

IntegratedEthics

Ethical Leadership (EL) Activities

Introduction

Most leadership training requires leaders to take time out of their busy schedules, which can be hard to do. We've created this set of Ethical Leadership activities to be practical and easy to implement. They enable leaders to hone ethics-related leadership skills as part of the usual workday.

The conceptual underpinnings for these activities come from the IntegratedEthics [Ethical Leadership Compass](#), which describes behaviors that help leaders foster an ethical environment and culture. Unless leaders make a point of doing and saying things that demonstrate they care about ethics, staff will likely conclude that "ethics isn't valued much around here." By engaging in these activities with staff and encouraging others to do the same, leaders "walk the talk," clearly demonstrating their commitment to ethics.

Recommended Distribution

These activities are designed to be completed over time, during a series of regularly scheduled leadership meetings. Since ethical leadership starts at the top, the activities are most likely to be successful if they are introduced by top leaders at a high level meeting. To spread learning effectively throughout the organization, other leaders should take the activities back to their own management meetings and conduct the activity again, asking leaders at the next level to do the same. This creates a cascade effect throughout the organization.

Recommended Order:

1. **Ethics Matters – Part 1**
2. **Ethics Matters – Part 2**
3. **Unintended Messages**
4. **Reinforcing Ethical Practice While Communicating Performance Expectations – Part 1**
5. **Reinforcing Ethical Practice While Communicating Performance Expectations – Part 2**

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IntegratedEthics

Ethics Matters – Part 1

An Ethical Leadership (EL) Activity

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Activity Goal:

Practice communicating directly that ethics is important

Time:

8 -10 minutes

Activity Format:

- Read script
- Ask questions
- Discuss/practice
- Read homework script

Leader Note:

Strive to gain participation from everyone in the group. Ask as many probing questions as needed to encourage a comprehensive discussion.

EL Compass Point Link:

Point 1:

Demonstrate that ethics is a priority

- Talk about Ethics
- Prove that ethics matters to you
- Encourage discussion of ethical concerns

Script:

“Today I would like to spend a few minutes discussing ethical leadership. We have all come in contact with a lot of different leaders over the years. Think about how you would rate each one of these people on a scale ranging from 0 (meaning they really don’t seem to care about ethics) to 10 (meaning you think of them as a role model for ethical leadership). Our staff could rate each of us on a similar scale – their rating would reflect how each of us is perceived as an ethical leader.

I assume everyone here is ethical and also wants to be perceived that way. However, research shows that just because you are ethical doesn’t mean you are perceived that way. As leaders, there are several ways we can increase our ethical leadership credibility by demonstrating to others that we think ethics is important. You need to talk the talk *and* walk the walk. Today, I’d like to take a couple of minutes, as a group, to come up with some words and phrases we might say which communicate that ethics matters to us. For some people using this language comes naturally, but for many of us it’s difficult. Our goal today is to listen to each other using these phrases and to practice communicating directly that ethics is important. We’re going to focus on general things you may say about ethics, not specific *behaviors* you think may or may not be ethical.”

Questions/Discussion:

1. What could you say to communicate ethics is important?

* *Leader note:* If no one is eager to share examples, you may prompt the group by throwing out a couple of examples of your own for discussion. Some examples might include:

- “If it’s *the right thing* to do, we’ll just have to figure out a way to do it.”
- “Now that we understand what we *can* do, i.e., what’s legal, let’s talk about what we *should* do.”
- “*Ethics* is not optional.”

2. Are there times when you would be more or less likely to use a particular phrase?

**Leader note: turn page for homework script*

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Ethics Matters – Part 1

An Ethical Leadership (EL) Activity

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Alternative Homework Assignment:

If there is no follow-up meeting scheduled to discuss homework, you may choose to have the group post their discussion on a SharePoint site or discuss via email.

Homework Script:

“I hope you’ll agree that we all now have a better idea of some language we can use to communicate directly that ethics is important. Between now and our next meeting, I would like everyone to commit to practicing this kind of language, using some of the phrases we’ve talked about today. At our next meeting please be prepared to discuss: what phrase or phrases you used, the context in which you used it, whether you found it difficult or easy to use, and how staff members reacted.”

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Ethics Matters – Part 2

An Ethical Leadership (EL) Activity

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Activity Goal:

Discuss the impact of communicating directly that ethics is important

Time:

8 -10 minutes

Activity Format:

- Read script
- Ask questions
- Discuss/practice
- Read take-home script

Leader Note:

Strive to gain participation from everyone in the group. Ask as many probing questions as needed to encourage a comprehensive discussion.

