

LESSON 15:

CRACKDOWN

Forceful action taken by authority

Monday, January 10, 2000

Vice Principal Grissom made his rounds around campus with his two trusty tools.

In his right hand was a list of students he personally identified as problem students. In his left, dominant hand he carried a bullhorn he used to make his commands loud and clear. Grissom took a route through Washington High that he drew out. It was a route that would let him cover the most ground before homeroom. And a route that covered the locations that his problem students often hung out before class. With bullhorn in hand, he barked orders and issued punishments to keep those kids in line.

“Two days detention, Mr. Watkins. Now remove that boy from his locker and return his lunch money.”

Grissom’s search included both the boys’ and the girls’ restrooms. “Ms. Chastel, your makeup exceeds the allowed amount. Report to detention next Saturday morning.”

Not even the cafeteria was safe. “Mr. Cook, I have warned you about chewing with your mouth open. Finish your breakfast in the ISS room.” His voice and his authority was felt through every corner of the cafeteria.

In one week, Grissom transformed Washington High. The halls and walkways were free of litter. Acts of vandalism, harassment, and tardiness decreased significantly. For the first time in years, not one student was busted for smoking. In short, order was returning to the school, order through fear. From detention to both in and out of school suspension, Grissom made good on his threats to dish out the most

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severe punishment for any infraction. That fear put most of the students on the straight and narrow. The seniors, who were still afraid of getting their prom cancelled, were on their best behavior. That set an example for the younger students to follow.

Grissom stood in the middle of the quad and simply observed the students' activity. His presence was their reminder that he was always watching. He looked toward the A Building and saw Jericho, the truant officer, ride in on horseback. His bounty: Charity, Vicks, Wedge, and Casey were hogtied on the horse's back. Grissom motioned for Jericho to take the ditchers to his office. He grinned with the thought of how he was going to discipline the ditchers. It was the same grin he had whenever the judge sentenced the criminals he prosecuted.

What made Grissom happy was that nobody opposed his methods of discipline. Some of the teachers and staff praised Grissom for finally returning control of the school back to the adults. The others wanted to speak out against him and his methods, but they weren't willing to risk their jobs to do so. The students didn't say anything either. None of them wanted to be the next addition to Grissom's problem students list. Grissom was pleased with the work he did so far. But there was more work to be done, and one more student on his list. A red Hyundai Sonata pulled up to the drop-off point and out came #1 on Vice Principal Grissom's problem students list: Robert Stanley.

Rob made his triumphant return to Washington High dressed like he stepped off the set of a rap video. He sported a glossy, black puffer jacket with an NFL jersey underneath. A backward white cap slightly tilted to the side with his hair peeking out, showing parts of his fresh haircut. A fresh pair of baggy jeans two sizes too big and barely hanging on to his body. And a brand new pair of Air Jordans delivered from the *Eastbay* catalog. Capping off his wardrobe was a gold watch and a custom made gold necklace with an *Ed Edd and Eddy* pendant. His new wardrobe came courtesy of a shopping trip through Park Hills Mall funded by Leslie. To her, The hundreds of dollars charged to the Taylor family's black card was a small price to pay for Rob introducing her to the drama club and turning things around for her.

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Rob carried an oversized backpack packed with all kinds of merchandise for him to sell. And he was ready to move product as soon as possible. He cupped his hand to his mouth and announced his return to everyone in the quad. “Ayo, look who it is! Big Rob Dawg’s in the building!” He followed that up with his signature barking noises that drew the attention of his best customers. They came running itching to buy whatever he had to sell.

Not wanting anyone to stain his new gear, Rob commanded, “Bag back! Bag back! Get up off me. I said get up off me!” The group gave Rob some space and he continued, “I know y’all been fiendin’ but don’t even trip. Ya boy Everlasting Robstoppa got enough work to serve the whole school for the rest of the year!” He dropped the backpack onto the ground and opened it up revealing his merch. He asked, “Now, what y’all trying to get?”

Rob’s customers fought with each other to be the next to buy something. One-by-one they exchanged money for junk food, test answers, bootleg movies on VHS, burned copies of CDs, and adult magazines. They wanted anything and everything Rob could get his hands on during his suspension. The biggest sellers were the Pokémon cards and merchandise that were sold out for months in all the stores. He was being swarmed in every direction with cash. His hands were quick to snatch the bills out of everyone’s hands and to weave past the debit cards some people were trying to pay with. He reminded those customers of his store policy, “Cash only, fool!”

Unknown to Rob, Vice Principal Grissom was in the quad and watching him like a hawk. He made a mental note of every transaction, counting each one made and which students bought something from Rob. The crowd didn’t see Grissom watching either, but unlike Rob, they felt his presence. Rather than returning to the quad after Rob’s bag was empty, they scattered like scared roaches to various other places on campus.

