LAW

THE MISSED APPOINTMENT

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. How should legal professionals balance compassion for clients with the practical demands of caseloads, deadlines, and court procedures? Would the answer to this question change if Ms. Lane was paying for the services herself?
2. In what ways can compassion enhance, rather than conflict with, effective legal advocacy?
3. What forms might self-compassion take for a junior attorney navigating difficult client situations?
4. How might lawyers discern when compassionate accommodation supports a client—and when it may unintentionally hinder progress?

Facilitation of this Caselet

Start with Sarah's assumptions, not Ms. Lane's absences. The caselet turns on a quiet but significant moment when Sarah realizes she never asked why Ms. Lane missed her previous appointments. She assumed carelessness when something else entirely was happening. Open discussion there rather than at the level of what Sarah should do next. What made that assumption so available? What does it reveal about how even well-intentioned professionals can let the structure of their work shape their perception of the people they serve?

Take Sarah's frustration seriously. Sarah is not unsympathetic or indifferent. She chose family law precisely because she wanted to make a meaningful difference. Her frustration with Ms. Lane is grounded in real pressures: clinic resources, approaching deadlines, her own reputation with a new supervisor. Resist any framing that treats her frustration as a simple failure of compassion. The more productive question is how good values and genuine care can coexist with assumptions that quietly undermine them.

Explore the tension between compassion and effectiveness. The caselet is careful not to resolve this tension. Sarah's shift in understanding doesn't change the deadlines or the costs to the clinic. Students may want to land on one side: either compassion should take priority, or professional obligations must. Push back on both. The richest discussion will sit with the genuine difficulty of holding both at once, and ask what it looks like in practice to do so.

Close with the question of role boundaries. The caselet ends with Sarah wondering what support she can reasonably offer without overstepping the boundaries of her role. This is a question that has no clean answer, and it shouldn't be treated as one. Ask students where they think those boundaries are, and what draws them there.

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