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Human Values from the Lives of Great Leaders and Reformers

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Human Values from the Lives of Great Leaders and Reformers

The aptitude paper asks you to draw values from real lives. A value is easier to grasp through a person than through a definition. This page takes eight leaders and names the one value each one teaches.

The idea in brief

- **Gandhi:** truth, non-violence and simple living.
- **Patel:** resolve joined with negotiation.
- **Mother Teresa and Baba Amte:** service to the excluded.
- **Kalam:** humility with high office.
- **Vinoba Bhave:** reform by moral persuasion.
- **Mandela and Prasad:** forgiveness and restraint.

Which Leader Teaches Which Value?

Gandhi	Truth, non-violence
Third-class travel, spinning	
Patel	Resolve with diplomacy
Merging the princely states	
Mother Teresa	Compassion
Care for the dying poor	
Kalam	Humility
Letters to students	
Vinoba Bhave	Moral persuasion
Bhoodan land gifts	
Baba Amte	Serving the excluded
Anandwan for leprosy patients	
Mandela	Forgiveness
Truth commission, not revenge	
Rajendra Prasad	Restraint
Limits on a ceremonial office	

Eight leaders, one value each. Original diagram.



Mahatma Gandhi, 1931. Photo: Elliott & Fry, Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

How should you use these lives in an answer?

Do not retell a biography. Name the value first. Then give one concrete act that shows it. Examiners reward this pairing.

- **Value:** the quality being tested, such as compassion.
- **Act:** one fact that proves it, such as a famous decision.
- **Link:** how a civil servant could apply it at work.

Sources: britannica.com

Gandhi: Truth and Non-Violence

What values is Gandhi best known for?

Gandhi is linked with **satya** (truth) and **ahimsa** (non-violence). He also stressed simple living and self-restraint. He lived by them while leading a national movement.

Examiners use him for one idea: lead by example. He travelled third-class by train. He spun his own cloth. He did not ask others to bear hardship that he avoided.

Sources: britannica.com

Quick check 1. Gandhi asked followers to accept hardships that he himself avoided. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Think it through. *Why does leading by example matter for an officer?*

Show the explanation

Staff copy what a leader does, not what a leader says. An officer who keeps the rules personally gives the rules weight. One who exempts himself teaches that rules are optional.

Patel: Resolve with Negotiation

What did Sardar Patel teach about resolve?

Patel was India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister. He is remembered for firm, practical decisions. His best-known task was joining more than 500 princely states to the Indian Union.

Most joined by agreement. Patel used talks first. He kept a credible threat of force for the few that resisted. He did not use one method on every state.

Sources: britannica.com

> **Quick check 2.** Patel combined negotiation with firmness when joining the princely states. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Teresa, Amte and Kalam: Service and Humility

What does Mother Teresa teach?

Mother Teresa founded the Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata. She served the dying and the destitute. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

She could have chosen an easier life. She chose the poorest streets. Exams read this as compassion shown through action, not words.

Sources: britannica.com; nobelprize.org

What does Baba Amte teach?

Baba Amte worked for people with leprosy and for the disabled. He founded the Anandwan community in Maharashtra. Leprosy patients were shunned in his era.

He picked the most excluded group, not a popular cause. That choice is the lesson. You may link it to the full biography, Baba Amte.

Sources: britannica.com

What does Dr. Kalam teach?

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam was a scientist and India's 11th President. He is linked with humility, vision and public service. He answered students' letters and spoke in schools.

He treated a high office as a place to mentor, not to keep distance. Authority and approachability can go together.

Sources: britannica.com

> **Quick check 3.** Kalam showed that high office and humility can go together. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Bhave and Mandela: Persuasion and Forgiveness

What did Vinoba Bhave show with Bhoodan?

Vinoba Bhave was a close follower of Gandhi. In 1951 he began the Bhoodan movement, which means land gift. He asked wealthy landowners to give land to the landless.

No law forced anyone. Gifts came from conscience. It is the standard example of reform through moral persuasion.

Sources: britannica.com

What does Nelson Mandela teach?

Mandela was not Indian, but exams cite him often. He spent 27 years in prison. He then became South Africa's first democratically elected president, in 1994.

He chose reconciliation over revenge. South Africa set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission instead of mass trials of the old regime.

Sources: britannica.com

> **Think it through.** *Is forgiveness the same as ignoring injustice?*
>
> **Show the explanation**
>
> No. The commission asked offenders to disclose the truth about what they did. Forgiveness here meant naming wrongs openly while refusing to answer them with revenge.

Rajendra Prasad: Institutional Restraint

What does Rajendra Prasad teach?

Rajendra Prasad was India's first President. He served from 1950 to 1962. His office was largely ceremonial under the Constitution.

His lesson is restraint. Holding power is different from using it. A leader may refuse to use a power when using it would upset the balance the Constitution depends on.

