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After the jury returned its verdict, Brouwer, pursuant to Davis v. State, 336 S.C. 329, 520 S.E.2d 801 (1999), asked the court to impose a sentence comparable to that given Wendy Kaplan, his co-worker and co-defendant who pled guilty immediately before trial. Because the two were similarly situated in that both were newly hired and trained store clerks with no prior criminal record, and both were convicted of disseminating the exact same material, Brouwer argued for a proportionate sentence. The trial court declined the request, explaining that Kaplan received a more lenient sentence because she admitted guilt:

I'm a judge that gives serious consideration for someone admitting their guilt. I think that's important. . . . I believe that's the first step towards rehabilitation. . . . [T]here is no way in rhyme or reason for us to ever give a sentence for someone pleading guilty the same sentence for a jury trial. Then we have ignored the fact that a person has admitted their guilt. . . . And . . . I will take [that] into consideration in imposing this sentence, because it is not an admission of guilt.

In Davis, our supreme court found an attorney rendered ineffective assistance of counsel when he failed to object to nearly identical comments by the trial court. In response to the defendant's request for a sentence comparable to two co-defendants who pled guilty, the court there stated:

Yes, ma'am, but [Davis] didn't plead guilty. Those other two people, they pled guilty. They admitted what they had done and to me that's the first step towards rehabilitation

Davis, 336 S.C. at 332, 520 S.E.2d at 802. In granting Davis post-conviction relief, the supreme court held:

In response to [Davis'] argument, the trial judge

