

Boundaries: Saying "no" is really saying yes to you



As we kick off 2023, we start the year with personal planning topics to help you with your goal setting.

Many have trouble saying "no" which is key to boundary setting and effective planning. Our boundaries teach others how we want to be treated. Boundaries are vital to keeping us mentally and physically energized. They separate you from me: my feelings from your feelings, my needs from your needs, my physical space and body from yours and even my responsibilities from yours. Individuals recognize the value of boundaries, but just can't seem to keep them. Why?

Fear of failure

boundaries can improve relationships, stress levels and work-life balance, but in the back of a person's mind they may think, "What if these boundaries don't work? Then what?"

Knowing you have a problem and how to fix it may be easier to handle than trying to solve the problem with a boundary and failing. The only thing worse than trying and failing though is not trying at all.

Feeling guilt and shame

Feeling guilt and shame when setting boundaries is especially problematic for people who have been placed in caregiver roles, are people-pleasers or they've been taught low self-worth. These folks may not feel they have the right to enact boundaries or have been taught the only way they can gain love, respect or attention is to make their needs secondary to others. Creating boundaries may even feel like they are doing something "wrong" or "bad."

Unsure of priorities

There is a big project due at work tomorrow that you need to work on tonight, but your mom needs groceries and help cleaning, and you have to drop off Taylor at karate, and so young James will have to come with you. Hopefully your partner can walk the dog and throw a load of laundry in before they go back to the hospital. Oh darn, and you should really check in on your elderly neighbour! And what will we have for dinner?! Being pulled in so many important directions means it can be hard to even know where a boundary needs to be established. Communicate what's on your plate and make sure to ask for help when you need it.

False hope

This is one of the hardest reasons to overcome in a person who is reticent to set boundaries. Often when a person has not set a boundary, it is because they are hoping to receive something: love, friendship, accolades or maybe forgiveness. These hopes can be misguided.

People do not love us because of what we do for them, they love us, period. Allowing individuals to keep crossing our boundaries will only hurt us, but the hope they will change toward us can keep a person boundary-less.

Creating loose boundaries

Sometimes it is easier to put a “loose boundary” in place. Thinking “I won’t give my adult child money anymore, except if she needs rent money” is an example of a loose boundary. Or “I told my dad not to talk about my daughter’s weight, but she’s in a different room anyway.” Loose boundaries are equivalent to no boundaries, but when it is hard to fortify boundaries, loose boundaries may feel like the most that can be accomplished.

Thinking others won’t like you

When a person lays down a boundary that previously did not exist, those affected can get angry as dynamics shift. If your colleague is used to you picking up their slack but a new boundary lets them know you can no longer “help” them, they may express anger.

Boundaries are a good idea, we can all see that. But we can also see why keeping them in place is not easy. Remember though: by saying “no” to others’ expectations and demands, we are saying “yes” to self-love and everything in our lives we decide is an absolute priority.

Support is always available for you if you experience any personal planning and life challenges. Reach out to our experts whenever you need.

UPCOMING WEBINAR

Ask an Expert - Personal Planning

January 11, 2023
12:00 PM EST

For many folks, conflict and anger is difficult to handle so it is easy to let boundaries slide, or to avoid putting them in place at all. Remembering you are responsible for your own well-being will help you get through this fear.

Believing nothing can be done

This is a rare situation, although it isn’t uncommon for people to incorrectly assume that they are in it. Sometimes we can’t build a boundary to safeguard ourselves. A single mom working two jobs, taking care of an ill parent or a toddler may not have the ability to set a boundary with their boss saying they can only work weekdays. They may think it is a great idea, but realize it isn’t practical. Be realistic with your time and use it to focus on your priorities.