Sources: britannica.com

> **Quick check 4.** Restraint means a leader should use every power the law allows. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Angle

- Questions often describe an act and hide the name. You must name the **value**, such as compassion or restraint.
- These figures also help in the essay and the interview. You may be asked whom you admire, and why.
- Learn at least three leaders well. One strong example beats a long list.
- Pair each leader with a real workplace use. That link earns marks.

How does each value work in an office?

Leader	Value	Use at work
Gandhi	Leading by example	Follow the rule you set for others

Leader	Value	Use at work
Patel	Resolve with talks	Hear all sides, then decide firmly
Mother Teresa	Compassion	Give time to the weakest applicant first
Kalam	Humility	Listen to juniors and citizens
Bhave	Persuasion	Win consent before using orders
Baba Amte	Serving the excluded	Reach people who never come to the office
Mandela	Forgiveness	Fix the system without seeking revenge
Prasad	Restraint	Do not stretch your powers

Use this table to turn any life into a workplace lesson. Examiners like that last step best.

Sources: britannica.com

What does a good answer look like?

Take the 2020 Gandhi quote. Start with its meaning in one line. Serving others pulls attention away from ego.

Next, give one act. Gandhi spun cloth and travelled third-class while leading a movement. Then add a modern case. An officer who spends a Sunday at a relief camp learns more about need than any report can show.

Close with a limit. Service must not turn into a show. The test is whether the person served is better off.

- **Meaning:** serving others loosens ego.
- **Act:** a real example from a life.
- **Use:** a task from public work.
- **Limit:** service is judged by results, not display.

Sources: britannica.com

Previous-Year Questions

UPSC CSM 2017, Paper IV, Q5(b)

“If a country is to be corruption free and become a nation of beautiful minds, I strongly feel there are three key societal members who can make a difference. They are the father, the mother and the teacher.” — A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Analyse. (10 marks, 150 words)

Kalam traces clean governance to personal formation, not rules alone.

Sources: mcqquestion.com

UPSC CSM 2020, Paper IV, Q6(b)

What does the following quotation mean to you? “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” — Mahatma Gandhi (10 marks, 150 words)

This is Gandhi’s service value, stated as one line.

Sources: mcqquestion.com

UPSC CSM 2024, Paper IV, Q3(b)

“Faith is of no avail in the absence of strength. Faith and strength, both are essential to accomplish any great work.” — Sardar Patel. What does this quotation convey to you in the present context? (10 marks, 150 words)

It matches Patel’s mix of conviction and resolve.

Sources: mcqquestion.com

Practice MCQs

1. Which value is the Bhoodan movement of Vinoba Bhave best known for?

A. Reform by legal compulsion

B. Reform by court order

C. Reform by military force

D. Reform by moral persuasion

See answer ↓

2. Which pair best describes how Sardar Patel joined the princely states to India?

A. Court orders alone

B. Negotiation first, with force held in reserve

C. Force alone in every state

D. Doing nothing and waiting

See answer ↓

3. Baba Amte founded Anandwan to serve which group?

A. Child workers in factories

B. Landless farmers

C. People with leprosy and the disabled

D. Flood victims in cities

See answer ↓

4. After 27 years in prison, Nelson Mandela supported which body instead of mass trials?

A. Truth and Reconciliation Commission

B. International Court of Justice

C. Security Council

D. Constituent Assembly

See answer ↓

5. Rajendra Prasad is best cited in ethics answers for which value?

A. Mass persuasion

B. Institutional restraint

C. Market reform

D. Armed resolve

See answer ↓

6. Which organisation did Mother Teresa found in Kolkata?

A. Servants of India Society

B. Missionaries of Charity

C. Ramakrishna Mission

D. Sarvodaya Samaj

See answer ↓

7. An exam question describes a leader's action without naming the leader. What should your answer name first?

A. The leader's party

B. The place of the event

C. The underlying value shown

D. The leader's birth year

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **D.** Bhave asked landowners to give land to the landless. No law forced them. Gifts came from conscience. ↑ Q1
2. **B.** Most states joined by agreement. Patel kept a credible threat of force for the few that resisted. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** Leprosy patients were shunned in his era. Choosing them is the lesson in serving the excluded. ↑ Q3
4. **A.** South Africa set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Offenders disclosed truth, and revenge was refused. ↑ Q4
5. **B.** Prasad was the first President. He served 1950 to 1962 and is cited for holding back power the office could have used. ↑ Q5
6. **B.** She founded the Missionaries of Charity to serve the dying and destitute. She won the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize. ↑ Q6
7. **C.** Examiners test the value, such as compassion or restraint. The person is only the example. ↑ Q7

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** He shared the hardship, through third-class travel and simple living. That is leadership by example. ↑ 1
2. **True.** He used diplomacy where it worked and held back force as a last option. ↑ 2
3. **True.** As President he spoke directly with students and citizens. ↑ 3
4. **False.** Restraint means holding back a legal power when using it would harm the constitutional balance. ↑ 4

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