ENGINEERING

TRUST THE EXPERTS

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. What would it mean for Owen to demonstrate humility in this situation?
2. How do power dynamics in engineering teams foster—or hinder—an environment of professional humility?
3. Why is it important in technical fields to acknowledge one's own limitations or the possibility of error?
4. What is the difference between humility and skepticism? Is there an inherent tension between expertise and humility?
5. Imagine the following scenario:

   A few weeks after the client presentation, the team learns that the advanced material has failed during preliminary field testing—fortunately without causing injury or major loss, but enough to delay the project and damage the firm's reputation. When the data are reexamined, it turns out that the issue Steve identified was indeed a contributing factor. In the aftermath, Owen expresses deep regret, admitting that he had dismissed Steve's concerns too quickly because he felt confident in his team's past successes.

   How, if at all, would this outcome change your thinking about Owen's earlier response to Steve, or about the broader importance of humility and openness in professional collaboration?

Facilitation of this Caselet

Resist making Owen a villain. Owen is not dismissive or cruel. Instead, he is welcoming, well-regarded, and genuinely accomplished. The failure of humility here is subtle, which makes it more instructive. Help students locate exactly where things go wrong: not in his character broadly, but in a specific pattern of receiving feedback that his environment has never forced him to correct.

Take expertise seriously as a complicating factor. Owen's confidence in his team's work is not baseless. They have checked the calculations multiple times. Explore the genuine tension between confidence and expertise, and openness to error. Students should wrestle with this rather than assuming humility simply means deferring to anyone who raises a concern, as such deference is not always prudent or practical.

Follow Steve and Amelia, not just Owen. The caselet offers a rich portrait of what it costs junior colleagues to speak up, especially Steve's hesitation, his late nights with the calculations, and his decision to approach Amelia first. These details deserve attention. Humility in professional life is not only about how expertise is held by those at the top; it is also shaped by what the environment makes possible for those at the bottom.

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Handle the hypothetical outcome carefully. The final discussion question introduces a scenario in which Steve's concern turns out to be correct and consequences follow. This is included to add depth for extended discussions, but it may also cause students to focus on outcomes rather than character. Consider withholding this question until initial discussion has taken place, or using it for a more focused discussion on how increased stakes of a decision can impact humility.

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