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# SETTING BOUNDARIES

BY ROBERT JONES | THE VILLAGE BUSINESS INSTITUTE

If you own a home, you may think of your backyard as your sanctuary, your place of Zen that you can go to at the end of the day to forget about the stress of the world. Maybe you use your backyard as a place to garden, paint, or meditate. Maybe, like me, you decided to build a fence around your backyard to keep the bad things out of your Zen space. You want to stop the neighbor kids from using your backyard as the end zone for their football game (you know that inevitably someone is going to land in your flowerbed) or to keep the neighbor dog from leaving a present in your tomato plants. For whatever reason, you are protective of your space.

People often think that setting boundaries is a way to protect themselves, but by approaching boundaries from this perspective, all we do is isolate ourselves. That is not healthy.

What if we reframe the idea of that fence from an attempt to keep the bad out, but to *keep the good in*? That fence creates a safer place for your children to play, your dog to sit outside and admire his domain, and you to grab that 10-minute nap in a hammock up your tree.

Boundaries are important in the workplace, as they allow leaders to set expectations and act in a consistent manner. Because you and your team know what is expected, you can manage opportunities in the moment without feelings of guilt.

## BOUNDARIES ALLOW LEADERS TO:

Act consistently.

Focus on the organization and its people.

Develop safe, supportive relationships.

**Continued on page 2**

# What if we reframe the idea of that fence from an attempt to keep the bad out, but to keep the good in?



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With boundaries and expectations in place, the employer is able to focus on the needs of the organization and the people, which will improve the levels of accountability and the overall reputation of the organization.

The creation of boundaries by a leader and or an employee can create safe and supportive relationships, which will foster support and help to empower a level of independence that will enhance the creativity and innovation of the team.

We need boundaries to protect who we are and not let the struggles of the world challenge us to the point that all the things pushing against our fence break it down. So how do we establish our boundaries?

The first thing that has to happen is to **establish your limits**. What are you able to emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically handle?

As a society, we are more likely to value physical boundaries people set. For example, if you asked someone to lift a 100-pound box and they said they couldn't, we would accept that and find someone else to do the task. But for some reason, our emotional and mental boundaries are not afforded the same value. We tell people to "suck it up" or that there is no such thing as a "mental health day." Once you have identified your limits, you have to trust in yourself and value that establishing these limits will help you to reach greater potential.

After we set our boundaries, we need to **pay attention to our feelings**. There are three particular feelings to watch out

## STEPS TO SETTING BOUNDARIES:

**Establish your limits.**

**Pay attention to your feelings.**

**Give yourself permission to set boundaries.**

**Consider how your environment is affecting you.**

for: discomfort, resentment, and guilt. If you sense that these feeling are becoming part of your mental and/or emotional state, then you are most likely allowing your boundaries to be crossed. If this is the case, it is time to reevaluate and reestablish your boundaries.

As I said above, we tend to place more value on physical boundaries and allow our emotional, mental or spiritual boundaries to be crossed. That's why the third thing we have to do is **give ourselves permission to set boundaries**. You have every right to create and maintain boundaries so that you

can remain the person that you want to be and the person that people value. Be that advocate that only you can be.

Along with giving yourself permission is the need to tell people your boundaries. The people in your life are not mind readers. You have to tell them what your boundaries are. You have to advocate for yourself.

Finally, when setting boundaries, there is the need to recognize that sometimes your environment can play a role in your boundaries. Your environment can create context and influence your behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions. Your environment can offer you support or challenge your boundaries. Take time to look around and **consider how your environment is affecting you** and determine if there is a way to change the negative and support the positive.

In the end, a boundary is about maintaining the best part of who you are, and that is what is truly important.

# 7 TIPS FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES AT WORK

By Margarita Tartakovsky, MS | PsychCentral



Many of us spend the majority of our days at work. That work also can bleed into our life at home. So creating boundaries around our workplace is critical.

It also shows your boss, clients, and colleagues that you have a backbone, said Melody Wilding, a therapist who works with young professionals and business owners.

When you respect your personal boundaries, others typically will, too. Remember that “you teach people how to treat you.”

