

## 2025 Dinner and Awards for Ethical Leadership Remarks

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Ethical Leadership Award

I have something I want to talk about tonight. I want to talk about three words. Three words that, for me, embody the behavior of the professionals in the 1930s. And, that I fear are too relevant today as we think about professional ethics and about the current behavior of professionals. By the way, why do I speak of “professionals”? Because they have influence. They have the power to impact.

*Victimhood.* Part of what motivated the designers of the policies of National Socialism, and part of what they sold, was victimhood. They claimed that they were the victims of the others—the elites, the communists, the artists, the Jews, etc., etc. Sound familiar? But, worse, what of those who know better and claim their own brand of victimhood—wringing their hands saying that there is nothing for them to do, nothing that one person can do, too difficult or risky or whatever. Not acknowledging their agency and power. And, worse, not recognizing their own vulnerabilities to acting badly. Victimhood is not becoming regardless of which side you are on. Victimhood is paralyzing. It is demeaning.

*Mendacity.* Yes, I am a big believer in Big Daddy from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Mendacity—unadulterated lying. Lying that becomes part of one’s basic fabric. A consuming lack of interest in the difference between truth and lies. Mendacity that makes lying normal and that therefore normalizes the results of the lying. It cannot be tolerated. It must be called out. It cannot be normalized.

And, *complicity*. Thorsten and I had conversations long ago about the category of the bystander. Is there such a thing? I say no. But, there is the other category that some talk about—quoting Hannah Arendt —banality. I want to say that the passivity or silence of professionals is by definition never banal! It is complicity. There are no passes for the complicit professional—regardless of how normal her motivations are, regardless of how unintentional his actions may be, regardless of how minor the infraction is.

I am not in the business of analogies. I reject the instrumentalization of the Holocaust through analogizing. It’s silly, it’s reductive and it’s unproductive, even counterproductive. But, we can and must learn from history. And, here is the real point: we learn from history, from that history, that we are all vulnerable to victimhood, we are all vulnerable to mendacity, we are all vulnerable to complicity. To pretend that we are exclusively the good guys is mendacious and complicit in itself.

FASPE’s mission is to guide professionals in their day-to-day work, in their day-to-day interactions with their patients and clients, their readers and parishioners, the buyers of their goods and services. That said though, we must not kid ourselves. The rule of law is under attack; truth is under attack; science is under attack; the free press and the free exercise of religion are

under attack; civility is under attack; safety nets and basic social protections are under attack; education is under attack. Our right to disagree is under attack.

And, for those of us who believe that what we care about is under attack, the fact is also that our own courage, creativity, and humility are equally at risk.

We must not cower into self-righteousness or self-certainty. We must meet the moment. Our honorees this evening are models of those who used their professional influence to act. Let us learn from them. My dream for FASPE is to create generations of ethical leaders who will always meet the moment with humility, clarity, self-reflection, and courage. I am grateful to all of you in the room for helping us realize that dream.