



SETTING BOUNDARIES IN THE WORKPLACE

Setting boundaries is a way to create limits in relationships. Boundaries preserve your individuality when you are sharing part of your life with another person, and serve as a protection from being manipulated or overwhelmed by others' needs. It is important to identify what constitutes healthy relationship boundaries and to recognize unhealthy ones. Without boundaries we fail to discriminate about who we let in to our inner circle; boundaries become too rigid if they keep everyone out.

Types of Boundaries

There are five types of boundaries:

Physical boundaries – determine who is allowed to touch you and how and when they may touch you

Emotional boundaries – determine how many of your feelings you share with others and how many you allow others to share with you in return

Sexual boundaries – determine who you share your sexuality with, how and when (includes physical activity, jokes, comments and gestures)

Intellectual boundaries – determine how you share your ideas and perceptions with others and how you respond to others' ideas and perceptions

Spiritual boundaries – determine with whom you share your spiritual beliefs and practice¹

Differentiating between Public and Private

Establishing healthy boundaries in the workplace is complicated by the fact that some personal information must be shared when it impacts other people in the office. Letting others know for example that you are ill, or are going to be married, or are going on vacation, may be necessary but it is not an invitation for advice or opinions. Giving others notice of upcoming events is not the same as taking them into your confidence. If intimate personal relationships do develop between co-workers, these friendships should not impact others in the office--either by making others feel excluded, or by involving them if problems in the relationship occur.

Maintaining Boundaries

What to do if boundaries are not respected:

- Tell the person they have crossed a line
- Let the person know that you have not solicited their opinion or advice
- Make a firm and clear statement of what you consider to be appropriate
- Discuss the issue with a supervisor or with human resources if the behavior continues

¹ Ashleigh Frank, "The Swinging Gate: Know Your Relationship Boundaries Balance Is The Key To Boundaries And Relationships," April 04, 2008, http://www.lifescrpt.com/wellbeing/articles/t/the_swinging_gate_know_your_relationship_boundaries.aspxCurrently

