just a "do-gooder" and practically dismissing what I experienced with the women at that prison.

Al

Maybe he just wanted to see how you'd react. If you get this job and start contacting employers to hire ex-cons, you're going to face a lot of resistance.

Jaylene

I prefer that to silence. That chairwoman, Lois, didn't ask a single question. Just kept staring at me.

Al

Maybe she wants to remain neutral.

Jaylene

It felt parental to me, like that one interviewer practically telling me not to get pregnant in the next two years.

Al

You know how **I** feel about that.

Jaylene

This would only be for two years.

Al

Two **more** years, you mean. Added to the last three.

Jaylene

C'mon, Al, we both agreed to wait till I finished my degree. Besides, I may not even get this job.

Al

Did you get a sense of how they felt at the end?

Jaylene

“We’ll be in touch.” Whatever that’s worth.

Al

Well, I think we should go celebrate, while we wait for them to be in touch.

Jaylene

That could be days.

Al

All the better.

(LIGHTS DOWN. END ACT I; SCENE 1.)

ACT I; SCENE 2

(AT RISE: JAYLENE’S office, represented by a desk/table and chair with a telephone, telephone directory, and a filing cabinet. The impression is a less-than bare bones “office.” JAYLENE enters, places a briefcase on the desk, removes her jacket, looks around for where to hang it, then drapes it over the chair. SHE stares for a moment at the telephone, picks up the directory and fans the pages. SHE sighs deeply, then looks at the audience with an expression of ambiguity and concern that borders on being overwhelmed.)

Jaylene

Two jobs a week . . . for ex-offenders . . . and I don’t know a single employer in this city. How am I going to do this?

(A CHORUS OF 4-6 MEN and WOMEN, enter one by one and begin briskly criss-crossing in front of and behind JAYLENE, eventually forming a circle around her while bombarding her with advice.)

Adviser 1

What you need to do is find out about other programs like yours.

Adviser 2

See what works

Adviser 3

And what doesn't.

Adviser 4

Don't reinvent the wheel.

Jaylene

But how do I find out about other programs?

(The CHORUS comes to an abrupt halt which momentarily resumes.)

Adviser 4

You should meet with the Parole Commission.

Adviser 2

The Bureau of Prisons.

Adviser 3

The Warden at the state facility.

Adviser 1

The Justice Department.

Jaylene

Can you help me get appointments with any of those people?

(Once again the CHORUS comes to an abrupt halt then momentarily resumes.)

Adviser 4

You need to have more visibility.

Adviser 3

Write an op-ed piece.

Adviser 1

Get a TV interview.

Adviser 2

Talk to civic groups, churches, community organizers.

Jaylene

What will I say? I haven't actually done anything yet.

(And again the CHORUS comes to an abrupt halt then momentarily resumes.)

Adviser 1

Make an organizational chart.

Adviser 2

Outline the steps of an intake process.

Adviser 4

Put together a list of prospective employers.

Adviser 3

Project an expansion of services.

Jaylene

Those are just ideas. I'm supposed to be finding jobs.

(The CHORUS halts once again then resumes.)

Adviser 2

All you have to do is get connected with the right people.

Adviser 3

Join the Chamber of Commerce.

Adviser 1

The Alliance of Business.

Adviser 4

The Private Industry Council.

Jaylene

I'm only one person! How can I do all this?

(The CHORUS halts then, this time, encircles JAYLENE at her desk. AL enters and parts the CHORUS which steps SR, forming a kind of Greek chorus with ADDITIONAL CHORUS MEMBERS who will articulate common opinions and attitudes throughout the rest of the scene.)

Al

You can't. And you shouldn't. At least, you shouldn't try to do everything all at once, especially with no staff, no equipment, and no real support. Just this so-called "office" in the basement of the church.

Jaylene

Thanks a lot. Tell me something I don't already know.

Al

(With an air of delight and surprise) The head of Human Resources at the Hotel Roosevelt is willing to talk to you about hiring one of your clients.

Jaylene

What!

Chorus

(Spoken with a chant-like cadence)

*Probably not sincere.
Only said yes as a favor.
Doesn't know the whole story.
Will find an excuse not to hire.*

Jaylene

But I don't have any clients yet. Nobody at the Parole Commission will return my calls.

Al

Then pay them an unannounced visit. Or hang a "help wanted" sign outside the church. Or camp out at the courthouse and grab somebody who's just been released from custody.

Jaylene

You know I don't operate like that, Al. I've worked out a process and I intend to follow it. First, a referral from a parole or probation officer, then a screening interview, then a contract, then a job search.

Al

All well and good, but you're going to have a harder time getting employers than ex-offenders. And this is an interested employer.

Jaylene

How do you know?

Al

Jimmy Farrell said so.

Jaylene

The guy you had lunch with a couple days ago?

Al

The guy who's chief of staff for Congressman Monroe, chairman of the Agriculture Committee and the key Congressman for getting the Organic Farmers of America included in the appropriations bill this year.

Jaylene

Sorry. I can't keep up with all your lobbying activity.

Al

You don't have to. Just be loving and supportive, and buy organic. Anyway, I told Jimmy you were hired to start this ex-offender employment program, and he mentioned it to his sister who runs H.R. at the Roosevelt, and she said she'd be interested in talking with you.

Jaylene

How interested?

Al

How do I know? "Interested" sounds like it's worth a phone call.

Jaylene

(Picks up the phone) That **is** one resource the church has provided. I trust you have her number.

Al

Better than that. I have her business card.

(AL hands JAYLENE the business card; JAYLENE dials. LIGHTS DOWN on JAYLENE as SHE waits for a response and LIGHTS UP on the CHORUS. JAYLENE crosses to a table and takes a seat across from BETSY, the head of H.R. at the Roosevelt Hotel)

Chorus

*Unemployment's high; recession's strong.
Why give a job to an ex-offender
When lawful citizens can't find work?
Why run the risk of crime on the job,
Morale being lowered, tensions being raised?
Why do more than society requires:
Serve your time, learn your lesson, and stay out of trouble.*

(LIGHTS DOWN on CHORUS, which crosses USC, and UP on JAYLENE and BETSY, who is reading a flow chart JAYLENE has given her.)

Betsy

If this works as well in practice as it looks on paper, I'd know more about a referral **you** send me than almost anyone else I'd hire.

Jaylene

And we'll provide support services like transportation and uniforms, and if the person doesn't work out, we'll take care of the termination.

Betsy

That's the part of your program I like best, Jaylene. I've never found an easy way to tell someone they're fired.

Jaylene

Hopefully, it won't come to that with our clients. But as I mentioned, I haven't been able to meet with anyone at the Parole Commission yet and until I do, I can't start the process.

Betsy

That's all right. I can't hire anybody till the end of the month. And if your system isn't in operation by then, stay in touch anyway. We have a fairly steady turnover with our entry level jobs, even though we pay above minimum wage and add in benefits. Here, FYI.

(BETSY hands JAYLENE a sheet of paper.)

Jaylene

A job description! I can't tell you how much your interest means to me, Betsy.

Betsy

I'm always looking for good workers, no matter where they come from.

Jaylene

I hope other employers feel that way.

Betsy

(Looking at the flow chart as she speaks) I'm sure they do. Enough of them anyway, for—what is it—two jobs a week?

Jaylene

That's right.

Betsy

Good luck.

(LIGHTS DOWN on Betsy's office. JAYLENE returns to her desk in the office. LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE as THE PHONE RINGS.)

Jaylene

Hello, "Workers for You." Jaylene speaking. *(Pause)* Really? Kathy White from the Parole Commission? Did you get the packet I sent, about our program and why I need to meet with you . . . or with someone from the Commission? *(Pause)* Yes, yes, tomorrow's fine. Whatever time you say. *(Pause)* You want to come here? Fine, I'll be here. And thank you very much.

(JAYLENE breaks into a smile. SHE gives a "fist pump" in the air as LIGHTS DOWN on desk and LIGHTS UP on the CHORUS.)

Chorus

*Government bureaucrats love to meet.
Talk is their action; memos, their goal.
Agendas, their plans; references, their help.
Get what you can, but don't be surprised
If the follow-through's faulty when you need it the most.*

(LIGHTS DOWN on CHORUS which crosses SL as LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE and KATHY at Jaylene's desk.)

Kathy

I'd heard something about this church looking for someone to start an employment program for ex-felons, but that was several months ago. I guess they couldn't find the person they were looking for.

Jaylene

They have now.

Kathy

Why did **you** take it?

Jaylene

I'm convinced a job is the key for offenders to get back into society and stay out of crime.

Kathy

Most of our parole officers would agree, but they don't have the time or the resources to help the people on their caseload get jobs.

Jaylene

That's where we come in. You refer the ex-offenders to us and we'll take it from there.

Kathy

You do realize that most of our parolees have few marketable skills, almost no work experience, and don't come from a work orientation. A paycheck for minimum wage isn't all that impressive to them.

Jaylene

But there must be some of your parolees who are ready and willing to work. If we can start with them and place them in good jobs, we can build a track record and expand our services to help others with more needs.

Kathy

You might be accused of creaming.

Jaylene

We have to start somewhere.

Kathy

Does “we” mean you have a staff? Links with other organizations? Some sort of network?

Jaylene

Not yet, but that will come once we start having success.

Kathy

I can see why you were hired for this job. Your optimism is refreshing. I only hope you can match it with real results.

Jaylene

I will, if you send me the right people.

Kathy

Tell you what I’ll do. I have a meeting with my parole officers tomorrow. We’ll go over our caseloads and see who we think might fit what you have in mind.

Jaylene

(Hands Kathy a sheet of paper) This might help. Criteria for Admission into the program.

Kathy

(Impressed, Kathy scans the sheet) You’re going to have them sign a contract?

Jaylene

I want to show that we’re serious. We’ll do our part and we expect our clients to do theirs.

Kathy

I’ll be interested to see how that works.

Jaylene

(Hands Kathy another sheet) Here’s something else that might help you tomorrow.

Kathy

Entry-level maintenance worker, Hotel Roosevelt. *The Hotel Roosevelt?*

Jaylene

(Nodding head) The Director of H.R. is willing to hire one of our clients. When may I expect to hear from you?

Kathy

I’ll call you after our meeting.

Jaylene

I’ll be waiting.

(LIGHTS DOWN on JAYLENE and KAHTY as THEY exit and UP on CHORUS.)

