

# IntegratedEthics

## 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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### An Ethical Leadership (EL) Activity

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**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.”