



## Quick Reference Guide: ELA Virtues of Ethical Leadership

How do we develop as ethical leaders? What core skills and ideas make us effective at empowering others to improve the world? This model by Ethical Leaders in Action (ELA) combines ancient concepts with modern terminology and situations. We invite leaders to use it as a framework for personal development and discussion.

Aristotle (among others) observed that people flourish by cultivating certain traits, which he called *arête*, translated as “virtues.” These virtues encompass a wide range of qualities: moral and practical, public and private. Virtues also reflect moderation: We locate the virtue of courage, for example, midway between cowardice and foolhardiness. Finally, virtues function together, so an excellent human being must exhibit the full set of virtues to some degree. This account of character development stands as an enduring and influential part of the Western philosophical tradition.

We live in a culturally and intellectually diverse world, with many concepts of human flourishing. Rather than attempt to address human development in full, we at ELA advocate a more focused set of virtues centering on ethical leadership, which we describe as *empowering others to improve the world*. Our intent is for this limited virtue model to resonate with people of many cultures and backgrounds, perhaps with some level of translation or adaptation. We propose this virtue framework as a guide for ethical leadership development and action.

The virtues of ethical leadership function together to guide action. Each virtue includes aspects of both motivation and capability – both “will” and “skill.” We develop the following virtues in order to grow stronger as leaders:

- **Service is the desire and ability to work with others toward a worthy purpose.** It describes the core motives of an ethical leader, striving and enabling others to achieve positive outcomes. It encompasses commitments to integrity, compassion, and justice.
- **Competence is command of relevant knowledge and skills.** It includes specific information and know-how, along with practical wisdom and sound judgment. It also includes more general leadership competencies, such as communication.
- **Creativity enables us to build, to improve, and to solve problems.** It features a desire for improvement and the capacity to generate possibilities and to create solutions.
- **Clarity helps us to see and share what is truly important.** It includes the abilities to craft and share vision, as well as to discern and evaluate reality. It also encompasses moral clarity with respect to our individual and shared values.
- **Courage is the capacity to do what is right in the face of obstacles.** Courage enables us to overcome our fears in order to pursue our duties and our worthy goals.

We develop virtues through practice and reflection, alone and especially in relationships with others. Ethical leaders rely on one another to develop these capacities, and to apply them in their leadership.

The ELA model rests on a foundation of excellent work by others, from ancient philosophers like Aristotle (who articulated a potent and enduring virtue set around 300 BCE) to contemporary thinkers like Peter Koestenbaum (whose similar model, called the *Leadership Diamond*, crystallizes around a commitment to greatness). As important, the model is informed by the real-life experiences of the leaders who use it every day. Please share your thoughts and comments with us.

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