Chorus

*Nothing done yet, only a meeting.
Wait for a call, hope for a contact.
Government bureaucrats love to meet, love to talk,
Love to send memos, love to drop names.
Nothing done yet, only a meeting.
Wait for a call, hope for a contact.*

*(LIGHTS DOWN on CHORUS, who crosses back to USC.
LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE now at her desk going over
papers. After a few moments DARIUS, a tall, muscular
African-American enters.)*

Darius

Excuse me, Ma'am.

Jaylene

(Nearly jumps out of her chair, sees Darius, reacts with alarm bordering on fear) Who . . . who are you?

Darius

Name's Darius. Didn't mean to startle you. I knocked on the door, but nobody answered. So, I just came in.

Jaylene

What do you want?

Darius

You the person finding jobs for folks?

Jaylene

That's what I've been hired to do, yes. How do you know about that?

Darius

Word's been on the street. *(Steps forward)* I need a job.

Jaylene

(Slides back from the desk, almost defensively) Well, the program isn't operating yet.

Darius

When will it?

Jaylene

I can't say for sure. Soon. There are a lot of things to be put in place first. And you have to be accepted into the program . . . once it starts.

Darius

How do I get accepted?

Jaylene

First of all, it's for ex-offenders, you know, ex-felons, ex-prisoners.

Darius

That's what I heard. That's who I am.

Jaylene

I see. The way it will work is, you're referred to us by your parole officer.

Darius

I finished my parole.

Jaylene

Oh. This program is for people just coming out of prison, or recently released, who're still on parole.

Darius

Sounds like I need to go back to prison to get your help with a job.

Jaylene

No, no. You don't want to do that.

Darius

But you ain't gonna help me otherwise.

Jaylene

Well, Darius, we can't help everybody.

Darius

(Takes a step toward JAYLENE) Don't imagine **everybody'll** be looking for a job.

Jaylene

No, but those who do have to be able to fit into our system.

Darius

Seems to me your system's pretty narrow, just like a jail cell, only this time I'm being locked out instead of in.

Jaylene

That's not the intention of our program, Darius.

Darius

(Puts his fists on the desk, leans toward JAYLENE) Then unlock that cell, open it up for people like me.

Jaylene

(Struggles for composure) OK, I'll think about it. I really will. I'll get back to you. How can I reach you?

Darius

Don't worry. I'll be around.

(DARIUS exits; LIGHTS DOWN on JAYLENE as SHE slumps back in her chair. LIGHT UP on CHORUS.)

Chorus

*Now you see what you're up against,
Dealing with people who feel left out.
Develop your system, set down your rules
But make an exception and you lose control,
And don't think you'll gain anyone's thanks.
You're dealing with people who feel left out.*

(LIGHTS DOWN on CHORUS, who spread out on the stage for the vignettes to follow. LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE and AL at home, sipping a drink at the end of the day.)

Al

So, how did things go today?

Jaylene

Encouraging.

Al

Good.

Jaylene

Then disappointing.

Al

Didn't your meeting with the gal from the Parole Commission go well?

Jaylene

No, that was the encouraging part. I think we're going to have a good working relationship.

Al

Great. *(Pause)* So what was disappointing?

Jaylene

Me.

Al

Did you hang up on an employer who was giving you a hard time?

Jaylene

No, I'm learning to handle that. This was different. I was going over some stuff on my desk when this black man walked in.

Al

Wasn't the door locked?

Jaylene

The lock doesn't work. I've been after the maintenance guy to fix it, but he hasn't gotten around to it yet.

Al

Jay, you know that neighborhood's not safe. You have to be careful.

Jaylene

I know, I know, but it was my reaction that disappointed me. I immediately felt he was there to do me harm.

Al

That's a natural reaction.

Jaylene

Why? Because he's black? Because "the neighborhood isn't safe?"

Al

It adds up.

Jaylene

Should everyone assume you're corrupt because you're a lobbyist?

Al

That's not the same thing. Lobbyists don't rob or rape or kill people. Not literally anyway.

Jaylene

My point is, we have more prejudices and assumptions about . . . certain people . . . than we're aware of, or like to admit. Why couldn't my first reaction be that he was looking for a job—which he was, and why I'm there?

Al

I still say, when your safety's at stake, you can't be too careful.

Jaylene

And I say, if I'm going to work with a mostly black, male group of ex-offenders, I've got to get a different mindset, see them first of all as people, like anybody else who's looking for work.

Al

Fine, but don't completely disregard the fact that they've committed crimes, and they could do it again. And don't beat yourself up for being caught off guard by this guy.

Jaylene

His name is Darius, and there was something else.

Al

What, he asked for bus fare and you gave it to him?

Jaylene

He asked how he could get into the program. When I explained the system I've designed, he didn't fit the criteria.

Al

Fair enough.

Jaylene

Except he had taken the initiative to find me and I think he really wants to work, but there I was, a white woman, defending a process that excludes him. I felt like a low-level bureaucrat protecting my paper model and I don't even know if it'll work.

Al

You can always make adjustments.

Jaylene

I don't know if someone like Darius can wait until I do.

Al

Knowing you, sweetie, it'll be done by tomorrow.

(LIGHTS DOWN on "home". LIGHTS follow JAYLENE as SHE moves from spot to spot on stage engaging various PEOPLE played by members of the CHORUS. The first encounter is with client, ISAIAH. JAYLENE greets ISAIAH with a strong handshake and pat on the shoulder. THEY sit at her desk.

Jaylene

How does it feel to be the first client accepted into our program, Isaiah?

Isaiah

(Compliant, deferring, avoids eye contact) All right.

Jaylene

Your parole officer thinks very highly of you.

Isaiah

Yes, Ma'am.

Jaylene

Do you know what it takes to be at work, on time, every day, and do a good job?

Isaiah

Yes, Ma'am.

Jaylene

And you're ready to make that kind of commitment?

Isaiah

Oh, yes Ma'am.

Jaylene

We're counting on you, Isaiah. You can pave the way for a lot of people who come after you.

Isaiah

Pave the way. That's like my namesake, in the Bible. Isaiah forty, verses three and four. "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord."

Jaylene

Ah, right. Tell me, Isaiah, how would you feel about doing maintenance work?

Isaiah

I'd like that just fine.

Jaylene

It might only be cleaning floors and changing light bulbs and pushing laundry carts at first, but there's lots of opportunity for upward mobility.

Isaiah

Yes, Ma'am.

Jaylene

(Stands and turns away as LIGHTS DOWN on ISAIAH) I wonder if he knows what "upward mobility" means. And this is the best candidate the Parole Commission can send me?

(JAYLENE crosses to the office of BILL REYNOLDS, an editorial writer for The Washington Post. SHE extends her hand and gives him a firm handshake.)

Jaylene, Continued

Thanks for taking time to see me, Mr. Reynolds.

Bill Reynolds

It's Bill, and I'm willing to give anybody fifteen minutes. Make use of yours.

Jaylene

Well, as I mentioned on the phone, I've been hired to start an ex-offender employment program. I've already got a referral system worked out with the Parole Commission and we had our first hire yesterday. *(No reaction from Reynolds)* At the Hotel Roosevelt. *(Still no reaction)* So, I was wondering, hoping really, that you might do an editorial describing our program. It would be a tremendous help when I contact potential employers.

Bill Reynolds

Why me?

Jaylene

You're a well-known editorial writer, highly respected, and very influential. Besides, you frequently write about social issues and give voice to people who don't have anyone to speak for them.

Bill Reynolds

But first I'm a reporter, which means I report on what actually happens.

Jaylene

Yes, of course.

Bill Reynolds

From what you've told me so far, not much has really happened with your program.

Jaylene

I'm just getting started.

Bill Reynolds

My point exactly.

Jaylene

Well, what do I have to do—for you to write an editorial?

Bill Reynolds

Let's say, when you've found . . . oh, seventeen jobs, call me again.

Jaylene

And you'll write an article?

Bill Reynolds

I'll consider it.

Jaylene

(Stands and extends her hand to shake Bill's) It's a deal. *(As turns to leave)* If I may ask, why seventeen jobs?

Bill Reynolds

(Smiles good-naturedly and shrugs his shoulders) That's how old my son is.

(LIGHTS DOWN on REYNOLDS and up on JAYLENE again at her desk. WILLIE, another client, enters hesitantly.)

Jaylene

(Looks up, catches sight of him) Willie, you're supposed to be at a job interview.

Willie

(Agitated, almost in a panic) Yes, ma'am, I know, and I was on my way. Gave myself plenty of time, like you said to. But I only had fifty cents for the bus ride. That's what it used to be. I didn't know it had gone up to seventy-five. The bus driver wouldn't let me on if I didn't have the right change. I didn't know what else to do, so I just walked on back here.

Jaylene

That's all right, Willie. We'll call Mr. Gifford and explain everything. *(Dials and waits)* Mr. Gifford, please. *(Pause)* Mr. Gifford, this is Jaylene James from "Workers for You." *(Pause)* Yes, I know he didn't show up. He's standing right here. *(Pause)* It wasn't his fault; it was ours actually. We should have If you'll only let me explain. *(Holds the receiver away from her ear and looks at it with annoyance before hanging up)* And goodbye to you too.

Willie

I'm sorry I fu. . . , messed up, Ms. James.

Jaylene

Willie, with an attitude like his, you wouldn't want to work for him anyway.

Willie

But I really want to do construction work.

Jaylene

Okay, I'll see what I can do.

(JAYLENE gives WILLIE a reassuring hug then steps DSC as LIGHTS DOWN on WILLIE. SHE faces the audience as if they are a group SHE has just addressed. SHE points to a person in the audience and listens to a silent question, then responds.)

Jaylene, Continued

Have **we** hired any ex-offenders? I wish we could, but we don't have any money in the budget for additional staff—or even office equipment. I have to go across town twice a week to the church's main office to make copies of forms and records and handouts. *(Beat, in a light manner)* Now if any of **you** would like to help us with some fund-raising, I'd love to talk to you afterwards. *(Looks out at the audience, acknowledges another person with "yes, sir" and listens to the question)* No, I wouldn't say we're "coddling" our clients. We're just trying to provide the help they need to get and keep a job. *(Pause as the questioner continues)* I doubt that any of our clients feel they're being "rewarded" for having committed a crime. *(Pause again as JAYLENE begins to show annoyance with the nature and tone of the person's questions)* Our program doesn't take jobs away from anybody or prevent law-abiding citizens from being hired. We're just trying to help one small group of people become productive members of our society. I think that's preferable to spending twenty-to-twenty-five thousand dollars a year keeping each of them locked up. Don't you agree? *(Pause)* There's time for one more question. *(Acknowledges someone in the audience)* We've placed five of our clients in jobs so far. *(Pause)* The first one was three weeks ago. *(Pause)* You bet I feel good about that, but I'd feel a lot better if we could place a dozen more. *(Pause)* Why a dozen? It's a short-term goal I have.

