



The 9 Virtues of Exceptional Leaders: Unlocking Your Leadership Potential **Discussion Guide**

In keeping with our commitment to lifelong learning as a key ingredient of virtue-based leadership, we invite organizations to read, study, and discuss *The 9 Virtues* together. The purpose of this Discussion Guide is to provide a framework for those conversations. Individuals may also find the guide helpful in their own quest to internalize and develop the virtues.

Chapter 1: Why Virtue?

1. What are some “flavors of the month”—leadership, management, or productivity gimmicks—that your organization has experienced in recent years? How did they affect the organization?
2. What’s the difference between ethics and values? Can you think of some examples of each? What do they have to do with virtue?
3. In what ways are leaders “born” and in what ways are they “made”?

Chapter 2: The Concept of Virtue

1. In ancient times, what was the connection between the concept of virtue and religious faith? What is that connection today? Is it necessary to embrace any particular religious faith, or to have faith at all, in order to practice the virtues? Why or why not?
2. How did the “heroic societies” of antiquity define virtue? What relevance does that view have today, if any?
3. What are some differences between what Covey call the “personality ethic” and the “character ethic”? What do those differences have to do with leadership?

Chapter 3: Learning to Lead

1. Are some people just “born leaders” and others “born followers”? Why or why not?
2. What impact has “leadership studies” had on modern leadership development? Would you say that impact is primarily positive or negative? Why?
3. What does it mean for a leader to be an active participant in his or her own learning? What implications does that have for the leader? For the organization?
4. Briefly describe the “experiential model” of leadership learning? What advantages does it have over the formula-based model?

5. What are the three types of learning that Coombs identifies? How do they impact the virtuous leader?
6. What, exactly, is “reflection”? What role does it play in lifelong learning?
7. Explain the connection between transformational learning and transformation leadership.
8. What strategies can leaders use to help those they lead also become lifelong leader-learners?

Chapter 4: The 9 Virtues: An Overview

1. What is the connection between the nine virtues of exceptional leaders and the overarching concept of virtue?
2. Can a leader become virtuous by embracing only certain virtues and ignoring others? Why or why not?
3. What’s the practical difference between behaving as if you possess a certain virtue and actually possessing that virtue?

Chapter 5: Humility

1. What’s the problem with a leader who sees himself/herself as “the boss,” especially in a highly professional environment?
2. Discuss Gleiser’s “Island of Knowledge” metaphor? Why will there never be a “Theory of Everything”?
3. How does Goleman define “empathy”? What does it have to do with humility? With leadership?
4. Though John Wooden and Bobby Knight’s college basketball teams both won multiple national championships, Wooden was arguably a more effective leader than Knight. Why do you think that might have been the case? What can humble leaders learn from Wooden? From Knight?
5. What does it mean for a leader to be “other-centered”? What practical applications does that concept have for an organization?
6. What are some practical ways that leaders can serve the people they lead?
7. Consider a pair of 1970’s success stories: Teledyne and Wells Fargo. Why was the latter’s success ultimately more sustainable? What implications does that have for organizational leaders?

Chapter 6: Honesty

1. What are some of the reasons people typically lie? How are lies harmful to individuals? To the organization?
2. Is there a difference between telling the truth and telling *the whole truth*? Why is it important for a leader to do the latter? Why?

3. Are there certain circumstances in which a leader should NOT tell the whole truth? What are some examples?
4. How does the term “integrity,” used as an engineering term, relate to the concept of honesty?
5. In what way is honor the opposite of politics?
6. Why is it important for a leader to trust those he or she leads? Why is it important for a leader to be trustworthy?

Chapter 7: Courage

1. Why is it important for leaders to stand up for themselves in certain situations? To stand up for others? To stand on principle?
2. Are there times when a leader should NOT stand up for those he or she leads? What might be some examples?
3. In what way does trusting others incur risk? Why is important for leaders to do so, regardless?
4. In what way does “thinking outside the box” require courage? What can be the consequences, both positive and negative?
5. Why does leadership itself require courage? What are some of the potential dangers?
6. Why is correcting others when called for an indispensable part of leadership? How does it require courage?
7. In what way is courage one of the most visible virtues? Is it possible to have courage without the other virtues, and if so, how does that reflect on the individual?