EL Compass Point Link:

Point 1:

Demonstrate that ethics is a priority

- Talk about Ethics
- Prove that ethics matters to you
- Encourage discussion of ethical concerns

Script:

“Today we are going to continue our discussion on communicating that ethics matters. As you may recall, last time we discussed how specific phrases can be used to communicate our commitment to ethics. I hope you’ve all had a chance to try out some of the phrases we identified last week, and are prepared to discuss your experiences here with us today.”

Questions/Discussion:

- 1. What phrase(s) did you use to communicate that you think ethics is important?**
- 2. How did you use this phrase? What were the circumstances?**
- 3. Did you find using this phrase to be difficult or easy? In what ways?**
- 4. How did staff react to your use of this phrase?**
- 5. Are you likely to use this phrase again in the future? If not, why?**

Take-Home Message Script:

“Thank you all for that great discussion. Our take-home message here is that we need to communicate to staff that ethics is important. The more we practice using language to communicate that ethics matters, the easier and more natural it becomes. I would like to continue this momentum toward improving the ethical environment and culture, and so I ask that each of you take this activity back to your own management meetings. Run this activity with your peers and subordinates, and then ask them to do the same with their own staffs. If any great ideas come from those meetings, please bring them back to share here with the larger group.”

[Lead-in to next activity: “We have practiced how we can and should communicate directly that ethics matters. Next week I’d like to discuss some of the ways in which we may inadvertently communicate that we don’t care about ethics or that we are willing to tolerate unethical behavior, and how we can avoid sending unintended messages to staff.”]

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Unintended Messages

An Ethical Leadership (EL) Activity

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Activity Goal:

Develop awareness and avoid using phrases that give the impression that ethics is not important

Time:

8 -15 minutes

Activity Format:

- Read script
- Pass around handouts
- Ask questions
- Discuss
- Read take-home script

Leader Note:

Strive to gain participation from everyone in the group. Ask as many probing questions as needed to encourage a comprehensive discussion.

EL Compass Point Link:

Point 1:

Demonstrate that ethics is a priority

- Talk about Ethics
- Prove that ethics matters to you
- Encourage discussion of ethical concerns

Script:

“Today I would like to discuss ethics for a couple of minutes. We are all ethical and we all want to be perceived that way, but sometimes we may say things that unintentionally give the opposite impression. Leaders may say things that give the impression that they don’t care about ethics, or that they are willing to tolerate unethical conduct. Today we’re going to take a look at some statements that may unintentionally send the wrong message to staff.”

Handouts:

Pass around the Unintended Messages Handout. Ask everyone to take a minute to read the statements and fill in the corresponding implied messages on the handout.

Questions/Discussion:

- 1. What is the unintended message here?** (Go through each statement individually)
** Leader note:* See the Unintended Messages Handout ANSWER KEY for possible answers.
- 2. How would you say things differently to avoid giving the wrong impression?**
- 3. What other statements have you heard that may imply that ethics is not important or that unethical practices are tolerated?**

Take-Home Message Script:

“Thank you all for that thoughtful discussion. Now we have developed a better awareness of phrases we should avoid using that unintentionally give the impression that ethics is not important. I would like to continue this momentum toward improving the ethical environment and culture, and so I ask that each of you take this activity back to your own management meetings. Run this activity with your peers and subordinates, and then ask them to do the same with their own staffs. If any great ideas come from those meetings, please bring them back to share here with the larger group.”

[Lead-in to next activity: “Next week I’d like to switch gears a little bit by discussing how we can reinforce ethical practice while communicating performance expectations.”]

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Unintended Messages An Ethical Leadership (EL) Activity

ANSWER KEY

Sometimes we say things about ethics without even knowing it. Read each statement and write in the potential unintended messages.

Statement	Unintended Message
"All that really matters is the bottom line."	<i>Money is more important than ethics.</i>
"What are the chances that anyone will find out?"	<i>What we are doing is wrong, but if we don't get caught doing it, it's ok.</i>
"You're naïve – everyone does it."	<i>It's ok to be unethical because others are.</i>
"Proceed until apprehended."	<i>What you're doing is wrong, but keep doing it until someone makes you stop.</i>
"That's my story and I'm sticking to it."	<i>I'm lying but I'll never admit it.</i>
"I shouldn't be telling you this, but..."	<i>I know it's wrong to tell you but I'm doing it anyway.</i>
"You didn't hear it from me..."	<i>You should lie about where you heard this because I will deny I said it.</i>
"It's better to ask for forgiveness than permission."	<i>If you ask you'll be told it's wrong, so don't ask!</i>

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Unintended Messages An Ethical Leadership (EL) Activity

HANDOUT

Sometimes we say things about ethics without even knowing it. Read each statement and write in the potential unintended messages.

Statement	Unintended Message
"All that really matters is the bottom line."	
"What are the chances that anyone will find out?"	
"You're naïve – everyone does it."	
"Proceed until apprehended."	
"That's my story and I'm sticking to it."	
"I shouldn't be telling you this, but..."	
"You didn't hear it from me..."	