(JAYLENE begins shaking hands and saying 'thanks' to members of the CHORUS as if they were in the audience SHE just addressed. The last member, JAKE HOLMQUIST, approaches and hands her a business card.)

Jake Holmquist

Call me tomorrow. I may be able to help with your short-term goal. *(Exits quickly)*

Jaylene

(Reads the card) "Jake Holmquist, Director of Personnel, George Washington University." I wonder how many jobs **they** have available?

(LIGHTS UP on AL at home. JAYLENE enters.)

Jaylene, Continued

Al, I need your help.

Al

Sorry, Jay, we don't have any money in our budget to hire one of your clients.

Jaylene

I don't need you to hire anybody; I need your contacts in Congress.

Al

All five of them?

Jaylene

Listen. Do you remember me telling you about Jake Holmquist?

Al

The guy from G.W.?

Jaylene

The Director of Personnel at G. W. He wants to hire four of our men.

Al

Fantastic. *(Beat)* So why do you need my help?

Jaylene

He asked me if I'd heard about some new legislation that's coming up for a vote soon. *(Pulls out a piece of paper and reads, looking expectantly at AL)* The Targeted Jobs Tax Credit.

Al

Haven't heard of it.

Jaylene

What kind of a lobbyist are you?

Al

Underpaid, overworked, and totally focused on the Organic Farmers of America. Only legislation that affects them concerns me.

Jaylene

Well, get concerned about this one. It proposes a tax credit for any business that hires hard-to-employ workers, like . . .

Al

. . . ex-inmates. Is that why Holmquist wants to hire four of your people? Like G.W. needs a tax break!

Jaylene

I don't know if that's his motive or not. I do need to know who's sponsoring this bill and how I can help to get it passed. It could be a great incentive for employers to hire our clients.

Al

I can find out who's sponsoring it, but how can you help get it passed?

Jaylene

I'll invite the key people to our program; let them meet some of our clients, show them who this legislation would ultimately help, give them a face-to-face experience they can use with their colleagues.

Al

Do you have that much confidence in your clients, and the success of your program—in its early stages?

Jaylene

We've had ten hires, two promotions, and no firings in the last six weeks. The system is working.

(The PHONE RINGS; JAYLENE crosses to answer it.)

Jaylene, Continued

Get me that information. *(Picks up receiver)* Hello? *(Pause)* What? Where? *(Pause)* Okay, okay, Richard. Calm down. I can be there in half an hour. *(Pause)* Don't worry; it'll be all right. Okay, good-bye.

Al

Who was that?

Jaylene

Richard Helms. One of the ten hires. He's been arrested for stealing an umbrella at Macy's.

(LIGHTS DOWN on home. LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE on the phone at her desk, trying to remain patient, speaking slowly and deliberately.)

Jaylene, Continued

I've left four messages already. I know Mr. Covington is busy, but I only need five minutes of his time. *(Pause)* As I've said before, I'm calling about your company's ad for delivery truck drivers. I have two qualified drivers. They have experience, the proper license, no traffic violations, and I can get them bonded if you want. *(Pause)* Well, when does he come to work? All right, let me give you my number again.

(DARIUS enters with a restaurant carry-out container in one hand and the day's mail in the other as Jaylene hangs up the phone. HE places the food container on the desk and gives JAYLENE a thumb-lock hand shake and a fist bump.)

Darius

Chicken a la Kirby, scalloped potatoes, and sautéed asparagus. The special of the day.

Jaylene

Darius, you have to stop bringing me these leftovers. I'm not used to eating this rich food.

Darius

It might be the **only** thing that's rich in your life. And they ain't leftovers; they're set-asides.

Jaylene

Don't you get in trouble with Mr. Kirby on my account.

Darius

No chance; we're tight. Besides, kitchen staff gets one free meal a day.

Jaylene

Then why don't **you** eat this?

Darius

Ain't my kind of food. But I don't want to see it go to waste either.

Jaylene

(Begins skimming through the mail) It won't, but I don't know when I can eat it. I have to leave in a few minutes for Richard's hearing. Did you talk to him?

Darius

I did. I talk to all the brothers who come through here, like you asked me to.

Jaylene

What do you think?

Darius

He's clean. Only stepped halfway outta the store to show his girl the 'brella. He had enough money with him to buy five of those things. No reason for him to steal it.

Jaylene

An innocent mistake, eh?

Darius

You ain't never completely innocent, when you're one of us.

Jaylene

Well, I hope I can convince the judge he's innocent enough. *(Glances at one letter, opens and quickly reads it, reacting with surprise, disappointment)* Oh no! *(Looks at DARIUS who waits quietly)* The church office where I've been going to make copies and get things printed wants to start charging for paper and the use of their equipment. That was supposed to be their contribution to our program. It's bad enough I have to drag all my stuff across town and back; now I have to pay for it too.

Darius

Want me to get you a copier?

Jaylene

(Realizes what he infers) Darius! No!

Darius

I just mean, some of the brothers who aren't working yet have . . . other skills.

Jaylene

Thanks anyway, but that's not how to handle this. I'll take it up with the Board of Directors and find out what's going on.

Darius

Suit yourself, but the offer stands.

(LIGHTS DOWN on DARIUS. LIGHTS UP on CHORUS who reassembles USC as JAYLENE moves around the stage playing out the multitude of tasks she must do by herself.)

Chorus

*Knock yourself out, run yourself ragged.
Measure success a job at a time.
Screen your clients, contact employers.
Hope for results you can build upon.
Beg for publicity, ask for help.
Be committed to this worthy cause
But don't assume that everyone is
And don't think a job is all it takes.*

(LIGHTS DOWN on CHORUS and LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE welcoming LOIS to her office.)

Jaylene

Thank you so much for stopping by, Lois. It's sure good to see a Board member and the chairwoman no less. I get a little lonely working here in the church basement.

Lois

From what I hear, you've been much too busy to be lonely.

Jaylene

I mean, I feel kind of alone in what I'm doing. That's why I'm looking forward to the next Board meeting, so I can share what's been happening.

Lois

Yes, well, that's why I wanted to see you, Jaylene. Before the meeting, to give you a heads-up, so to speak.

Jaylene

Why? Is something wrong?

Lois

No, I wouldn't say "wrong." It's just that some Board members have a few concerns, questions.

Jaylene

Like what?

Lois

Like, the number of jobs you've found in these first six months.

Jaylene

I've found fifteen, but it took the first couple months to get the program set up. I couldn't start placing anyone until about four months ago.

Lois

Even so, that's not quite four a month, or **one** a week.

Jaylene

But it's picking up. The last five jobs have come just this month.

Lois

Mostly from the same employer, I understand.

Jaylene

G. W. University, yes. What's wrong with that?

Lois

Some Board members would like to see more employers involved, representing a wider cross-section of the community.

Jaylene

So would I, but I take jobs wherever I can find them. Now, if I could hire a full-time job developer . . .

Lois

I'm afraid that's out of the question, budget-wise, as you well know. Unless **you** were to raise additional funds for that purpose.

Jaylene

I barely have time to do what I'm doing now. I couldn't take on another project, especially one like that. (*Beat*) But maybe the Board could pursue other funding sources.

Lois

I think they'd like to see more results first, be sure they can have confidence in your program.

Jaylene

Why can't they?

Lois

Well, there was that recent incident when one of your people was arrested.

Jaylene

Those charges were dropped. Macy's didn't pursue it once they heard Richard's side of the story and got character references from me and his parole officer and employer. Our program kept him from going back to jail—unfairly.

Lois

Still, it creates a bad impression, and it made some of the Board members uncomfortable.

Jaylene

Do those Board members realize what we're dealing with in this program? How easily people who once committed a crime are stereotyped, assumed to be guilty when something goes wrong?

Lois

Some of them are guilty.

Jaylene

Not my clients. Not so far.

Lois

I should tell you there have been reports that items are missing from the church kitchen.

Jaylene

And "my people" are to blame?

Lois

Your people are the only ones who use the church basement during the week.

Jaylene

Which is unfortunate.

Lois

What do you mean?

Jaylene

Well, I was hoping some members of the church might want to get involved in our program, during the week.

Lois

And well they might, if they saw you participating with them on the weekend. You know, some members of the Board, and of the church council, were hoping you might become involved with the church itself. At least attend Sunday services.

Jaylene

Yes, well, I thought I was involved with the church, running this program, which you're funding.

Lois

All the more reason to take their wishes seriously. They are, after all, paying your salary.

Jaylene

And not much more. The amount budgeted for utilities and transportation and support services is barely enough.

Lois

You knew the financial limitations when you took this job.

Jaylene

Yes, but now I have to pay for copying and printing too.

Lois

I wouldn't bring that issue up with the Board, if I were you. It's really an internal matter.

Jaylene

But it will just about wipe out my discretionary funds.

Lois

Now that you've mentioned it, I may as well tell you there is also some concern about the way you've used those discretionary funds so far.

Jaylene

For instance.

Lois

The Polaroid camera you bought. What is that for?

Jaylene

(Points to an imaginary bulletin board) Look at that bulletin board. I take a picture of everyone referred to our program and when they're accepted or hired, I put their photo in a special, prominent place. You have no idea what a difference it makes to our clients, seeing their picture on that board instead of in a police file.

Lois

Perhaps so.

Jaylene

Perhaps I should bring a few of the clients to the meeting so they could tell the Board members what this program means to them, in their own words.

Lois

I don't think that would be necessary, or advisable. The Board will be content to hear from you.

Jaylene

I hope so.

(LOIS looks quizzically at JAYLENE.)

Jaylene, Continued

Content, with what they hear from me.

Lois

Ah, well, I hope this little heads-up has helped in that regard.

Jaylene

Oh, it has, Lois. More than you realize.

(LIGHTS DOWN on LOIS; LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE and AL.)

Jaylene, Continued

I couldn't believe it. Everything she said felt like a judgment or an accusation.

Al

It sounds like you kept your cool though.

Jaylene

But I shouldn't have to. I'm busting my butt trying to make this program work and all she could offer were criticisms and concerns instead of encouragement and support. What do those Board members want?

Al

Maybe to feel good about themselves for being on the Board, and you're not making them feel good enough.

Jaylene

I wasn't hired to make **them** feel good.

Al

Don't be so sure. I get the same reactions from some of my Board members. I guess that's what it means to work on the rump end of society.

Jaylene

But these are church people.

Al

They're people who go to church, Jay. I'm not always sure about the carry-over.