Rob stepped onto the quad with a wallet stuffed with over 400 dollars. He was riding high and was looking forward to making much more throughout the day. He walked toward Grissom and didn’t pay him any mind. During his suspension, he’d heard about the new vice principal and how ruthless he could be. Grissom, or anyone else,

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slowing down or stopping the hustle. As he crossed paths with Grissom, Rob bumped into his arm. With swagger, Rob told Grissom, “Lemme slide past you real quick,” and kept moving.

Grissom turned toward Rob, put the bullhorn to his mouth, and called him out. “Robert Francis Stanley!” His powerful voice boomed through the quad. It silenced all chatter and made Rob stop in his tracks.

Rob turned and faced Grissom. Every teen and adult in the quad looked on as the confrontation unfolded. It was like the scene in a western where the sheriff and the outlaw met in the middle of town at high noon. Rob said, “It’s Rob, man. None of that Robert stuff. And I for damn sure ain’t nobody’s Francis.”

Rob was within earshot of Grissom, so there was no need for the bullhorn. But Grissom wanted everyone in the area to hear him discipline the number 1 problem student. He wanted to remind them all who was in charge, not that anyone needed to be. He demanded, “Robert Francis Stanley, you will report to my office.”

Rob made the same mistake everyone else made, not taking Grissom seriously. He burst into laughter and dismissed Grissom saying, “You for real? Man, stop playin’. I ain’t going nowhere.” His second mistake was turning his back toward Grissom.

With more bass in his voice, Grissom repeated his demand, “Robert Francis Stanley, you WILL report to my office! NOW!” He purposely didn’t tell Rob what would happen if he didn’t obey.

Rob stopped and turned to the vice principal again. He protested, “I know my rights. You can’t press me like this, I ain’t even done nuthin’ yet. Now quit wasting my time. I got stuff to do.”

Grissom didn’t say anything; he knew he wouldn’t have to. Rob, believing he won, turned away again and muttered, “Yeah, that’s what I thought. With your ol’ mark ass. Don’t ever in your life step to Big Rob Dawg like that again.” He looked around and noticed the frightened looks on everyone’s faces. He asked the crowd, “Damn, what got y’all all shook?”

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A boy stepped out in front of the crowd and advised, "You should do what he says, Rob." His friends nodded and agreed with him.

Rob wasn't going to back down and he certainly wasn't going to look weak, especially not in front of his customers. He told the boy, "You can kiss my ass." He then pointed at his friends one-by-one, and said to each of them, "And you can kiss my ass. And you can kiss my ass. And you can kiss my ass. All y'all can kiss my ass." He walked past the boy and raised his hand high into the air to put up the piece sign. He yelled, "Duces!" He lowered only his index finger to show the vice principal what he thought about him.

Rob didn't get far before being surrounded by another group of students. This group was led by Devanté of the JV basketball team and one of Grissom's former problem students. Devanté's group was made up of other students that Grissom reformed. They boxed Rob in, leaving him with no escape. Rob knew that Devanté outmatched him in size, weight, and strength. He wasn't as eager to tell Devanté to kiss his ass. Instead, he tried talking his way out. "Devanté. My dawg. My homie. My ace. You really gonna switch up on your boy like this?"

Devanté remained quiet and wouldn't look Rob eye-to-eye. He was ashamed of himself for what he was doing, but he was ten times more afraid of Grissom. Rob had no choice but to surrender. He sucked his teeth and said, "A'ight, I'll go see what that chump wanna holla at me 'bout." Before returning to Grissom, he made sure Devanté would regret what he did. "They bringing back the chicken sandwiches on Wednesday. You on your own getting one now."

Rob made a 180 degree turn and headed toward the A Building. Devanté cried out, "That's messed up, Rob! You know I got the late lunch block! They always run out before that! C'mon, Rob, I ain't have no choice! Don't be like that! Rob! Rob!"

Grissom made a sharp left turn and behind Rob. When he entered the A Building, and the doors closed behind him, the students in the quad breathed a collective sigh of relief that he was out of sight. They resumed their conversations but quietly so Grissom wouldn't come back outside. Some wondered what Grissom was going to do to

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Rob. Others were thankful that it was Rob that was under Grissom's microscope and not them.

When Rob came into the administration office, the first thing he saw was that Miss Wallace was gone. In her place was a new secretary, Pamela Blankenship, the third new secretary that year. Pamela wore more professional attire than her predecessors, and unlike them, was able to multitask. The entire office, from staff to student volunteers, was moving like a well-oiled machine, something Rob never saw before in the numerous times he was there.

Rob sat next to the ditchers, who were tied to their chairs. Jericho stood across from them and watched them struggle to break free with a grin on his face. When Grissom walked in, the office went quiet. Every staff member snapped to attention and shifted their focus onto him. Grissom went to the ditchers and handed down their sentence.

