



How to set and maintain healthy boundaries in the workplace

by Julia Kerr Henkel, MD of Lumminos

Let's define boundaries and why they are so important:

One definition is that boundaries in relationship terms are about naming and making clear to others what's okay and what's not okay...and why. Failure to set boundaries can quickly lead to resentment, frustration and sometimes deep hurt.



Understanding your role

If a leader is anyone who takes responsibility for developing the potential in people and processes - and is courageous enough to do so - then all of us are leaders. So, as leaders we need to:

- Model appropriate behaviours. Be clear, respectful, and open for questions. Most of the time, people will be thankful for the clarity and appreciate the rarity of seeing someone else ask for what they need (rather than be passive aggressive or annoyed).
- Respect the boundaries set by others. If you respect people who are brave enough to say No, they will in turn respect your No. When we accept that others have the right to set boundaries with us, we feel better about (or more able to) set our own.
- Boundaries are a core component of honesty and trust building, and this starts with oneself. How committed and able are you to identify, voice and hold your own boundaries? Be honest with yourself: how do you typically respond to others' requests? Do you have a tendency to say Yes or No too often? How often do you negotiate?
- Watch out for secret, invisible boundaries. Because inner fear, people may set "secret" boundaries. They may withdraw, get resentful, or experience annoyance with someone's irresponsibility instead of being honest about how they affect us. Boundaries need to be made visible to others and communicated clearly and kindly.

Examples of boundaries

In relationships, both personal and professional, we need to understand that there are several areas where boundaries might need to be articulated, requested and respected.

5 key boundary domains/areas:

Emotional: these are boundaries around inappropriate topics, emotional dumping, and dismissing emotions
E.g. "This isn't a topic I'm ok with or willing to discuss further."

Material: Boundaries around possessions, when they can be used, and how they are treated.
E.g. "My car cannot be used on weekends; material from this workshop can't be copied and reproduced."

Time/energy: Boundaries around time, punctuality, when to contact, favours and free labour.
E.g. "If you're going to be late, please message me in advance of the meeting start time to let me know; let's agree to take short breaks every 45-60 mins."

Mental/spiritual: Freedom to have your own thoughts, beliefs, values and opinions.
E.g. "I respect that you may disagree with my opinion, and please don't force your own."

Physical: Proximity, touch, personal displays of affection, unwanted comments regarding appearance, gender, orientation or sexuality.
E.g. "I don't find comments about someone's body shape funny or appropriate. "

For more information, visit www.lumminos.co.za