Jaylene

All I know is I felt more resistance from Lois than I have from most employers I've dealt with, even the ones who want nothing to do with ex-offenders or our program.

Al

Well, here's something that might cheer you up. Representative Ed Roth is a co-sponsor of the TJTC.

Jaylene

What's that?

Al

The Targeted Jobs Tax Credit bill you asked about the other day. You have to speak in acronyms or you can't play in Congress.

Jaylene

Okay, okay, what about it?

Al

Roth is a moderate Republican who likes any tax break for business, and he's trying to convince some of his colleagues that this is a good bill. A colleague of a colleague of mine told him about your program, and Roth is open to a meeting.

Jaylene

With the ex-offenders?

Al

With the employers. He wants to sound them out on this tax credit, see if they'd make use of it.

Jaylene

But I've only gotten six employers to hire our guys.

Al

You've had some "maybes," "call me in a month," "I'd like to, but." Can you round up about a dozen potentially interested employers, preferably from a variety of businesses?

Jaylene

You sound like my Board.

Al

Maybe you can kiss two birds with one smooch.

(LIGHTS DOWN on AL as JAYLENE crosses to her desk. After a moment, up on Jaylene at her desk. LORENZO saunters in with a very street-cool demeanor.)

Lorenzo

Yo, Ms. James, here I am.

Jaylene

Lorenzo Saunders.

Lorenzo

My friends call me 'Zo.

Jaylene

You're fifteen minutes late for our intake interview.

Lorenzo

Yeah, well, I don't wear no watch, y'know.

Jaylene

Do **you** know if you're ten minutes late and haven't called in, you have to re-schedule? And if it happens a second time, you're out of the program? Did your parole officer explain that to you?

Lorenzo

He mighta mentioned something 'bout that, but I don't recall he made it sound too important.

Jaylene

Well, it is.

Lorenzo

Don't see why.

Jaylene

If you're late for a meeting with me, you'll probably show up late for work—if you get hired. If you show up late for work, you'll lose your job.

Lorenzo

I'll get another one.

Jaylene

That may not be as easy as you think, Lorenzo, especially if you have an attitude. Are you sure you want to get a job?

Lorenzo

Got to. Condition of my parole: employment within three months.

Jaylene

Then I'd think you'd put forth a little more effort, to keep from going back to jail.

Lorenzo

Ain't goin' back to no jail.

Jaylene

Then you need to do what it takes to get a job.

Lorenzo

I know what it takes, but this ten-minute rule of yours seems awful tight-ass to me.

Jaylene

Suppose I said I'd give you a hundred dollars if you showed up at ten o'clock this morning. What time would you show up?

Lorenzo

You ain't got no hundred dollars for me.

(LORENZO looks at JAYLENE who does not react. SHE waits for Lorenzo's reply.)

Lorenzo, Continued

If I believed you, quarter to ten.

Jaylene

I'll see you day after tomorrow, ten o'clock. Not quarter after, not ten-thirty. If you're not on time, I'll conclude this program isn't right for you. And you can find a job some other way.

Lorenzo

But I'm here now. Let's get this over with.

Jaylene

It is over with. Day after tomorrow, ten o'clock.

(LORENZO stands, muttering to himself. LIGHTS DOWN on JAYLENE as Darius enters greeting LORENZO.)

Darius

Hey, 'Zo. What'ch you doin' here, man?

Lorenzo

Came to see that lady 'bout a job, but she wouldn't meet with me.

Darius

You have an appointment?

Lorenzo

Yeah, I had an appointment.

Darius

Let me guess, you were late.

Lorenzo

A few minutes was all. Bitch wouldn't change her goddam rule to meet with me.

Darius

Now 'Zo, you should know about rules and why you got to follow 'em.

Lorenzo

In the pen maybe, but I'm out here now.

Darius

And if you want to stay out here, you got to follow the outside rules too.

Lorenzo

Not from some uptight honkey, think she doin' me a favor.

Darius

Maybe she is, and you can't see it.

Lorenzo

Why you on her side? You gittin' some from her?

Darius

I got a chance from her, even after I smarted off like you probably did. She's firm, but fair. She give you another appointment?

Lorenzo

Day after tomorrow. Ten o'clock.

Darius

I can meet you on my way to work. We can come by together.

Lorenzo

I don't need no damn chaperone, Darius.

Darius

Only tryin' to help, 'Zo—and don't tell me you don't need help. We all do.

Lorenzo

I got options.

Darius

None of 'em much good. Be here day after tomorrow, on time.

(LIGHTS DOWN on DARIUS and LORENZO; LIGHTS UP on CHORUS.)

Chorus

*How does it feel to be the pin ball?
Pushed into play by hidden hands
Bounced 'round the board from here to there
Hoping for points, avoiding penalties,
Keeping a pace that moves ahead
Despite the hole waiting below.*

(LIGHTS DOWN on CHORUS. LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE who approaches BILL REYNOLDS at his desk. SHE stands silently until HE senses her presence.)

Jaylene

I've found eighteen jobs so far, one more than your quota.

Bill Reynolds

(Looks up at her quizzically, then with recognition) Jaylene James, the jobs lady for ex-offenders.

Jaylene

You remember me.

Bill Reynolds

You're not easy to forget, especially when you send me a progress report every week. Besides, I was reminded of you recently.

Jaylene

Working on that editorial about our program?

Bill Reynolds

No, eating lunch at the Brown Kirby, which I do about once a week. I went to school with the owner. He told me a few weeks ago about a new man in the kitchen who came from your program.

Jaylene

Darius Houston.

Bill Reynolds

Kirby thinks highly of him, likes the way you arranged everything.

Jaylene

(Holds out a folder with several sheets of paper) Here are seventeen others just like Darius—with more to come. I have their names, places of employment, time on the job, salary, references, contact information . . .

Bill Reynolds

Looks like you've done my legwork for me.

Jaylene

I really want that article, Bill. I need it.

Bill Reynolds

I promised you I'd consider writing one, and I will—consider it.

Jaylene

If you need anything else, anything at all, just let me know. These clients, and their employers, are ready to answer any questions, give you any information . . .

Bill Reynolds

What about you?

Jaylene

What about me?

Bill Reynolds

Where do you see yourself in this story?

Jaylene

I don't. I want the focus to be on the clients, and their employers.

Bill Reynolds

If I write this piece, I'll decide where the focus is. And right now it seems to me the focus is on you. You're obviously committed to what you're doing; you're the catalyst behind this program. You even accepted my arbitrary goal of seventeen jobs, and surpassed it. What motivates you?

Jaylene

Among other things, a quote I read recently from Dostoyevsky.

Bill Reynolds

Enlighten me.

Jaylene

“The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”

Bill Reynolds

But you're not working in prisons.

Jaylene

Society creates all kinds of prisons, Bill. For all kinds of people.

Bill Reynolds

And you want to civilize them?

Jaylene

I want to eliminate them.

Bill Reynolds

That's pretty ambitious, if not impossible.

Jaylene

I'll do what I can.

Bill Reynolds

I imagine you will. Ah, what about "the other things" that motivate you?

Jaylene

Write the editorial, and I'll "consider" telling you.

Bill Reynolds

Give me your folder.

(LIGHTS DOWN on JAYLENE and REYNOLDS; LIGHTS UP on WILLIE and MR. GIFFORD.)

Mr. Gifford

I don't usually give anyone a second chance, Mr. Holder, but that woman running your program won't take no for an answer.

Willie

Yes, sir. That's why some of us been callin' her "Dr. J."

Mr. Gifford

After the basketball player?

Willie

Yes, sir. She knows just what to do to make things work out right. And we all be better off for it, just like the Sixers when Dr. J's playin'.

Mr. Gifford

And how will I be better off—if I hire you?

Willie

I can do most anything on a construction job, Mr. Gifford. Paint, plaster, dry wall, electric, plumbing, carpentry . . .

Mr. Gifford

Where'd you learn all that, Mr. Holder?

Willie

You can call me Willie. I learnt most of it workin' for my cousin who had his own construction company, just like you. Real successful too, till he got mixed up in drugs.

Mr. Gifford

Did you get mixed up with him?

Willie

No, sir. I never took drugs and I never dealt drugs. Still don't. And I didn't know cousin Timmons was into it either till he asked me to drive him to this fella's house like he was checkin' it out for a job. Told me it was a business deal. It was business all right, but not the construction business.

Mr. Gifford

What happened?

Willie

The po-lice had been tipped off. They came swarmin' in and arrested everybody in sight. Accused me of bein' an accomplice because I drove the car.

Mr. Gifford

Wasn't your lawyer able to explain how you'd been used?

Willie

I couldn't afford no lawyer. Only had a public defender, who didn't even pronounce my name right at the hearing. "Mr. Helder," he kept sayin'. Then he felt real good afterward that he got me a reduced sentence of five years.

Mr. Gifford

And now you want to start over.

Willie

No, sir. I want to pick up where I left off, where I was cut off.

Mr. Gifford

Why with my company?

Willie

Because you're one of the biggest and best construction companies in the city. And Dr. J says, always go for the best.

Mr. Gifford

I don't know about the biggest and best, but we do have an outstanding reputation. We've worked hard to achieve it, and I have to see to it that nothing, and no one, tarnishes that reputation, not even a little bit. You understand what I'm telling you, Willie?

Willie

(Senses a brush-off) Yes, sir. I believe I do. And I appreciate you seein' me, especially after that earlier mix-up.

Mr. Gifford

Well, I hope to see a lot more of you.

Willie

Uh . . . what d'you mean?

Mr. Gifford

You said you can do drywall, right?

Willie

Oh, yes sir. Good as anybody.

Mr. Gifford

(Hands WILLIE a piece of paper) I need a drywall man at this address tomorrow morning, nine o'clock. Can you be there?

Willie

Yes, sir. You bet I will. *(Beat)* Ah, does this mean I'm hired?

Mr. Gifford

I usually put new people on two weeks probation. But if you do what you say you can do, you're hired.

Willie

I can. And, Mr. Gifford, you don't have to worry none about my bein' in prison. That's all behind me.

Mr. Gifford

To tell you the truth, Willie, I'd be more worried about explaining to your Dr. J why I didn't hire you. See you tomorrow.

(LIGHTS DOWN on WILLIE and MR. GIFFORD; LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE and AL.)

Jaylene

Al, you've got to tell me what's going on in sports right now.

Al

Sports? You've never been interested in sports.

Jaylene

I am now. That's all the guys talk about when we get together for a group meeting. They've even started calling me Dr. J, after some basketball player.

Al

Julius Erving?

Jaylene

I guess so. Is he good?