“You’ve all been caught skipping school 12 times this year. That’s more than enough for misdemeanor charges against both you and your parents. Since all other methods to get you to attend school have failed, you’ve left me with no other choice but to file those charges.”

Charity, still struggling in vain, shrieked, “You bastard! My mom’s a lawyer! You won’t get away with this!”

Grissom countered, “I’ve gone against your mother in two high-profile trials, Ms. Fairchild.” He leaned in closer to Charity, and with a sinister smile, he said, “I look forward to beating her a third time.”

He faced Pamela and ordered, “I want their parents in my office today, Mrs. Blankenship.”

With all seriousness, Pamela said back, “Consider it done, sir.” She put her other tasks on the backburner and made calling the parents her top priority.

Next, Grissom ordered Jericho, “None of them are allowed to leave their seats until I’ve personally spoken to their parents.” Jericho acknowledged the order with a grunt and a nod.

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Vicks asked, "What if we gotta piss?"

Wedge added, "Yeah, I've got a weak bladder."

Grissom answered, "Then your parents better get here pronto." As he walked to his office he commanded, "Let's go, Robert Francis!" Rob grudgingly followed the vice principal into his office.

Casey snickered at the sound of Rob's middle name. It caused Grissom to pause. He had his own theory as to why Casey laughed out of nowhere. He gave Pamela another task. "While we're waiting on their parents, have Officer Warren run drug tests on them."

Pamela called for the security officer to report to the office over the intercom. Grissom said to the ditchers, "Guess you'll get to use the bathroom after all."

Grissom didn't waste any time changing the office's overall look. Principal Terrell made the office look like his home away from home. Vice Principal Grissom made it look like a prison warden's. Stacks of folders containing various students' records were in organized piles all over the floor. Grissom painstakingly went through each of them. There weren't any photos of Grissom's family anywhere because he always kept his home life and work life separate. In fact, there were only two photos on the wall. One was of him shaking hands with the state's Attorney General. And the other was of him receiving his Curtin-Maleng Minister of Justice Award, one of the highest honors for a prosecutor. Taking up most of the space on the wall behind Grissom's desk were framed clippings of national newspapers. The headlines were of the cases he prosecuted that made national news.

Grissom hung his bullhorn on the left wall like it was a hunter's rifle. He pointed to a chair and instructed Rob to sit. Rob sat down immediately and got a closer look at what was on the vice principal's desk. The only thing that caught his eye was a set of numbers written on it. He quickly looked away from the note; he didn't want Grissom catching him looking at it. He took a mental note of one of the numbers: 51.

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Grissom didn't sit in his chair. Instead, he moved around his desk just as he did when he gave his opening statement in court. "65, Mr. Stanley. Within the past hour, you've committed 65 violations of student conduct." Rob knew he wasn't entirely innocent, but he didn't think he committed that many infractions. That was until Grissom itemized every one of them. "3 violations of the dress code, 6 counts of vulgar language, 2 counts of refusing an order from a faculty member, 27 separate counts of possession of contraband, and 27 separate counts of selling merchandise on school grounds without prior permission from an administrator."

Grissom, who was now standing in front of Rob, put out his hand and demanded, "Hand over the money you made selling your contraband."

Rob crossed his arms and refused. "I don't know what you talkin' 'bout. I ain't make no money. I did that just for the love of the game, namsayin'?"

Grissom countered by adding another entry onto Rob's list of infractions. "Another count of refusing an order from a faculty member. That makes 66."

He leaned against his desk with his arms crossed and employed the next strategy in his playbook. "You don't want to give up the money? That's okay. I'll suspend all 27 of your customers instead. I know their faces and I have their names. I will tell them that you gave them up to save your own skin."

Grissom successfully called Rob's bluff. Rob didn't want to lose a significant portion of his clientele on campus, and he didn't want anyone thinking he was a snitch. His reputation and his business would've never recovered from the damage that would've caused. He took out his wallet and disrespectfully tossed it past Grissom and onto the desk.

As Grissom went back around the desk, he returned to his conversation. "I'd love nothing more than to expel you right now, Mr. Stanley. To have you booted off campus just as quickly as you came back. Unfortunately, I don't have the power to do that. Not yet

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anyway.” He took the money out of Rob’s wallet and put it into a plastic bag that he labeled Evidence.

Rob asked, “So what you gonna do? Suspend me again?”

Grissom showed Rob the same disrespect Rob just showed him. He hurled back the wallet, not back at Rob, but onto the floor next to him. While Rob was distracted picking the wallet up, Grissom took the Post-It note and referenced it to unlock a small safe in the right corner of the wall. “No, you wouldn’t learn anything if I only suspended you. You’d come back in a week or two and be right back to your antics, just like you were this morning.” With his wallet back in his possession, Rob looked back up and spotted Grissom putting the plastic bag in the safe and relocking it while holding the Post-It note.