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Reinforcing Ethical Practice While Communicating Performance Expectations – Part 1 An Ethical Leadership (EL) Activity

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Activity Goal:

Develop strategies to reinforce ethical practice while communicating performance expectations

Time:

8 -15 minutes

Activity Format:

- Read script
- Ask questions
- Discuss
- Read take-home script
- Read homework script

Leader Note:

Strive to gain participation from everyone in the group. Ask as many probing questions as needed to encourage a comprehensive discussion.

EL Compass Point Link:

Point 2:

Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice

- Recognize when expectations need to be clarified
- Be explicit, give examples, explain the underlying values
- Anticipate barriers to meeting your expectations

Script:

“Today I would like to discuss ethics for a couple of minutes. As leaders we all know the importance of setting realistic, attainable performance expectations for staff. We all want the right results, but ethics is doing the right thing, the right way, for the right reasons. Too much focus on results can get us into trouble. For instance, saying things like ‘I don’t care how you get it done – just do it,’ or ‘I don’t want to hear any excuses’ can lead staff to conclude that we are telling them that the end justifies the means - in other words, that it’s okay to be unethical, game the system, or misrepresent information (fudge the numbers) as long as you get the right results. So let’s talk about how we can communicate expectations while at the same time reinforcing ethical practice.”

Questions/Discussion:

1. Has anyone here ever experienced a situation where you were required to meet a goal that was simply unrealistic or unattainable? What were your options?

* *Leader note:* If no one is eager to share examples, you may prompt the group. Some examples might include:

- “Do it by gaming the system”
- “Question authority”
- “Make it look like you did it”
- “Fail”

2. How can we as leaders avoid this problem?

* *Leader note:* Examples may include:

- “Be clear that you want to hear about barriers to meeting expectations.”
- “Emphasize not just the end but the means.”
- “Don’t shoot the messenger.”
- “Don’t ask for unrealistic unachievable results.”
- “Tell people it’s not okay to cheat.”

Take-Home Message Script:

“Thank you all for that thoughtful discussion. To sum up: whenever we communicate performance expectations, we also need to communicate clearly that ethics is not optional.”

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Reinforcing Ethical Practice While Communicating Performance Expectations – Part 1

An Ethical Leadership (EL) Activity

Homework Script:

“I’d like to continue this discussion the next time we meet. Before then, I’d like you to complete an easy homework assignment. Between now and our next meeting, please pay attention to the way performance expectations are communicated – formally or informally – by you and by others. Then be prepared to share at least one concrete example of how the concepts we discussed today play out in actual practice. Were you asked to do something you felt was unachievable? Did an employee come to you and complain that your expectations are unreasonable? Did someone state explicitly that gaming is not acceptable? Next time we’ll take a few minutes to discuss specific ways we might improve the organization by changing our own behaviors.”

Reinforcing Ethical Practice While Communicating Performance Expectations – Part 2 An Ethical Leadership (EL) Activity

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Activity Goal:

Develop strategies to reinforce ethical practice while communicating performance expectations

Time:

8 -15 minutes

Activity Format:

- Read script
- Ask questions
- Discuss
- Read take-home script

Leader Note:

Strive to gain participation from everyone in the group. Ask as many probing questions as needed to encourage a comprehensive discussion.

EL Compass Point Link: **Point 2:**

Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice

- Recognize when expectations need to be clarified
- Be explicit, give examples, explain the underlying values
- Anticipate barriers to meeting your expectations

Script:

“Today we are going to continue our discussion on how to reinforce ethical practice while communicating performance expectations. You’ll recall that last time we discussed situations in which we have been asked to meet a goal that we believed to be unrealistic or unattainable, and what our options were. We also discussed ways in which we as leaders can avoid asking our staff to meet goals that are unrealistic or unattainable. Our homework assignment from last week was to come up with real-life examples – positive or negative – that illustrate these concepts.”

Questions/Discussion:

1. **What examples did you come up with?**
2. **Based on this example, what would you have done differently, or in what way will you change your behavior in the future?**

** Leader note:* Feel free to ask this question of the entire group to brainstorm solutions.

Take-Home Message Script:

“Thank you all for that thoughtful discussion. Our take-home message here is that ethics is not just about getting the right results; it’s about doing the right thing, the right way, for the right reasons. As we’ve discussed, too much focus on results can get us into trouble by leading staff to conclude that we are willing to tolerate unethical conduct. But now we all have some ethical leadership strategies we can use. I would like to continue this momentum toward improving the ethical environment and culture, and so I ask that each of you take this activity back to your own management meetings. Run this activity with your peers and subordinates, and then ask them to do the same with their own staffs. If any great ideas come from those meetings, please bring them back to share here with the larger group.”