Al

Probably the best in the NBA right now. You know, the National Basketball Association, the pros? Why do they call **you** Dr. J?

Jaylene

Apart from the fact that I have a Ph.D. and my name begins with "J," they think I work wonders, the way this Dr. J does on the basketball court. At least, that's what Darius said.

Al

Well, you are making some unprecedented moves, which is one of the things the other Dr. J is known for.

Jaylene

So should I be flattered?

Al

I would be.

Jaylene

Okay, what else? I thought I overheard a couple of the guys talking about a football team with an Iron Curtain?

Al

"Steel" Curtain. The Pittsburgh Steelers' defensive line. They were on the cover of TIME magazine not long ago.

Jaylene

Oh god, do I have to start reading TIME now?

Al

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED might be a better choice, but you may want to wait till after the swimsuit issue.

Jaylene

What's that?

Al

It's like a spring break for sports fans.

Jaylene

Well, I need to know all you can tell me before my next group meeting.

Al

All you need to know is, they're into sports. Ask **them** what's going on. I bet they'd love to tell you. After all, even Dr. J has a coach.

Jaylene

Point taken.

(LIGHTS DOWN on JAYLENE and AL; LIGHTS UP on JAKE HOLMQUIST sitting in front of a computer monitor, obviously frustrated as HE tries to work with this unfamiliar machine. LORENZO enters with a push broom, large trash container and cleaning materials. HE sees HOLMQUIST.)

Lorenzo

Didn't know no one was here. I'll come back later.

Jake Holmquist

No, no. It's all right. I would have been out of here hours ago, except for this damn computer, which is supposed to make my job easier.

Lorenzo

(Looks at the machine) That model locks up with too many users.

Jake Holmquist

You're Lorenzo Saunders, aren't you?

Lorenzo

'Zo.

Jake Holmquist

I remember interviewing you a few weeks ago. How's it going?

Lorenzo

It's goin'.

Jake Holmquist

You know about computers, 'Zo?

Lorenzo

Some.

Jake Holmquist

What do you know about this machine?

Lorenzo

What'ch you want to know?

Jake Holmquist

How to get back to the data I entered an hour ago. I pulled up last month's records to check some numbers and now I can't get out of that or into what I was working on.

(LORENZO leans over the keyboard and hits several keys which brings up the page.)

Jake Holmquist, Continued

Well, I'll be. There it is. How'd you know to do that?

Lorenzo

I had some trainin'.

Jake Holmquist

In prison?

(LORENZO barely nods his head.)

Jake Holmquist, Continued

Look, I don't care where you learned what you know. I do care about what you know.

Lorenzo

I know the IBMs pretty good. Not so much the Apple. They didn't have but one or two when I left.

Jake Holmquist

"They?"

Lorenzo

The warden. His brother's a big shot at IBM, got him to donate some computers and have his people give us lessons. Thought we might get jobs in that field when we got out.

Jake Holmquist

Would you like a job in that field, 'Zo?

Lorenzo

Better than pushin' a broom and emptyin' trash.

Jake Holmquist

Let me talk to our Director of Communications and Information. He'll probably want to give you a test to see how much you know.

Lorenzo

I been tested before.

Jake Holmquist

And if he doesn't have a position for you, I may have to create one in my own department. Would you like that?

Lorenzo

I like workin' with machines.

Jake Holmquist

I like machines that work. I'll let you know what I make out.

(LORENZO nods and starts cleaning up as LIGHTS DOWN. LIGHTS UP on INDIVIDUAL CHORUS MEMBERS as EACH steps forward for the following exchanges with JAYLENE.)

Employer 1

Ms. James, this is Walt from Sky-High Roofing. Ah, we got a "situation" here with that fella you sent us yesterday.

Jaylene

He didn't fall off the roof, did he?

Employer 1

No, he didn't even get **on** the roof. Seems he's afraid of heights.

Jaylene

Oh dear God. Is there something else you can give him to do?

Employer 1

Well, ma'am, we're a roofing company. Everybody works up top. Look, I'm sorry. I really want to help with what you're doing, but this just isn't going to work out.

(LIGHTS DOWN on EMPLOYER 1; LIGHTS UP on EMPLOYER 2.)

Employer 2

Ms. James, I'm calling from Sky Blue Airlines. You asked us to let you know how Marcus Dupree was doing in baggage handling. Well, I'm looking at the stats for lost, damaged, and misplaced bags in the last month . . .

(JAYLENE puts her hand to her head, expecting bad news.)

Employer 2, Continued

. . . and our incidents are down twenty per cent, better than all the other airlines at the regional airport. Hiring Marcus looks like the best thing we've done all year.

(LIGHTS DOWN on EMPLOYER 2 as JAYLENE gives a sigh of relief and satisfaction.)

Employer 3

Bruce Hart here, from Road Runner Movers. We got a big move coming up next week to Oregon and we need an extra man. I told you I'd keep your people in mind when you called me a few weeks ago, and I'm wondering if you have anybody we could use.

Jaylene

I appreciate you getting back to me, Mr. Hart, but do you have any local moves?

Employer 3

Yes, ma'am, but we got them all covered. Is there a problem with this Oregon haul? It pays really well.

Jaylene

I'm sure it does, but . . . none of my clients can cross the state line. It's a parole stipulation.

Employer 3

Oh. I understand. Well, too bad.

Jaylene

If anything comes up within the state . . .

(LIGHTS DOWN quickly on EMPLOYER 3; LIGHTS UP on EMPLOYER 4.)

Employer 4

Ms. James, what was Tamika in jail for?

Jaylene

I don't discuss that with my clients, or employers.

Employer 4

Maybe you should. It was theft.

Jaylene

So? You hired her as a florist, to fill orders.

Employer 4

And to ring up sales when customers come into the shop and no one else is available.

Jaylene

You never said she'd have to handle money.

Employer 4

Well, she does. Or would have. I can't take the chance that she might . . . you know, steal again.

Jaylene

Why don't you give **her** a chance, see what happens in a week or two?

Employer 4

Sorry, I've already let her go. And I won't be needing any other referrals from you.

(LIGHTS DOWN on EMPLOYER 4.)

Jaylene

And she was our first, and so far only, female client.

(LIGHTS UP on EMPLOYER 5.)

Employer 5

Ms. James, I know we're just a thrift store. All of our clothing and merchandise is used and our customers are not the most affluent. Nonetheless, everything should be properly hung and shelved. That's what we hired your man, Lawrence, to do.

Jaylene

Is there a problem?

Employer 5

I don't think the man can read. Sizes are all mixed up, petites are stuck in with misses', shoes are put anywhere on the rack. It's just a mess.

Jaylene

Are you sure it's Lawrence's fault? Customers in big clothing stores tend to walk around with several items and then just hang them on whatever rack is nearby when they leave.

Employer 5

Some of our customers do that, yes. But it's Lawrence's job to keep things straight, and I don't think he's capable of doing it.

Jaylene

All right. I'll talk with him, see what the problem is.

Employer 5

Please do. Or I'll have to find someone else.

(JAYLENE sighs wearily, slumps in the chair at her desk, and puts her head down on her arms. After a few moments, the PHONE RINGS, startling her.)

Jaylene

Hello. This is "Workers for You," Jaylene speaking.

(LIGHTS UP on EMPLOYER 6.)

Employer 6

Ah, yeah, hi, Jaylene. My name is Clyde Ferguson. I'm with Bodies Made Beautiful.

Jaylene

(Hesitantly) Yes.

Employer 6

I was wondering, do you have anybody there who'd like to do some body work?

Jaylene

What kind of body work?

Employer 6

Uh, you know, auto bodies, cars.

Jaylene

Oh. Well, I don't know if any of our clients have that kind of experience.

Employer 6

That's okay, I'll train 'em, teach 'em what they need to know. It's not complicated, just hard work, physical, you know.

Jaylene

All of our clients are ready to work, hard.

Employer 6

That's what I thought. When can you send me somebody?

Jaylene

Maybe today, tomorrow for sure. I'll have to check our clients' qualifications and see if any of them are interested.

Employer 6

Great. I got cars stackin' up here like a junkyard, and I don't run no junkyard.

Jaylene

I'm sure you don't. *(Beat)* Ah, Mr. Ferguson, do you know who our clients are?

Employer 6

Yes, ma'am. That don't bother me any. My nephew got in with a bad crowd a while back and is still servin' his time. It happens.

Jaylene

But how did you hear about our program?

Employer 6

I read about it in the morning paper.

(LIGHTS DOWN on EMPLOYER 6 as JAYLENE grabs the newspaper, hurriedly opens it to the editorial page, and reads aloud.)

Jaylene

“Wanted: Ex-Offender Employers.” *(Looks at the audience and breaks into a wide grin)* Thank you, Bill.

(AL enters scene.)

Jaylene

I actually had three employers call **me** today because of Bill's editorial.

Al

Does that mean you don't have to make any more cold calls?

Jaylene

I wish. It's the thing I hate most about this job, which is why I'd love to hire a job developer.

Al

Your Board didn't oppose the idea at the last meeting.

Jaylene

Of course not—all I have to do is raise the money myself.

Al

Maybe you can.

Jaylene

How many hours are in your day? Mine still has just twenty-four.

Al

Look, you want to have that meeting with Representative Roth and some of the employers. You've talked about an awards ceremony for the guys who've been working since the program began. Why not throw in a little fundraising too?

Jaylene

It's not like tossing the socks in with the sheets in the washing machine, Al. It takes planning, contacts, publicity, arrangements . . .

Al

I can help.

Jaylene

You can? I mean, you don't have any more time than I do.

Al

No, but I have more control over my time than you do. (*Beat*) Besides, it'd be something we could do together.

Jaylene

You don't think we do things together?

Al

We do—some things. But not the most important thing.

Jaylene

Are you going where I think you're going with this?

Al

I'm going where I've been since we got married.

Jaylene

And I'm where I've been since we got married. I'm just not ready to start a family yet.

Al

I know, but maybe working together on a project like this will help fill the gap—until you are ready.

Jaylene

That's not fair, Al. You know I can't get pregnant with everything else that's going on. The timing isn't right, not for me anyway.

Al

The timing wasn't right after we first got married because we needed to get settled. Then it wasn't right because you had to finish your doctorate. Now it isn't right because you have this all-consuming job to do. Will there ever be a right time?

Jaylene

Yes. I just can't say when.

Al

But you will give me a heads-up when you decide.

Jaylene

You'll be the first to know. Now, here's what you can do to help with the meeting.

(LIGHTS DOWN on JAYLENE and AL. LIGHTS UP on CHORUS.)