Grissom sat in his chair for the first time. He sat upright and clasped his hands on the desk. He proposed his alternate idea for handling Rob. “Here’s what I’m going to do instead.” He caught Rob looking off to the side and he wanted his full attention for the next part. He commanded, “Look at me, Mr. Stanley!”

Rob redirected his attention back onto Grissom. Grissom told Rob, “I will be watching your every move on campus. Every time you violate the student code of conduct, I will note it. If you’re out of the classroom without a hall pass, I will note it. If you bring more contraband onto campus, I will note it. If you’re disrespectful to any faculty member - even the janitors - I will note it. If you so much as sneeze without covering your mouth first, I will note it. I am going to build a case on you so extensive, and with evidence and testimonies to back it up, you’d be getting off lightly if all Principal Terrell did was expel you.”

Keeping his calm, he continued on with his threat. “And you won’t just be expelled once, Mr. Stanley. You’ll be expelled as many times as it takes for you to comprehend that Washington High belongs to me now. That you and the other punks that ran roughshod on campus all belong to me now. And if you don’t believe me, well then I look forward to giving you this same lecture 10 years from now when you’re still repeating the 9th grade.”

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The expulsions were a last resort. Grissom's goal wasn't to get rid of Rob and wash his hands of him. It was to change Rob's behavior in the present so it wouldn't be a problem in the future. In order to do that, Grissom's plan was to tear down Rob's persona piece by piece. He started by ordering Rob to stand up, which Rob did without delay. Grissom accessed Rob's class schedule on his computer and read it aloud. "It says here, you have Economics first period." With a few keystrokes, he changed that. "Not anymore. You're taking English now. Let's get you reacquainted with the English language."

Next, Grissom instructed Rob to take several steps back. Again, Rob obeyed. Grissom retrieved a belt from his desk and then made his way around to Rob again. He said, "Now, to make sure you're following the dress code." He was now standing closer to Rob than Rob allowed even his favorite customers to be. Rob was powerless to tell Grissom to back away. He forced the belt into Rob's hand and commanded, "Put it on." As Rob pulled up his sagging pants and put on the belt, Grissom gave Rob instructions directly from the student handbook, "In accordance with Rule 11 of the dress code, pants must be worn at the appropriate waist level. Either you wear more fitting jeans, or you wear a belt to keep them where they should be."

Next, Grissom adjusted Rob's cap to where the panel faced front while citing rule 4. "Hats and other head coverings are allowed but must be worn the appropriate way."

Finally, Grissom cited rule 3. "Excessive jewelry is not permitted. Students are allowed to wear one piece of jewelry." This was the dress-code rule that was often ignored by the students and rarely enforced by the teachers. However, Grissom was determined to make sure Rob followed it. He said, "You may wear your watch for the purpose of keeping time." With his left hand, Grissom grabbed Rob's necklace and said, "But this? This is too much." With force and without warning, Grissom yanked Rob's necklace right off of his neck. The clasp broke and some links fell to the ground.

Up to now, Rob put up with everything Grissom put him through. Humiliating him in the quad, turning his customers against him, confiscating the money he earned, changing his schedule, and

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adjusting his wardrobe. But Grissom snatching his chain was going too far. He confronted the vice principal, yelling, “My chain! Ayo man what the f...”

While walking back to his side of the desk, Grissom interrupted, “Language, Mr. Stanley. If you want your necklace back, your parents can come pick it up for you. Both parents.”

Rob asked, “You gonna call my folks about it?”

Grissom sat back in his chair and answered, “No, you are.” In another power move, Grissom didn’t lock away the necklace like he did the money. Instead, he tossed it onto his desk and said, “It’ll be right here waiting for them.” Rob understood that as Grissom’s way to having a conference with his parents, something he didn’t want to happen.

The bell for homeroom rang. Grissom sent Rob on his way with one last reminder of his situation. “If you’re late for class, Mr. Stanley, I will note it.”

Rob left the vice principal’s office without any further protest. On the way to his homeroom class, his classmates came up to him and asked what happened with Grissom. He only answered, “Don’t even worry about it,” in a defeated tone. The usually loud and talkative Rob was soft-spoken and had very little to say. He couldn’t trust any of his customers now. Like Devanté, any of them could also be under Grissom’s thumb.

Rob made a quick stop to his locker. He figured he’d stash his pockets with smaller items to sell in order to recoup some of his losses. He opened his locker to find it empty save for a Post-It note on the shelf. The note read, “I’m always watching,” and had the initials GG underneath. Rob slammed his locker. He imitated Tony Montana and recited one of the movie’s iconic lines. “Okay, Grissom. You wanna go to war? I’ll take you to war.” Rob wasn’t merely acting. He meant every word.