

Leadership Ethics: The Killer Asteroid

Facilitator Guide

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to teach students to lead and/or follow in an ethical manner.

Method: Ethical principles are easy to follow when all is going well. A crisis, however, will test a leader's adherence to those principles. When a situation seems impossible, ethics are often discarded. This exercise is intended to place students into an impossible situation, with no right answers, while challenging them to approach it in an ethical manner.

As facilitator, it is your responsibility to introduce the exercise, manage the time, and then lead a concluding discussion when the exercise is complete.

Goal: The goal of this exercise is for students to complete the worksheet as a group following a serious, respectful discussion of the situation presented.

Timeline

Individual reading and response: Ten (10) minutes

Small group discussion and response: Twenty (20) minutes

Large group discussion of leadership: Fifteen (15) minutes

Introduction (in your own words): This exercise is intended to give you an opportunity to apply the principles of ethical leadership that we've already discussed. It's easy to be an ethical leader when all is going well, but when a difficult situation arises, our ethical principles are too often the first thing we disregard.

Regardless of your course in life, you will inevitably encounter a situation—perhaps in your work, perhaps in caring for a family member, perhaps in your own health care—where there is no right answer, but leadership is nonetheless required. It is in these times that ethical principles are most needed. For this reason, we are giving you an opportunity to practice ethical leadership in the midst of an impossible situation.

You will each receive a handout. That handout will place in you where you must make an impossible decision, with no right answer. Moreover, that situation will give you the opportunity

to behave in an ethical manner, or to disregard ethics and injure those around you in pursuit of your own goals. The question, then, is how will you lead?

Our timeline for the exercise will be as follows: After each person has received the handout, we will begin. For the first ten (10) minutes, you will each work individually, recording your own personal response to the question presented. You will then proceed to a group discussion and response, for which you will have twenty (20) minutes; during that time, you will choose one person from your group to be the secretary recording your group answers.

Before we begin, I need to emphasize again: remember your ethical principles. There are no right answers. This impossible situation is designed to put every hot-button issue on the table for discussion: race and the importance of diversity, religion, sexual orientation, the true meaning of life, etc. These questions will inevitably come up. Will you remember your ethical principles when they do?

Discussion

Interjection (in your own words, after ten minutes of small group discussion): We interrupt your discussion for a brief news update! Two items:

First, Mia contracted Aids in a freak hospital accident. Her illness can be managed with medication (which she will need for the rest of her life), but it can still be transmitted to others and it cannot be cured.

Second, Manuel accidentally shot himself in the foot while hunting, breaking several bones and requiring surgery. He is expected to make a complete recovery within six months, but the incident has triggered post-traumatic stress disorder, increasing his unpredictability.

Thank you for your attention. This concludes our news update; please return to your discussion.

Conclusion (in your own words): As we discussed at the beginning, this is an impossible situation. The goal is not to find the right answer—there is no right answer—but to learn how to lead in an ethical way when life is difficult and emotions are running high. Now I want to hear from you, not about who you selected, but about how you discussed this problem and how you observed others in your group leading in an ethical manner. Faced with an impossible choice, what did ethical leadership look like in your group today?