Chorus

*All's going well, just as you hoped.
Jobs coming in, word getting out.
Still lots to do to keep things going.
Build on success, push the limits.
look back as you move ahead.
But watch your step, all the same.
You never know what might come next.*

(LIGHTS DOWN on CHORUS and LIGHTS UP on DARIUS, ISAIAH, WILLIE, and LORENZO. JAYLENE enters and greets the others with high-fives and hugs.)

Willie

Yo, Dr. J, what happened to the Steelers on Sunday?

Jaylene

Wait till the Super Bowl, Willie. Then we'll talk. *(Sits down next to Isaiah)* Are you a football fan, Isaiah?

Isaiah

Not much, ma'am. I'm more of a baseball fan.

Jaylene

Who do you root for?

Isaiah

The Yankees.

Darius

Why you root for a team like the Yankees?

Isaiah

'Cause they winners, like Dr. J's Steelers.

Lorenzo

They ain't hers.

(An air of tension follows Lorenzo's remark. JAYLENE attempts to diffuse the matter.)

Jaylene

Do you have a favorite baseball team, Lorenzo?

Lorenzo

White Sox.

Darius

The White Sox? You ain't from Chicago. Why they your favorite team?

Lorenzo

They drafted me in '72.

Willie

You played pro ball, 'Zo?

(LORENZO nods.)

Isaiah

What position you play?

Lorenzo

Pitcher. Moved from class A to triple A in two years. Then I blew my arm out.

(OTHERS respond; "too bad, that's a shame" etc.)

Jaylene

Yes, but Lorenzo is moving ahead at George Washington. Tell them what's happened, Lorenzo.

Lorenzo

I workin' with computers now.

Jaylene

For Mr. Holmquist, Director of Personnel there. It's a big promotion, and we're all proud of you, Lorenzo.

(Soft clapping and expressions of congratulation from the OTHERS, but no reaction from LORENZO.)

And how about you, Isaiah?

Isaiah

I been moved to banquets and special events. More evening work but better pay. And, I get to wait on celebrities now and then.

Darius

Well, I still workin' in the kitchen at the Brown Kirby so I don't get to see what "celebrities" might come in our restaurant. But I do have a piece of news for you, Dr. J. I spoke with Mr. Kirby like you asked me to, about havin' some kind of meeting for employers and clients and whoever. He likes the idea.

Jaylene

How much does he like it?

Darius

Enough to open the restaurant on a Monday for lunch or dinner. Whatever suits you.

Jaylene

And how much does he want for that?

Darius

Nothin'. He think the free publicity he got in that article about our program already pay for it.

Lorenzo

Plus, he be getting' some more pub' outta this.

Darius

Ain't nothin' wrong with that.

(There is an awkward pause in response to this exchange. JAYLENE breaks the silence.)

Jaylene

Well, I think it's a very generous offer and I appreciate you talking to Mr. Kirby about it, Darius. I'll give him a call this afternoon. Is there anything else?

Willie

Ah, yeah, Dr. J. Mr. Gifford wants me to get my electrician's license before he has me do any electrical work, but I need some equipment—and the fee for the test and license.

Jaylene

Okay, Willie, I'll see what I can squeeze out of the budget.

Willie

I'll pay it all back, out of my increase in salary.

Jaylene

No, Willie. We try to provide what you need to do your job. This is part of it.

Lorenzo

I need a PC.

Jaylene

A what?

Lorenzo

Personal Computer. They the comin' thing.

Jaylene

Well, that may be beyond our means, Lorenzo.

Lorenzo

Thought so.

Jaylene

(Stares at him for a moment, maintaining patience) All right, if there's nothing else, off you go. Don't be late for work. And don't root against the Steelers.

(LIGHTS DOWN momentarily as MEN exit then LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE alone in the office. LOIS enters.)

Jaylene

Lois! Good to see you again. You just missed some of the guys at our group meeting.

Lois

Yes, well, perhaps some other time.

Jaylene

Did you read Bill Reynolds' editorial? I can't tell you what a difference it's made already.

Lois

Have **you** read the "Letters to the Editor" this morning?

Jaylene

No, I haven't had a chance to look at today's paper.

(LOIS hands her the paper and sits down; JAYLENE reads aloud in a sarcastic tone.)

Jaylene, Continued

"Why help people who've broken the law?" "Maybe I should commit a crime to get a job."
"How long before they're back in jail?" I've heard all this before.

Lois

Not everyone has.

Jaylene

I'll write a letter to counteract these views. They're biased and misleading.

Lois

I don't think we need controversy.

Jaylene

We?

Lois

The Church, and the Board. People who want to do good but don't want to be criticized for it.

Jaylene

Criticism seems a small price to pay for "doing good."

Lois

Small to you perhaps, but it could escalate. I just wish you had consulted the Board before you went after this publicity.

Jaylene

I've gotten three unsolicited jobs as a result of this publicity.

Lois

But Bill Reynolds . . . he can be so provocative, always stirring things up.

Jaylene

That's why people read him.

Lois

And why we should avoid him. We don't need to be associated with someone like that. It can give the wrong impression about this program, and the church.

Jaylene

And what impression is that, Lois?

Lois

That we're trying to stir things up too, confront the system, turn the status quo upside down. We're not living in the sixties anymore, Jaylene.

Jaylene

I was only eighteen when the sixties ended, Lois; I barely knew what was going on. Besides, I'm just trying to find jobs for people. That's buying into the system, maintaining the status quo.

Lois

Obviously, not everyone sees it that way.

Jaylene

Maybe not these reactionary letter writers, but the people I've been dealing with see it that way.

Lois

(Stands to leave) Just remember, Jaylene, yours is not the only program this church sponsors. What you do reflects on everyone, and everything, else. A low profile might be more advisable—and advantageous for everyone.

(LOIS exits.)

Jaylene

A low profile! Wait till she hears about our Awards Night-Political Fact Finding-Fund Raiser event at the Brown Kirby.

(LIGHTS DOWN on JAYLENE. The CHORUS and OTHERS begin milling about the stage; the men in suits and ties and the women in dresses or business attire. LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE and AL as they observe from Downstage.)

Jaylene

You know what I love most about this, Al?

Al

The finger food Darius prepared?

Jaylene

In addition to that. Nobody knows who anybody really is. It's kind of like that scene in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* when Jack Nicholson takes the patients on a boat ride and introduces each of them as Dr. So-and-so from the State Mental Hospital.

Al

I admit there's a similarity, but I wouldn't push that analogy too far if I were you.

(As JAYLENE and AL continue to observe, LIGHTS UP on the following exchanges.)

Rep. Roth

(Reading the name tag on CLYDE FERGUSON'S windbreaker) So, Clyde, who do you work for?

Clyde

Myself, I guess.

Rep. Roth

I didn't know there were any self-employed workers in this program.

Clyde

Well, I'm not exactly **in** this program. I own Bodies Made Beautiful auto repair.

Rep. Roth

Ah, you're one of the employers.

Clyde

Yes, sir. I've hired two of Jaylene's people so far.

(REP. ROTH places his arm around CLYDE as THEY move aside.)

Rep. Roth

Clyde, you're just the person I want to talk to. I'm Representative Ed Roth and I'd like your opinion about a bill coming up in Congress.

Betsy

(To KATHY from the Parole Commission) We have four of Jaylene's clients working at the Hotel Roosevelt. How many have you hired *(Looking at her name tag)*, Kathy?

Kathy

None, actually.

Betsy

Oh, just checking out the program, eh? Well, let me tell you from my experience, you won't find better workers than the ones Jaylene refers. I don't know where she gets them.

Kathy

From us, as a matter of fact.

Betsy

You're with . . .

Kathy

. . . the Parole Commission.

Betsy

Well, I'll be. You know, we were the first company to hire someone from Jaylene's program.

Kathy

Isaiah Sampson, the first ex-felon we sent her.

(KATHY and BETSY continue silently as BILL REYNOLDS passes WILLIE and MR. GIFFORD.)

Willie

Say, you be Bill Reynolds, ain't you?

Reynolds

Yes I am, even without my name tag.

Willie

I thought so. You look just like your picture in the paper. Ah, this is Mr. Gifford, my boss.

Gifford

We spoke on the phone, Mr. Reynolds, before you wrote the article about "Workers for You."

Reynolds

Yes, I remember.

Gifford

I just want you to know, as a result of your article, I lost one of my contracts.

Reynolds

I'm sorry to hear that.

Gifford

But I gained two new ones! And Willie here, Mr. Holder, is going to do the wiring on one of them. It's hard to find good electricians these days.

(The focus returns to JAYLENE and AL.)

Al

It must make you feel kind of special to know all these people are here because of you.

Jaylene

And because of your help. I couldn't have pulled this off without you, Al.

Al

(With a hint of sarcasm) I know, and I did it all . . . so I could finally meet your dear friend, Lois. Which one is she anyway?

Jaylene

She's not here yet. At least, I haven't seen her. But maybe you can tell me, who's that over there talking to Jake Holmquist?

Al

Beats me. I don't even know Jake Holmquist.

Jaylene

Well, I'll just have to go over and find out who he is. We don't want any party crashers, do we?

Al

Not at my party.

(As JAYLENE approaches, JAKE moves away leaving MARK by himself. JAYLENE extends her hand as she greets MARK.)

Jaylene

Hello. I don't believe we've met. I'm Jaylene James.

Mark

I know. I heard you speak at our church when this program was just getting started. I liked what you had to say, and particularly how you handled one of the more opinionated questioners.

Jaylene

I remember that guy. He seemed a little sarcastic, maybe antagonistic.

Mark

I **know** that guy, and I'd say he's more like . . . belligerent, when there's something he disagrees with. But he didn't seem to frustrate you.

Jaylene

I'm too determined to know when I should be frustrated.

Mark

That's probably a real asset in your position. By the way, I'm Mark Cross.

Jaylene

Pleased to meet you, Mark. So you're here out of curiosity?

Mark

Not exactly. I'm the staff coordinator for the Chief Justice of the United States.

Jaylene

As in, the Supreme Court of the United States?

Mark

That's right.

Jaylene

Why would you be interested in a little program like ours?

Mark

Well, I **am** a member of this church. But more importantly, the Chief Justice is deeply concerned about our criminal justice system. He's convinced we're not doing enough to help inmates prepare for their return to society.

Jaylene

I second that.

Mark

He's looking at all kinds of ideas, especially bringing businesses into the prisons to give inmates a real work experience and marketable job skills. He calls it "Factories with Fences."

Jaylene

That works for me.

Mark

He also feels we should be more helpful with an inmate's transition when they're released from prison.