Chapter 8: Perseverance

1. What is the practical difference between perseverance and plain old stubbornness? Is it possible for stubbornness to be a virtue? If so, under what circumstances?
2. How does perseverance relate to other virtues, such as courage, justice, and wisdom?
3. What is the relationship between perseverance and failure? Can the latter ever be good? If so, under what circumstances?
4. How can a leader’s “stubbornness” inspire others to persevere?
5. Discuss the concept of “a capacity for suffering” as it applies to perseverance.
6. Why is a willingness to see tasks through to completion such an important quality in a leader? What effect can that have on those he or she leads?
7. Are there times when it just makes sense—and it’s better for the organization—simply to quit? When?

Chapter 9: Hope

1. What are some of the qualities that characterize a “climate of despair”? How about a “climate of hope”?
2. How can a leader’s hope inspire those who follow him or her also to have hope?
3. What is the connection between hope and faith? Does faith necessarily have to be religious in nature? What kinds of “faith” should a leader have?
4. How is having faith in yourself compatible with humility?
5. In what sense is what we call “vision”—greatly valued in leaders—a reflection of hope?
6. What effect can a perpetual pessimist have on an organization? How about someone who is consistently optimistic?
7. In what sense might we say that the opposite of optimism is actually not pessimism but actually cynicism?
8. How is pragmatism ultimately an expression of hope?

Chapter 10: Charity

1. What is the relationship between what we normally refer to as “charity” and love?
2. What different types of love are appropriate in a leader’s relationship with those who follow him or her?
3. What exactly does it mean to love oneself? How is that compatible with humility? What does love of self have to do with love of others?
4. Why is it important for leaders to love the work they do?
5. What does it mean to love your organization? Why is that important?
6. How is “servant leadership” the highest manifestation of love for others within an organization?
7. What role does forgiveness play in loving others? How about acceptance?
8. How is generosity an expression of love? Can a leader take generosity too far? How so, or under what circumstances?

Chapter 11: Balance

1. What is the popular conception of balance? How can that idea become counterproductive or even destructive within an organization?
2. Discuss the following statement: “Balance is about being in the moment.” How does that relate to an individual’s role as leader? How about to his or her other roles?
3. In what way is being “out of balance” not necessarily a bad thing?
4. How does being well organized contribute to balance? What areas of our lives do we especially need to organize in order to find balance?

5. Discuss balance as “harmony.”
6. How does setting priorities contribute to balance? How does one go about prioritizing, especially at work?
7. What does the concept of “work-work” balance suggest? How can a leader go about attaining it?
8. How can leaders encourage and inspire those they lead to seek balance in their own work and personal lives?

Chapter 12: Wisdom

1. Discuss the difference between the two Greek words for wisdom: *sophia* and *phronesis*. What roles do they play in leadership?
2. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom—and how does the former contribute to the latter?
3. What types of knowledge are especially important for leaders?
4. In what way can “conventional wisdom” sometimes be detrimental to actual wisdom?
5. What does wisdom, and in particular good decision-making, have to do with lifelong learning, as we discussed in Chapter 3?
6. Why is it so important that leaders pass knowledge on? What are some ways they can do that?
7. How does wisdom relate to humility? To honesty? Perseverance? Courage?

Chapter 13: Justice

1. In what way is justice sometimes a “politically fraught” concept?
2. How do modern, democratic ideas of justice differ from the ideas of ancient heroic societies?
3. What happens when modern leaders tend to practice the ancient ideal that “might makes right”?
4. How should the concept of justice as an extension of “natural law” influence the leader’s behavior toward those he or she leads?
5. What does it mean to treat people fairly, given that life itself often doesn’t seem fair?
6. Does treating people fairly always mean treating them exactly the same? If not, when doesn’t it? When does it?
7. Why is it important for modern-day leaders to “share power”? How can they accomplish this while still maintaining the integrity of the organization?
8. What do individuals within an organization have a right to expect of their leaders? What do those leaders, in turn, have a right to expect of them?
9. What role does trust play in the just organization?

Chapter 14: The Virtuous Leader

1. What does it ultimately mean to be a “virtuous leader”?
2. How does being a lifelong learner contribute to that?
3. In what sense is virtue a habit—or a collection of habits—rather than a quality, or collection of qualities?
4. When it comes to virtue, what is the relationship between “doing” and “being”?
5. In what sense is virtue “contagious”? How can leaders spread it?

Please go to www.9virtues.com for leadership programs based on the book, an excerpt and book summary, reviews, author interviews, our 9 Virtues Blog, and more.