But creating boundaries at work can get tricky because there’s the real worry of being demoted or fired. Yet with clear communication, practice and preparation it can be done.

It’s often easier to set boundaries when you first start a job, said Julie de Azevedo Hanks, founder and executive director of Wasatch Family Therapy, a private practice in Utah.

For instance, when defining your boundaries, she suggested considering these factors: the number of hours you’ll work; under what circumstances and conditions you’ll work overtime; which people, if anyone, you’ll give your personal cell phone number; and if you’ll date co-workers.

If you’re not planning on switching jobs any time soon, here are seven tips for setting boundaries and navigating violations at your current workplace.

## 1. KNOW YOUR VALUES.

Understanding your values helps you figure out where you’d like to set boundaries. In other words, by first knowing your values, you’re able to then set up systems that help you get those needs met.

For instance, you may have several side passions that are important to

you, such as volunteering and running races. Because you want to make time for those passions, you have strict boundaries around working overtime or being available at all hours.

## 2. COMMUNICATE CLEARLY.

Lay out your limits very clearly. For instance, if you don’t want your colleagues and clients to contact you at all hours, verbally tell them the hours you will be available for work-related conversations.

In the same scenario, it’s also important to figure out what constitutes an “emergency,” and clearly communicate that as well.

## 3. BRING UP A BOUNDARY OR VIOLATION RIGHT AWAY.

When their boundaries are violated, it’s not uncommon for people to get upset, ruminate about the situation for days or weeks and then bring it up a month later.

However, so much can transpire during that time that the person may not understand where you’re coming from. Instead, it’s important to reinforce and exercise your boundary in the moment or very close to it. Because if you don’t, it simply loses its power.

For instance, if a coworker wants to gossip about another coworker – and you don’t want to get roped into the drama – tell them clearly and politely in that moment that you don’t want to participate. This is much more effective than having your colleague spill the beans, and then telling them two weeks later that you wish they hadn’t told you.

**Continued on page 4**



**Continued from page 3**

#### **4. CREATE STRUCTURE.**

One way to create structure – and thereby establish a boundary – is to have an agenda, even if it’s a meeting between you and your manager. An agenda is more efficient, and positions you as a professional, especially if that person is treating you as an inferior in some way. When setting an agenda, include a start and end time along with topics to discuss.

#### **5. SET BOUNDARIES AT HOME.**

For instance, you check email before dinner, and then put away your devices so you can spend the rest of the evening eating with your family, watching TV, and reading bedtime stories to your kids.

It’s also important to have one day when you’re completely offline, so you can replenish your mental, emotional and spiritual reserves, Wilding said.

#### **6. FOCUS ON CONCRETE EXPLANATIONS.**

When you’re setting a boundary at work, it’s not necessarily productive to talk from your personal perspective, Wilding said. In other words, if your boss makes an unreasonable request, avoid statements such as “I’m really stressed” or “I have too much to do.”

Instead, frame your explanations in something concrete, in terms of how it’s going to affect other projects, clients or your bottom line. Make it relevant to your boss. For instance, “If I spend my time on X, we’re going to lose this big client,” or “there won’t be enough time to do Y.”

Also, if your boss makes an unreasonable request, it’s important to first clarify what the request is really about, Wilding said. “Think about why your boss may be making this request.”

Instead of turning inward and catastrophizing, turn outward, she said. Engage your boss. For instance, you might say something like: “Tell me more about why you need this done.”

Doing so helps to diffuse your anxiety response, which sabotages your ability to think rationally. And it opens the door to negotiating a more reasonable and mutually beneficial option.

#### **7. PREPARE FOR VIOLATIONS.**

It’s helpful to visualize your boundaries getting crossed, and how you’re going to handle those situations, Wilding said. For instance, imagine your boss emails you on Saturday, visualize processing your reaction and creating a plan of action, she said.

Will you reply right away? Will you respond Monday morning, apologize and say you were with your family?

This way, when a moment like this comes up, “you won’t be hijacked by your emotions. You’ll be able to handle it much more rationally” and refer to the protocol you already have in place.

Building boundaries takes time and practice. And your boundaries will get crossed. Instead of viewing violations as taking a step back, see them as something instructive, and an opportunity to gain insight and improve on your boundary setting.

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