



February 15, 2023

When “No” is a Complete Sentence: Setting Boundaries

It can be challenging to set boundaries as a servant leader. There are BCPVPA members who do this well, and who will likely skip this week’s column. There are other members who think they do this well, but could use a ‘ReFresh’, and there are members who groaned when they read this title and thought, “...I know... I know...I need to do this better!”

What are Boundaries?

A boundary is an invisible line that defines the behaviours that are acceptable for an individual. They can be physical (*do not touch me*) or emotional (*do not lie to me*). Boundaries can also include time or space (*while I am doing ‘X’ please respect my time and understand I will not be available to talk or address your concern until I am done*).

9 Signs you Need Stronger Boundaries! (*Does this sound like you?*)

- You’re left with very little time for yourself
- You say ‘yes’ when you want to say ‘no’
- You feel guilty to book ‘me time’
- You often feel others take advantage of you
- You feel responsible for solving other people’s problems
- You feel depleted from so much overgiving
- You don’t speak your truth
- You self-sacrifice in order to avoid conflict
- You feel that how others feel is up to you

The Benefits of Setting Boundaries:

- Wards off burnout
- Improves emotional health

- Improves relationships
- Clear expectations for others
- Decreases stress
- Improves self care capabilities
- Respect from others and self-respect
- Promotes autonomy

Source: <https://wellnesscenter.uic.edu/news-stories/boundaries-what-are-they-and-how-to-create-them/>

10 Steps to Setting Boundaries:

1. Clearly identify your boundary

Get really clear about the boundary you need to set. For example, do you need your partner to stop calling you at work unless there are defined circumstances? If you are not clear, you will not be able to communicate your expectations.

2. Understand why you need the boundary

This is your motivation for setting the boundary. If you do not have a compelling reason, why are you going to follow through with setting a boundary that may be out of your comfort zone?

3. Be straightforward

Do not be purposefully vague, thinking you are sparing someone's feelings or avoiding conflict. The kindest and most successful approach is to be direct. Say what you mean and mean what you say.

4. Do not apologize or give long explanations

This approach just undermines your authority and gives the impression that you're doing something wrong that requires an apology or justification.

5. Use a calm and polite tone

Keep your own anger in check. Don't try to set boundaries in the middle of an argument. You want your message to be heard. Yelling or being condescending makes others defensive and distracts from the real boundary you are establishing.

6. Start with tighter boundaries

It is always easier to loosen up tight boundaries than it is to tighten up loose boundaries.

7. Address boundary violations early

Small problems are always easier to manage. Do not wait until someone has violated your boundary a dozen times before you speak up. You cannot assume others know your boundaries until you have explained them.

8. Do not make it personal

Setting a boundary is not a personal attack. When we do not set boundaries, we become passive until we are upset enough and then we get aggressive. For example: Gina generously agreed to drive her co-worker Maggie home while Maggie's car is in the shop. Gina likes to leave promptly, so she's grown resentful that she's waiting 10-15 minutes after shift as Maggie chats and socializes. After three days of this she snaps, "Maggie, you're really inconsiderate. Can't you see I'm waiting for you? You're so ungrateful! Just take the bus home!" Notice the difference when Gina uses an 'I statement' and leaves out the personal attack. "Maggie, I need to get home straight after work. I'm happy to give you a ride, but I can't wait more than five minutes for you. So, if you need more time, I won't be able to drive you home."

9. Use a support system

Starting to set boundaries is tough and can feel very uncomfortable. It can make all the difference to have a support system available, and/or to seek coaching or counselling to help you take small steps towards boundary-setting.

10. Trust your intuition

Pay attention to what you are feeling. What is your gut telling you? If it feels wrong, make a change.

Source: <https://www.strategy-business.com/article/How-healthy-boundaries-build-trust-in-the-workplace>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rochelle Morandini

Member Health & Well-Being, Director

If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpya.bc.ca.