

SETTING BOUNDARIES IN THE WORKPLACE

“Only I can change my life. No one can do it for me” Carol Burnett

Does your job or business demand that you be constantly accessible? Do you keep agreeing to do things that you really don't want to do? Do you have trouble saying no? In an era of mobile phones, blackberry's and easy internet access, it is very easy to stay in touch with the office from anywhere. This is both a blessing and a curse as it can erode boundaries between your work and personal life.

Setting boundaries and maintaining them is extremely important to your overall well-being. For most of us, there is constant pressure to perform in the workplace and establishing and keeping to boundaries is one of the most challenging things to do. A lack of strong, clear-cut boundaries is one of the key causes for stress and overwork in the workplace.

Boundaries are imaginary lines that allow you to have control over your life and stop other's actions and behaviours from interfering in your life. They allow you to teach people how you would like to be treated as people treat you as you allow them to. Boundaries impact on the quality of your life and when your health and/or family life begins to suffer, it will sooner or later not only decrease your quality of life, it will also likely reduce your productivity on the job.

Steps to Setting and Maintaining Boundaries in the Workplace:

1. Develop Self Awareness

Identify what area of work you need more space, energy or personal power in. Recognise when you feel angry, frustrated or resentful. This usually suggests that a boundary has been crossed and you don't even know it. As you become more aware of these situations you are better able to create boundaries and let others know what they are.

2. Be Clear About What Your Role Entails

If someone asks you to complete a task, which is not in your scope of work, say so. If you say yes once, it will be presumed that you are willing to help out regularly. If you truly want to help out the person say something like “this is not in my scope of work but I am willing to assist you this once.” This sends a clear message to the recipient.

3. Be Clear About Your Work Hours



Everyone needs time away from work. Let people know what hours you can be contacted when you are not in the office. Then back it up and let your voice mail take messages outside of those times. Returning calls when you are in the right frame of mind will be much more productive and effective than when you are feeling like you are compromising something.

4. Control Your Diary

Neither your clients nor your boss control your diary, you do. So take control of it. If you find that you are working excessively and taking more on that you can manage, it's time to stop and reschedule. Start setting the expectations to deadlines. Let people know that what they want you to do is not realistic within the timeframe or support you have available. This may feel uncomfortable at first, however it will become easier as you keep doing it. You and your family and others around you in the workplace will benefit from having put yourself first as we can only give to others once we have given to ourselves.

5. Let People Know

When setting new boundaries you need to let others know what the boundaries are otherwise they have no idea they are crossing the line. When doing this, use simple and direct language. There is no need to defend or explain your boundaries or feelings to anyone. Be polite, not aggressive. When there is resistance, just simply repeat a statement. For example, "Please respect my decision". Then back it up with action. For example, if you have let colleagues know that you will be leaving the office at 5.00 o'clock every Wednesday then you need to leave at 5.00 o'clock every Wednesday without exception.

6. Practice Saying NO

This may feel uncomfortable at first, however the more you do it the easier it will become. If the request is unreasonable say so and say no. We don't offer an explanation when we say yes.

You can't control people's responses or reactions to your boundaries but hopefully with direct requests and open communication others will support you. With practice, boundary setting will become much easier. Like any new skill it will take a little bit of time before you feel comfortable doing it. It also takes at least 21 days to change a habit.

Therefore, setting clear, strong boundaries are a necessary part of life if you want to stand up for yourself and be true to you and in turn be true to others. Boundaries allow you to respect yourself and show individuals how you would like to be treated. It is part of the process of defining what you will tolerate or not tolerate in your life (values). Boundaries will support you to become a much happier, healthier and balanced individual. They will also show others that you care and respect yourself and you will become an example for others to follow. And there is no better support or endorsement than that.

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