Class Activities

# Chapter 12: Addressing Ethics in Leadership

## Guide to the Class Activities

Each activity is designed based on Fink’s Learning Taxonomy and is tagged with the following tags under the taxonomy’s learning and assessment structure:

1. Foundational Knowledge (F)
2. Application (A)
3. Integration (I)
4. Human Dimension (H)
5. Caring (C)
6. Learning How to Learn (L)

These activities may be used in either small-group or large-group settings, depending on class size and time available. Some may also be suitable as homework.

## Activities

### Ethics in the Workplace (A, H)

Poll students about the kinds of careers they are currently in, or hope to go into some day. Group students together who have similar career interests or experiences (retail, marketing, sales, non-profit management, health care, etc.). Have them discuss together the kinds of ethical leadership decisions they may face in this line of work. Example – retail manager:

* How do I handle theft by employees?
* How do I get people to work extra hours if I’m not permitted to pay overtime wages?
* How many of my store’s problems do I need to inform my supervisor of?
* Do I retain underperforming employees who need the income from their job to support their families?
* Customers sometimes return goods claiming they are defective, when it’s clear they have caused the damage themselves. Yet our company policy is “The customer is always right.”

How can they prepare for handling these eventualities?

### Student Presentations (A, I, H, C, L)

As individual or group projects, ask students to research a major event in recent U.S. history that concerns ethical issues, such as the collapse of Enron, the Flint, Michigan water crisis, the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, sexual assaults in the U.S. military, or similar. In their class presentations, students should recount a brief history of the event(s), and then apply concepts from chapter 12 to interpret what went wrong:

* What went wrong with the values, actions, goals, or power of the leader(s)?
* Which pillars of character were absent in the leader(s) management of the crisis or problem?
* How does the handling of the crisis show a lack of justice?
* Which of the five forms of power were used unethically?
* What are the take-away lessons from this case?

### Walking the Talk (A, I)

Have a discussion with the full class or in small groups about organizational values. Have students think about an organization they currently belong to (school, work, volunteer, church, summer camp, fraternity/sorority, etc.). What are the organization’s stated values or mission? What are the organization’s lived values? Are they the same? Why or why not? If not, what steps could be taken to bring them into alignment?

### Current Events (A, I)

Ask students to bring in newspaper clippings (or printouts from the web) of stories and issues involving ethical leadership. Dishonest politicians? Active citizens? Caring neighbors? Discuss what it would take for more people to engage in the ethical actions presented. What actions are needed to change the unethical behavior into ethical behavior?

### Character Development Skits (F, A, H)

Assign each of the pillars of character to a small group. Ask each group to develop a two-part skit. The first part should show a deficit of this dimension (deception, not trustworthiness; disrespect, not respect; etc.) and its outcomes on the persons represented in the skit. In the second part, have students show how a change in attitude, perspective or circumstance causes the same actor to now embody the quality (responsibility, fairness, caring, etc.). After each group has presented, discuss the process of developing character. Is it formed in childhood? Is it formed on a day-to-day basis, by the choices we make? What motivates us to develop our character?

### Open Debate (F, A, C)

Have the class choose a complex ethical issue they would like to research during the week before class, such as global warming. Require them to do some substantive reading on the topic and come prepared to discuss the various aspects of the issue. Students should initially sit on the side of the classroom that corresponds to their position on this issue (which you determine ahead of time), but move freely to the center or other side as new information and perspectives are voiced. As the instructor, prepare for the debate by looking for relevant video clips you can show on the topic and doing some background reading yourself. After the debate, reflect: On an issue like global warming, how do we weigh American interests with those of developing nations? What trade off do we make between current levels of energy consumption in the U.S. and the potential flooding of global coastlines due to the melting of the polar icecaps? How do we engage different perspectives with respect and fairness? What is our responsibility as citizens toward this issue?

### Class Discussion on Forgiveness (A, H, C)

According to our text, forgiveness is an expression of caring on the part of a leader. In class discuss: What kinds of follower behaviors should a leader overlook? Confront? Forgive? How does forgiveness benefit the forgiven? The forgiver? What examples of forgiveness have you seen at work or school?

### Leaders, Ethical Failures and Excuses (A, I, H)

We often perceive leaders who have failed ethically in different ways, depending upon how they respond publically. Ask students to identify compelling examples of leaders responding in public to their personal failures. Then discuss the following questions:

* How did their response change your perceptions of them?
* What impact did this have on the leader?
* Has the leader overcome the ethical failure in some way?
* What lessons might we learn from the way they responded?

## Writing Assignments

### Accountability (A, H, C)

Have students write a 2-3 page paper about the people they feel accountable to for their ethical character and conduct. Whose trust matters to them? Who do they turn to when they are facing an ethical challenge?

### Citizenship (A, H)

Have students write a 2-3 page paper on what citizenship means to them. What benefits do they receive as citizens? What responsibilities do they take on? Do they participate in political meetings and vote in elections?

### The Best People I Know (A, H, C)

In a 2-3 page paper, ask students to list three or four people they know whom they consider to be *good* people. What character traits and actions set these people apart? What are their leadership roles? Students should not limit themselves to the qualities and dimensions that are described in Chapter 11. If possible, ask students to illustrate with a story that exemplifies each person’s character.

### Performing Your Best (A, H, C)

In a 2 page paper, ask students to describe a project or program they worked on that they are proud of. What was the goal of the program or project? What actions did the supervisor or leader take to make them want to perform their best? How can they work toward becoming that same kind of inspiring, ethical leader?

### Integrity (A, I, H)

Parker Palmer, referenced earlier in these resource materials, explains that one of the requirements of leaders is to bring their inner and outer worlds into congruence; being the same person on the inside and outside. Have students write a 1-2 page essay about ways they are divided as persons: How they might both want a career, and fear the responsibilities that come with it. Or they want to learn, but struggle with procrastination. How they are “basically” honest people, but do cut ethical corners sometimes, like driving over the speed limit. Or don’t regard themselves as sexist, but do laugh at sexist jokes. How will they work toward congruence, so their behavior more closely reflects their values? Or do they assume personal development will happen automatically over time?

### One Minute Paper Topics (F, A, I)

Agree or disagree: Life is unfair.

How tolerant are you of differences?

What long-standing habits are *not* helping you develop the six pillars of character?