

THE WELD THAT PASSED

FACILITATION GUIDE

Overview

These case studies 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 case 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.

Cases are organized by virtue and professional context, but many will resonate beyond their primary category. A case about curiosity in a business setting may illuminate curiosity in medicine or law. Instructors are encouraged to use cases 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 case, 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 case 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 case’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 case 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.

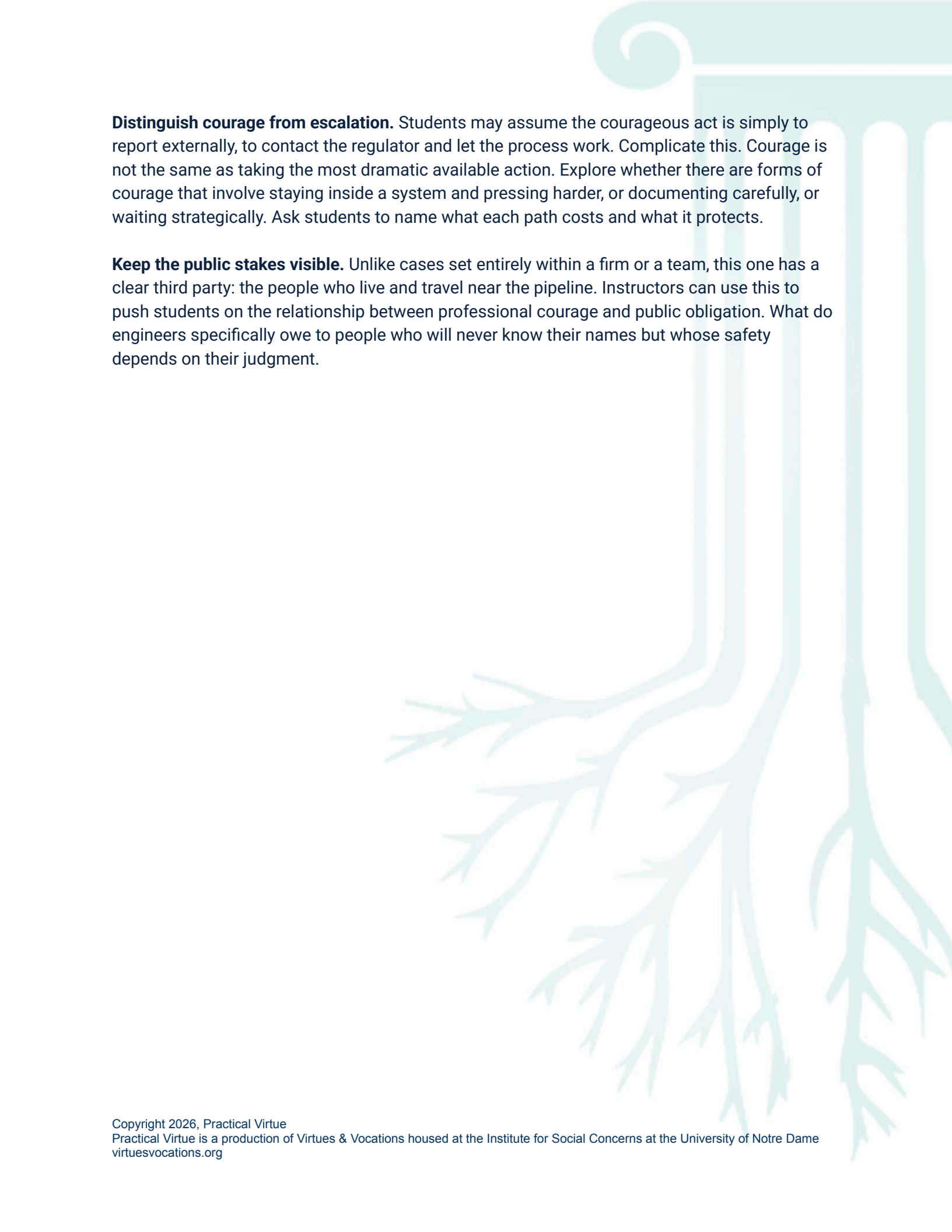
Discussion Questions

1. The engineering code of ethics requires practitioners to hold public safety paramount and to report safety violations when internal processes fail. Daniel knows this. What does courage add to that obligation that the code alone does not supply?
2. Daniel's situation involves a clear conflict between his duty to the public and the potential cost to his family. How should a professional weigh those competing obligations, and does the code of ethics offer any guidance on that question?
3. Aristotle described courage as the mean between cowardice and recklessness. A courageous act is not simply a bold one, instead, it is the right response to a genuine threat, taken at genuine personal risk. Where do each of Daniel's options fall on that spectrum?
4. Daniel has already followed the prescribed internal process and been ignored. At what point does continued internal escalation become a way of avoiding the harder step rather than a genuinely responsible path?
5. Professional codes of ethics exist in part to give individuals cover, or a standard to point to when personal pressure mounts. Did that cover fail Daniel here, and if so, what does that suggest about the limits of codes as a substitute for courage?
6. How do organizations build cultures where an engineer like Daniel is not forced to choose between his livelihood and his professional obligations?

Facilitation of this Case

Resist making Ron a cartoon. The temptation in a case like this is to frame Daniel as the obvious moral exemplar and Ron as the obvious villain. Push back on this early. Ron is not cartoonishly corrupt. He is a busy supervisor making judgment calls under real deadline pressure, in a project that is already behind and over budget. The more productive question is not whether Ron is a bad person but what the professional and institutional conditions are that make his dismissiveness possible, and what courage requires of Daniel in response to those conditions rather than to Ron specifically.

Take the code of ethics seriously as a complicating factor, not a resolution. The revised case makes clear that the engineering code of ethics points toward external reporting when internal processes fail. Students may treat this as settling the question: Daniel should report, end of discussion. Push back on this. Knowing what the code requires and having the courage to act on it are not the same thing. The code gives Daniel a standard to point to, but it does not pay his mortgage, protect his family, or shield him from the informal consequences that formal protections often fail to prevent. Ask students what courage adds to the obligation that the code alone cannot supply.

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Distinguish courage from escalation. Students may assume the courageous act is simply to report externally, to contact the regulator and let the process work. Complicate this. Courage is not the same as taking the most dramatic available action. Explore whether there are forms of courage that involve staying inside a system and pressing harder, or documenting carefully, or waiting strategically. Ask students to name what each path costs and what it protects.

Keep the public stakes visible. Unlike cases set entirely within a firm or a team, this one has a clear third party: the people who live and travel near the pipeline. Instructors can use this to push students on the relationship between professional courage and public obligation. What do engineers specifically owe to people who will never know their names but whose safety depends on their judgment.