

THE PLEA

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

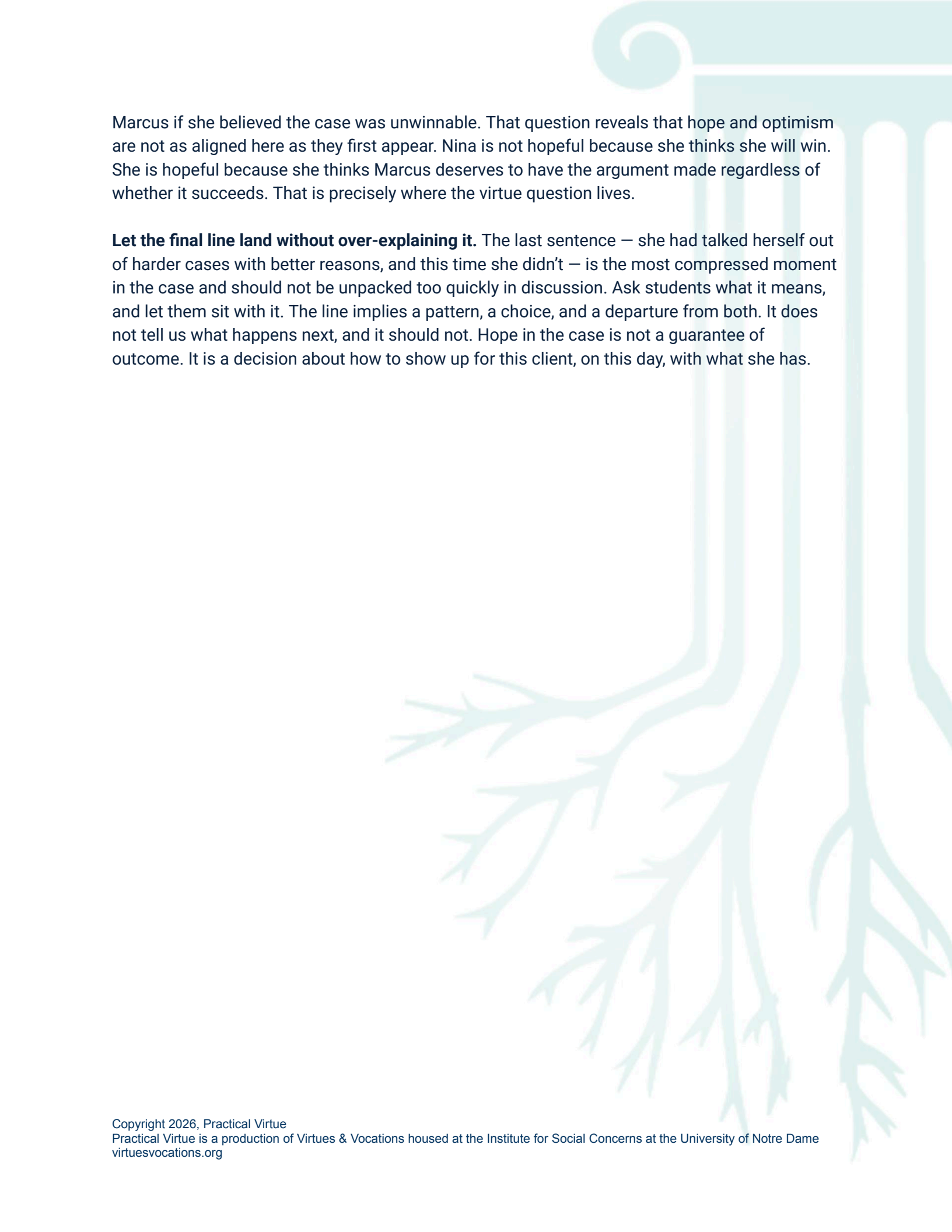
1. Nina is tired in a way that has been affecting her professional judgment. At what point does that kind of exhaustion become a failure of hope, and how would someone in her position recognize that line from the inside?
2. Nina's instinct to fight this case is inseparable from her reading of the footage. Is that hope, or is it professional confidence that comes from eleven years of knowing what is worth taking to trial? Does the distinction matter?
3. Public interest law is demanding, underpaid, and structured in ways that make it hard to sustain the energy that brought most people to it in the first place. What does protecting hope require of someone whose job systematically wears it down?
4. What does optimism look like for someone in Nina's position? What does hope look like? How are these similar and different from one another?
5. Nina tells Marcus she thinks he deserves to have the argument made. Is that a statement about hope, about professional obligation, or about something else – and does it matter which one is motivating her?

Facilitation of this Case

Hope is easy to see in this case, but difficult to evaluate. Nina recovers something at the end, that much is clear. What is less clear is whether what she recovers is the virtue of hope, professional instinct, a response to a specific set of facts, or some combination of all three. Before moving to the specific questions, ask students simply to describe what they think happens in the room with Marcus. Something shifts in Nina. What is it, and where does it come from? That opening question surfaces the interpretive disagreement that will drive the best discussion.

Take the opening seriously before moving to the ending. The case is structured so that the ending feels earned, but only if students have sat with what came before it. Nina has real reasons to be worn down. Eleven years of losses, an underfunded office, a docket that does not get shorter. Ask students to name what has happened to her over those eleven years, not as a critique but as an honest accounting. The supervisors who call it maturity are not entirely wrong. The question the case puts pressure on is what has been lost in that maturation, and whether it can be recovered.

Sit with the optimism and hope distinction in this particular context. This case is more complicated than most because Nina's recovery of hope is accompanied by a genuine belief that she has a real argument – and by eleven years of experience that tells her which arguments are worth making. Students may conclude that she is simply being optimistic about her chances, or that she is drawing on professional judgment rather than hope, and that the virtue language is doing unnecessary work. Push back on both. Ask students what Nina would owe

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Marcus if she believed the case was unwinnable. That question reveals that hope and optimism are not as aligned here as they first appear. Nina is not hopeful because she thinks she will win. She is hopeful because she thinks Marcus deserves to have the argument made regardless of whether it succeeds. That is precisely where the virtue question lives.

Let the final line land without over-explaining it. The last sentence — she had talked herself out of harder cases with better reasons, and this time she didn't — is the most compressed moment in the case and should not be unpacked too quickly in discussion. Ask students what it means, and let them sit with it. The line implies a pattern, a choice, and a departure from both. It does not tell us what happens next, and it should not. Hope in the case is not a guarantee of outcome. It is a decision about how to show up for this client, on this day, with what she has.