Jaylene

That's where we come in.

Mark

I know. I told the Chief Justice about your program and he asked me to keep him informed. So here I am.

Jaylene

I'm glad you came. And if I can give you any additional information or be of any help to you, let me know.

Mark

I will.

(LOIS enters; JAYLENE takes notice.)

Jaylene

Excuse me, Mark. The chairwoman of our Board has just arrived. I better go see her.

Mark

Of course. We'll speak again soon.

(JAYLENE approaches LOIS.)

Jaylene

Lois, I'm glad you could make it. We're just about to begin the awards ceremony.

Lois

I'm not sure that's such a good idea, Jaylene.

Jaylene

Why not?

Lois

The church has been robbed.

Jaylene

That's awful. When did it happen?

Lois

Late this afternoon. The pastor was getting ready to leave when he heard a disturbance in the basement and called the police.

Jaylene

Did they catch the robber?

Lois

Yes.

Jaylene

That's good. But . . . why shouldn't we go ahead with our ceremony?

Lois

The robber was one of your people.

Jaylene

Who?

Lois

A Lorenzo Saunders.

Jaylene

Oh no. I knew Lorenzo had an attitude problem, but I thought he was getting over that. He was doing so well at G. W. I'll have to talk to him.

Lois

I'm afraid that won't be possible.

Jaylene

Why not?

Lois

Apparently he resisted arrest and threatened the officers who were called to the scene with a gun. *(Beat)* They shot him.

Jaylene

How badly is he hurt?

Lois

He's dead.

(LIGHTS OUT on JAYLENE and LOIS. LIGHTS UP on CHORUS.)

Chorus

*Don't be so shocked; you knew it was coming
Something awful was bound to happen.
You can't put your trust in people like that.
They'll turn against you and do you in.
We told you it would happen; we gave you warnings.
We told you so; we told you so.*

(The LIGHTS FADE OUT on "We told you so; we told you so" which the CHORUS repeats in diminishing volume. END ACT I.)

ACT II; SCENE 1

(AT RISE: The CHORUS Upstage with JAYLENE and AL seated at their kitchen table Stage Left.)

Chorus

*Try to regroup, resume your drive
Crawl out from under the wall that collapsed.
Try to convince the doubters and skeptics
That you're still right and know what to do.
Try to keep going despite this setback.
Try not to think that more may come.
Try to remember why to try.
Try not to try what you can't guarantee.*

(JAYLENE and AL continue to sit in silence. JAYLENE half-heartedly fingers the newspaper, lifts her coffee cup, then sets it down, sighing deeply.)

Jaylene

Well, I guess I better be going to work.

Al

Why?

Jaylene

Because it's Tuesday morning and I should be at work.

Al

It's not just any Tuesday morning, Jay. Nobody would expect you to go to work as usual after what happened yesterday.

Jaylene

But I can't sit here all day. I have to do something, get busy.

Al

Don't do it at the church. Everything there will remind you of what happened.

Jaylene

(Long pause) Why did it have to happen, Al? Why did Lorenzo break into the church for petty cash? Why did he resist arrest and threaten armed police officers with a gun? And why did they have to shoot him point blank?

Al

I can give you all the answers you can give yourself, but it won't change a thing. The question you need to ask, and try to answer, is: what now?

Jaylene

I'm sure it won't be business as usual. I imagine Lois has already been talking with the Board members.

Al

She can't hold you responsible for what Lorenzo did.

Jaylene

I hold me responsible; she'll just look at what happened and draw her own conclusions.

Al

Meaning what, that she'll fire you? After all you've accomplished in just one year?

Jaylene

It doesn't feel like I've accomplished very much right now.

Al

You've accomplished more than anyone had a right to expect—except me, of course, because I know what you can do.

Jaylene

Then tell me what I should do now.

Al

Don't let this one incident overshadow everything else. Forget about Lois and the Board, and the church for that matter. Talk with some of the guys—Darius and the others. See what they have to say.

Jaylene

We do have a group meeting scheduled for tonight.

Al

Keep it, but don't meet at the church or any of their work places. Meet somewhere neutral so there are no prior experiences to get in the way.

Jaylene

Why does that sound familiar?

Al

I didn't proof-read your dissertation without learning something about effective group communication.

Jaylene

Okay, so where do you suggest we meet?

(LIGHTS DOWN on JAYLENE and AL. JAYLENE crosses to a table Stage Right at which DARIUS is seated. LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE and DARIUS.)

Darius

So this is where your husband works.

Jaylene

When he's in his office. Most of the time he's up on the Hill, talking to legislators or their staff.

Darius

What about?

Jaylene

Organic farming. You know, that's where . . .

Darius

My granddaddy farmed like that. Natural fertilizers and no pesticides. Lived to be ninety-five. I'm tryin' to talk Mr. Kirby into buyin' more organic produce for the restaurant.

Jaylene

Al would thank you.

Darius

Ain't nothin' to thank me for yet, but I'll let you know if there is.

Jaylene

(Pause) Do you think any of the others will be coming?

Darius

Willie and Isaiah for sure; told me they comin' together.

Jaylene

Have you talked with anyone else—about yesterday?

Darius

Talked to everybody.

Jaylene

How're they doing?

Darius

'bout the same as any other time a brother goes down.

Jaylene

How's that?

Darius

Glad it wasn't me, and things ain't changed much when it comes to . . . stuff like that.

Jaylene

So you don't think anybody will feel discouraged, or embarrassed, to be identified with our program?

Darius

It'd take more than that, Dr. J. Besides, it wasn't like 'Zo was a role model or hero to anybody.

Jaylene

I just hope this incident won't have a negative effect on anybody's morale.

Darius

Everybody I talked to was at work today. Except you.

Jaylene

I started to go in, but somehow it just didn't feel right.

Darius

Feelin' right and doin' right ain't always the same thing.

Jaylene

You think I should have gone to work today?

Darius

Ain't for me to say. All I know is, there's a lot of people gonna need **you** to go to work so **they** can have a chance to go to work.

(WILLIE and ISAIAH enter.)

Willie

Sorry we late, Dr. J. Ain't neither of us ever took this subway exit before.

Isaiah

Fact is, I haven't been on the new subway but once. Bus gets me where I need to go.

Jaylene

That's all right. I'm just glad you all came.

Willie

Wouldn't miss a group meetin,' Dr. J.

Jaylene

Will you miss Lorenzo?

Willie

Well now, that's a different matter.

Isaiah

'Zo didn't always come to the meetings. And didn't say much when he showed.

Darius

Dr. J's concerned that you, and others in the program, might start runnin' into some problems.

Isaiah

Because of what 'Zo did yesterday?

Willie

That be his business.

Jaylene

But you're in the same program. His action might reflect on you, make it more difficult for you to do your job going forward.

Willie

'Zo didn't run the program, Dr. J. You do, and I got my job because of you.

Isaiah

I did hear some people make comments at a luncheon today, but I served 'em same as always.

Jaylene

What did they say?

Isaiah

Seemed mostly upset that 'Zo tried to rob a church.

Jaylene

Not that he was shot to death?

Isaiah

I didn't hear everything they had to say.

Willie

Nobody said nothin' on my job.

Darius

Mr. Kirby asked if I knew 'Zo. That's all.

Jaylene

So you don't think there's anything to worry about.

Darius

Always somethin' to worry about, Dr. J. But 'Zo's action ain't it. Not as far as the guys in the program go.

(WILLIE and ISAIAH nod and voice agreement.)

Darius, Continued

Now as far as the program itself, and how your people see things, that's for you to say.

Jaylene

My people?

(LIGHTS OUT. JAYLENE returns to the kitchen table Stage Left. LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE and AL.)

Jaylene

My people. Just two words, but they made me feel two miles away from those guys.

Al

In terms of race relations, that's still pretty close.

Jaylene

You know what I mean, Al. I've been pouring myself out for them. I've been totally on their side.

Al

You can be **on** their side, Jay, but you'll never be on their **inside**. It's got nothing to do with you; it's just reality. Besides, Darius is basically right.

Jaylene

What do you mean?

Al

Who funds your program? Who's hiring your clients? Who do you go to if you want to expand?

Jaylene

My people.

Al

There's nothing wrong with that. They're your strength; use them. "Start with what you've got, not with what you want." Wasn't that what you told the parents of those emotionally disturbed kids in your dissertation project?

Jaylene

More or less.

Al

Mostly more. I know; I've used the same mantra in dealing with legislators for the organic farmers.

Jaylene

And look where it's gotten you.

Al

I still have a job.

Jaylene

Good, because I may not.

Al

C'mon, Jay. You're over dramatizing this.

Jaylene

I'll let you know about that tomorrow.

Al

What's tomorrow?

Jaylene

Lois wants to see me.

(LIGHTS OUT on JAYLENE and AL. AL exits as JAYLENE crosses to her desk. LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE talking on the phone. There is a knock.)

Jaylene

That must be Lois at the door. I'll call you later, Al. Wish me luck.

(JAYLENE hangs up the phone, exits SL and re-enters a moment later with JAKE HOLMQUIST.)

Jake

(As entering) I hope I'm not interrupting anything by just dropping by.

Jaylene

No, no. I have a meeting in a few minutes but I'm free now.

Jake

I just can't tell you how sorry I am about Lorenzo. He could be abrasive at times, but he really knew that computer stuff, and I thought he liked working at the University.

Jaylene

He did. It's when he wasn't working that things got to him.

Jake

I guess it's pretty hard for some people to rise above their past and change the way they've lived.

Jaylene

I really thought Lorenzo was on his way. He was just the kind of person this program is meant for.

Jake

It must be discouraging for you.

Jaylene

And for you too. You not only took a chance by hiring him but opened the door for him to advance and do something he was really interested in. You couldn't have done more for him, Jake.

Jake

Maybe not, but there is something else I'd like to do for him now, which is why I stopped by. I saw in the death notice this morning that he doesn't seem to have any family or relatives.

Jaylene

None that any of us know about.

Jake

And there was no mention of a viewing or service.

Jaylene

Nothing's been arranged yet.

Jake

Well, I'd like to take care of his funeral expenses, whatever the arrangements turn out to be. If you think that's appropriate.

Jaylene

It's more than appropriate, Jake; it's extremely generous.

Jake

I have discretionary funds in my budget that I can use for emergencies and unexpected needs. I think this fits the criteria.

Jaylene

I don't know what to say. How can I thank you?

Jake

By sending me a good replacement for Lorenzo. Don't give up on your program, Jaylene. And don't give up on the people you're trying to help.

(LOIS enters, apparently annoyed.)

