

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF MERCY

On the first day teaching his class 250 college freshmen, R. C. Sproul carefully explained the assignment of three term papers. Each paper was due on the last day of September, October, and November. Sproul clearly stated there would be no extensions (except for medical reasons). At the end of September, some 225 students dutifully turned in their papers, while 25 remorseful students quaked in fear. "We're so sorry," they said. "We didn't make the proper adjustments from high school to college, but we promise to do better next time." He bowed to their pleas for mercy, gave them an extension, but warned them not to be late next month.

The end of October rolled around, and about 200 students turned in their papers, while 50 students showed up empty-handed. "Oh, please," they begged, "it was homecoming weekend, and we ran out of time." Sproul relented once more but warned them, "This is it. No excuses next time. You will get an F."

The end of November came, and only 100 students turned in their papers. The rest told Sproul, "We'll get it in soon."

"Sorry," Sproul replied. "It's too late now. You get an F."

The students howled in protest, "That's not fair!"

"Okay," Sproul replied, "you want justice, do you? Here's what's just: you'll get an F for all three papers that were late. That was the rule, right?"

"The students had quickly taken my mercy for granted," Sproul later reflected. "They assumed it. When justice suddenly fell, they were unprepared for it. It came as a shock, and they were outraged."