ENGINEERING

THE GHOST READING

FACILITATION GUIDE

Overview

These caselets are narrative accounts designed to stimulate dialogue about the virtues that shape professional life. They differ importantly from the ethical case studies most faculty and students encounter in professional training. Rather than presenting a moral dilemma to be resolved, each caselet illustrates the presence—or absence—of a particular virtue as it operates in everyday practice. The goal is not to reach a verdict on what a character should have done, but to explore what a virtue looks like in action—and what may be at stake when it is absent.

Caselets are organized by virtue and professional context, but many will resonate beyond their primary category. A caselet about curiosity in a business setting may illuminate curiosity in medicine or law. Instructors are encouraged to use caselets flexibly and across disciplines.

General Facilitation Tips

- **Focus on virtue, not verdict.** Keep discussion centered on how the virtue appears (or is absent) in the caselet, not on whether the character made the right call. If the conversation drifts toward "what should they have done?", redirect gently.
- **Start with observation.** Open by asking what students noticed before asking what they think. Grounding early discussion in specific moments from the caselet prevents premature judgment.
- **Use questions as starting points, not a script.** Follow student energy. If a student raises a more generative question than the ones provided, pursue it.
- **Push back on easy agreement.** If the room converges too quickly, the caselet's complexity may not have been fully engaged. Invite students to complicate their own claims and consider opposing readings.
- **Invite connection to professional life.** The richest moments often come when students link the caselet to patterns they've observed or anticipated: "I've seen something like this when . . ."
- **Let silence work.** Resist the urge to fill every pause. Students often need a moment to arrive at their most substantive responses.
- **Close with reflection.** Reserve a few minutes to ask students what will stay with them — a question, an image, an unresolved tension. A sentence or two naming what they now understand about the virtue that they didn't before is a strong closing move.

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Discussion Questions

1. Elias had to trust his curiosity over the “objective truth” of the computer system. What are the risks of blindly trusting automated diagnostics? What are the risks of questioning these systems?
2. If Elias had been wrong and the vibration was harmless, would his delay of the project still be considered a virtuous act of engineering, or a failure of judgment?
3. Engineering education and practice relies heavily on data and modeling. What if anything is the role of the “physical intuition” that Elias used?
4. The monitoring system worked perfectly, but it was looking in the wrong place. How can engineers stay curious when so much relies on trusting systems, norms, and routines?

Facilitation of this Caselet

Start with the feeling in the handrail. The caselet turns on a moment of physical intuition: when Elias feels something that the sensors do not register, and he cannot fully articulate why it matters. That moment is worth dwelling on before moving to anything else. Ask students what they make of it. Is this good engineering, or is it the kind of hunch that leads projects astray? The caselet ultimately vindicates Elias, but the discussion should not begin there. Start with the moment itself, when he had no confirmation and only a feeling, and ask what it would have taken to act on it responsibly.

Take the foreman’s position seriously. The foreman is not careless. He is pointing to a freshly calibrated, state-of-the-art monitoring system that is showing green across the board. His argument is the argument that modern engineering is built on: Trust the data, trust the instruments, trust the systems that exist precisely so that individual judgment does not become a bottleneck. Ask students where that argument is strong and where it breaks down, and what the caselet reveals about the conditions under which data-driven confidence can become its own form of blindness.

Linger on what Elias actually does. He does not simply act on his intuition, he goes back to the schematics and finds the specific reason the sensors could be missing what he felt. This is worth isolating. Ask students whether Elias's curiosity would have been as defensible if he had simply insisted something was wrong without doing the work to understand why.

Explore the second discussion question carefully. If Elias had been wrong — that is, if the vibration had been harmless resonance and the delay had cost the project real time and money — would his decision still have been virtuous? This question tends to split rooms, and both sides deserve to be pushed. Students who say yes, the process was right regardless of outcome, should be asked whether there is any amount of being wrong that would change their answer. Students who say no, outcomes matter, should be asked what that implies for how engineers should handle uncertainty in the future.

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