Lois

Excuse me, Jaylene. We had an appointment at nine. I've been waiting outside your office.

Jake

I was just leaving. Sorry if I delayed you.

Jaylene

(Looks at her wristwatch) You haven't. Lois, this is Jake Holmquist, Director of Personnel at G. W. University. *(To JAKE)* Lois chairs our Board of Directors.

Jake

Pleased to meet you.

Jaylene

Mr. Holmquist has hired more of our clients—including Lorenzo Saunders—than any other employer.

Jake

I just told Jaylene how sorry I am about Lorenzo. Such a tragic outcome.

Lois

Unfortunate, indeed.

Jake

We both thought he was turning his life around, thanks to this wonderful program.

Lois

One can never be too sure about things like that, can one?

Jake

No, but without a program like “Workers for You,” people like Lorenzo wouldn’t have much of a chance at all. It must make you feel good to be associated with it.

Lois

I try to do my part.

Jake

Well, I won’t keep you from doing it now. It was nice to meet you, Lois. Let me know when the arrangements are finalized, Jaylene.

(JAKE exits.)

Lois

Arrangements?

Jaylene

For Lorenzo’s funeral. Mr. Holmquist has offered to pay the expenses.

Lois

How uncommonly generous.

Jaylene

It’s certainly generous, but not uncommon for our employers to do whatever they can for our clients.

Lois

Do I assume **you** are making the funeral arrangements?

Jaylene

Unless I can find someone in the next few days with closer ties to Lorenzo. *(Pause)* I was thinking it would be appropriate to hold a service for him here at the church.

Lois

Here? How is that appropriate? The man tried to rob this church.

Jaylene

Yes, but he also found a job through this church’s help. It may have been the most positive experience in his whole life.

Lois

That may be true, but he—like everyone else in your program—has no affiliation with the church itself.

Jaylene

Are you saying the church is here only for its own members?

Lois

When it comes to holding a funeral service, under these circumstances, yes.

Jaylene

What circumstances? Lorenzo was a member of a program sponsored by the church. If this is where he died, why can't it also be where he's buried?

Lois

Because he didn't just "die" here. He was shot resisting arrest during a burglary.

Jaylene

And that means you want nothing more to do with him?

Lois

There's nothing more to do, as far as I can see.

Jaylene

I just don't understand that kind of thinking. It makes me wonder why you ever started this program.

Lois

We know why we started the program, but some members of the Board are no longer so sure you're the right person to lead it.

Jaylene

What? I'm finding more than two jobs a week, I have a growing list of employers, a solid working relationship with the Parole Commission, and I have several meetings lined up this week with prospective funding sources. What more does the Board expect me to do?

Lois

It's not about your performance, Jaylene. It's more about you.

Jaylene

What about me?

Lois

That's what the Board would like to discuss with you. This Friday evening, at seven o'clock.

Jaylene

Are you going to fire me?

Lois

I hope it wouldn't come to that, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. Friday at seven?

Jaylene

I'll be here.

Lois

And if I may, I would advise against those fund-raising efforts until you've met with the Board.

Jaylene

But we're going to need funding if the program is to continue after the church's seed money is gone.

Lois

I know.

(LOIS exits.)

Jaylene

They **are** going to fire me.

(LIGHTS DOWN then LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE and AL.)

Al

You actually asked her if the Board is going to fire you?

Jaylene

Well, you put the idea in my head.

Al

If I recall, I said it facetiously.

Jaylene

It felt as serious as sin when she said the Board wants to talk about me personally.

Al

They can't fire you just because they don't like you.

Jaylene

Maybe they don't like the way I do things.

Al

The way you do things has accomplished more than they hired you to do.

Jaylene

But I have the feeling I move too quickly for some of them. Maybe I should consult more often or defer to their preferences.

Al

That's not you, Jay. You're an achiever; you want to get things done. Besides, Lois said it wasn't about your performance.

Jaylene

But that's all they have to go on. No one on the Board knows me personally. I haven't had personal conversations with any Board member except Lois.

Al

And those haven't seemed all that personal to me.

Jaylene

She does have a way of grinding my wheels.

Al

Maybe you're a threat to her.

Jaylene

But I've tried to be cooperative, respectful.

Al

While remaining your no-nonsense, self-confident, in-charge self. Maybe it's just an old-fashioned clash of personalities. You may be too strong for her liking.

Jaylene

So my strength turns out to be my weakness.

Al

I'd call it your vulnerability. But only if the Board fires you, which I still don't believe they will.

Jaylene

Lois said she hoped it wouldn't come to that, but it didn't feel very reassuring.

Al

Maybe she hopes you'll resign.

Jaylene

Resign? Why would I do that?

Al

I didn't say you would, but it would make things a lot easier for Lois and anyone else who thinks you're not "the right person to run the program."

Jaylene

Oh no. I'm not letting them off the hook by resigning. If they want to fire me, they'll have to give their reasons why.

Al

And if their reasons are about you personally, are you ready to deal with that?

Jaylene

I am—if you're with me.

Al

Of course I am.

(AL gives JAYLENE a strong hug, then a kiss.)

Al, Continued

You know, there may be another way to look at all this.

Jaylene

Oh, what's that?

Al

Maybe you've already accomplished all you can with this program.

Jaylene

You've got to be kidding. I haven't even begun to accomplish what I have in mind.

Al

I know, but maybe you need a different setting to do all you have in mind.

Jaylene

Like what?

Al

I don't know, but people don't usually see alternatives or opportunities unless they're looking for them.

Jaylene

Well, I'm not looking.

Al

You may have to.

Jaylene

So you **do** think they want to fire me.

Al

No, I'm only trying to prepare for what may happen, and all I'm saying is, if worse comes to worst, it may be for the best.

Jaylene

You're getting too heady for me. All I know is, the Board wants to meet with me on Friday night, and we'll go from there.

Al

Fair enough. There's no need to get ahead of ourselves, as Lois herself cautioned. *(Beat)* What are you going to do till then?

Jaylene

Meet with representatives of three funding sources, as planned. I've still got a job to do.

(LIGHTS DOWN on JAYLENE and AL; LIGHTS UP on CHORUS.)

Chorus

*If you go after funding, be prepared to hear:
We don't fund salaries; we only give loans;
The deadline has passed; come back next time.
Our mission is to match what others donate.
We need a track record of at least three years.
Who else is funding you and for how much?*

(LIGHTS DOWN. END ACT II; SCENE 1.)

ACT II; SCENE 2

(AT RISE: the hallway outside the meeting room of the church. As in Act I; Scene 1, a partition separates the hallway from the meeting room. AL paces nervously. After a few moments JAYLENE enters out of breath. AL quickly crosses to her.)

Al

Where have you been? It's almost seven.

Jaylene

I had a great meeting with the president of People First, but she wouldn't stop asking questions about the program and where I see it going. She all but assured me of a twenty-five thousand dollar grant AND I can use it for a salary! Now I can hire a job developer.

Al

That's great, Jay, but first things first. Are you ready for this meeting?

Jaylene

(Inhales deeply, straightens her posture) More than ever.

Al

Then go get 'em, girl.

*(LIGHTS DOWN on AL as JAYLENE crosses into the meeting room.
LIGHTS UP on JAYLENE seated center surrounded by the CHORUS with
LOIS center.)*

Chorus

*Thank you for meeting with us tonight.
We know it's on short notice.
We appreciate all that you've done.*

(Each member of the CHORUS speaks one after the other.)

Chorus, Continued

*But . . . But . . . But . . . But . . . But
We have some concerns we need to discuss
Regarding your judgment and personal conduct.*

Lois

For example, we think you're much too friendly with the inmates.

Jaylene

They're ex-inmates, Lois, and what do you mean "too friendly"?

Lois

You're always giving them hugs and exchanging those unusual handshakes.

Jaylene

I'm an expressive person; I believe in the value of human touch.

Chorus

*But it could be misinterpreted,
Give the wrong impression,
Let them feel they're free
To take advantage when they want.*

Lois

Like that Lorenzo Saunders, for example.

Jaylene

Nobody knows what caused Lorenzo to do what he did.

Lois

Nonetheless, we recommend you take a more professional, even formal, approach with the inmates in the future.

Chorus

*Then there's the business
Of favoring business.*

Jaylene

What are you talking about?

Lois

Those tax breaks you obtain for companies that hire the inmates.

Jaylene

That's a government program. Companies that qualify are entitled to them. I only use it as an incentive so they'll hire our clients.

Lois

Nonetheless, we recommend that you focus more on the inmates themselves and less on the profits of these companies.

Chorus

*There's also the issue of getting publicity,
Drawing attention and building an image.*

Jaylene

The more our program is known the more likely we are to succeed.

Lois

Unless the publicity turns negative, or appears to be merely self-serving.

Jaylene

Any publicity I've generated has been for the program, and to make the employers and clients feel good about being part of it.

Lois

Nonetheless, promoting one's accomplishments is not consistent with the spirit of humble service we promote in the church. We recommend you tone down the quest for notoriety.

Chorus

*And that brings up the basic point,
The concern that covers all the others.*

Lois

We feel, despite your success thus far, that you're too ambitious.

Jaylene

I only want the program to succeed.

Lois

But you're trying to do too much, too fast. Why do you think we set the original goal at two jobs a week?

Jaylene

Because you thought it was achievable.

Lois

Because we wanted to keep the program small, focused on a single objective.

Chorus

*But you've pushed beyond the intended goal,
Adding group meetings and public events.
You want more staff and additional funding.
You're on a course we never envisioned.*

Jaylene

You didn't tell me two jobs a week was the limit. I assumed it was the minimum. Anything beyond that would be welcomed.

Lois

It's not your assumption that troubles us, Jaylene; it's your presumption. You seem to think we've given you a carte blanche to do whatever you want.

Jaylene

Everything I've done is to develop the program so more ex-inmates can find jobs. That's not "whatever I want"; it's what the program exists for.

Lois

Nonetheless, we see a more limited program than you do. And in keeping with that vision, we recommend that you confine your activity to obtaining two jobs a week.

Jaylene

I can't believe your vision is so myopic. Why wouldn't you want me to do all I can to make this program everything it can be?

Lois

Finding two jobs a week is all we want you to do.

Jaylene

And if I don't want to settle for that?

Lois

Then you leave us no choice but to find someone else who will.

Jaylene

You don't seem to leave me much choice either.

(Members of the CHORUS withdraw, chanting as THEY exit.)

Chorus

*Too friendly with inmates, too cozy with business,
Much too public and much too ambitious.*

Lois

Nonetheless, the choice is yours.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes