LAW

THE PRO BONO PROJECT

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.

Copyright 2026, Practical Virtue
Practical Virtue is a production of Virtues & Vocations housed at the Institute for Social Concerns at the University of Notre Dame
virtuesvocations.org

Discussion Questions

1. How does Mark's attitude affect his ability to effectively represent his clients?
2. What are the risks of approaching a case with preconceived notions of its simplicity?
3. How could Mark have demonstrated intellectual humility in this situation?
4. What is the difference between confidence and hubris in the legal context?

Facilitation of this Caselet

Avoid the easy verdict. Students may move quickly to "he should have asked for help" and consider the case closed. Push further: what would genuine humility have required of Mark at each stage: when he first agreed, as he grew overwhelmed, when he considered the pro bono coordinator? The question is less about the final outcome than about the pattern of reasoning throughout.

Distinguish confidence from hubris. Mark's self-assurance is not unreasonable given his track record as he genuinely is a capable lawyer. Help students locate the precise moment where legitimate confidence tips into something else. The caselet is most interesting not when Mark is clearly wrong but when his reasoning almost makes sense.

Take his motivations seriously. Mark's desire to help is real, and his values are genuinely good. Resist any framing that reduces him to simply arrogant or naive. The more productive question is how good intentions and strong values can coexist with a failure of humility.

Sit with the institutional context. Mark's reluctance to ask for help doesn't happen in a vacuum. The firm culture he describes — where pro bono work is treated as an obligation and colleagues are focused on billable hours — shapes what feels possible. Explore how environments can make humility harder to practice, even for people who are otherwise disposed toward it.

Copyright 2026, Practical Virtue
Practical Virtue is a production of Virtues & Vocations housed at the Institute for Social Concerns at the University of Notre Dame
virtuesvocations.org