D.C. Bar Lawyer Assistance Program
Presents

Thriving Not Just Surviving:
Boundary Setting In Practice

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Objectives

You should be able to answer:

• What are boundaries
• Why do they matter
• How to set healthy boundaries
Definition of Boundary

- Something (such as a river, a fence, or an imaginary line) that shows where an area ends and another area begins.
- A point or limit that indicates where two things become different.
- Boundaries: unofficial rules about what should not be done: limits that define acceptable behavior.

(From Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
Concept of Boundaries

Your skin is a great example.

• It is:
  • Firm yet flexible (semi-permeable)
  • Keeps out the bad
  • Holds in the good
  • Penetrable (can be wounded but will heal)
  • Adaptable based on circumstances (growth)
What shapes our boundaries

- Belief system
- Values
- Morals
- Emotions
- Thoughts
- Life experiences
- Wants
- Needs
Boundaries: How are they useful?

- Defines the line between ourselves and others
- Provides the framework for a relationship
- Ensures what we do is aligned with our intentions, values, and purpose
  - Help make sure we are using our time, space, things, feelings, and relationships in the most appropriate way
Professional Boundaries: How are they useful

- Builds and maintains trust
- Consistent delivery of quality service
- Set limits between client and self
- Keeps relationships professional
- Avoids feeding into clients’ vulnerabilities
- Prevents burnout
- Minimizes misunderstandings
- Reduces risk of client problems
- Prevents role confusion
Professional boundaries help differentiate between who we are and what we do.
If your boundaries are weak, you will...

- Have great difficulty saying “no”
- Have difficulty prioritizing your needs
- Experience anger and resentment towards other people
- Work overtime not as an exception but as a rule
- Experience low morale and low energy
- Hold other people responsible for your predicament
- Feel responsible for other people’s feelings, even when you have done nothing wrong
- Compromise your values to please others or to avoid conflict
- Rely on others’ opinions, feelings, and ideas more than your own
If your boundaries are rigid, you will...

- Likely say no if the request involves close interaction
- Avoid intimacy by not getting too close to others
- Rarely share personal information
- Fear being hurt, vulnerable, or taken advantage of
- Have difficulty connecting to feelings (self and others)
- Feel like no one really knows or understands the real you
- Have few or no close relationships
- Not allow yourself to connect with other people and their problems
- Rarely ask for help (or for what you want and need)
If you have healthy personal boundaries, you...

- Know who you are and are able to hold your center. Respect self.
- Can say no or yes, and you are ok when others say no to you
- Know your limits. Allow others to define their limits.
- Clearly communicate with people in setting your limits
- Focus on you and what you can change (you)
- Don’t waste time and energy trying to change other people
- Take responsibility for your feelings and actions
- Do not take responsibility for someone else’s feelings or actions
- Do not hold someone else responsible for your feelings/actions
- Are able to ask for help when you need it
If you don’t set your own boundaries other people will do it for you. Always.
Boundary Continuum

Clear
• Always OK

Blurry
• Sometimes OK

Violation
• Never OK
Lawyers and Boundaries

Some are easily defined for us, some we have to define for ourselves.

- Clients
- Money
- Opposing counsel
- Colleagues

- Supervisors
- Time
- Ethics
Boundary Violations

What can happen?
“Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves, even when we risk disappointing others.”

-Brene Brown
General Principles of Boundary Setting

• Develop self awareness, tune into your feelings
• Know what you want and your limits
• Give yourself permission
• Be direct. Be clear about your role
• Communicate. Discuss. Verify.
• Be consistent
• Practice saying “No”
Work Boundaries

• Create a job description for yourself
• Have separation between work and home
  • office number, email address, mailing address, physical space
• Take breaks
• Designate one day as a personal Sabbath
• Say no
  • Be honest with self what can and want to do
• Say yes
  • If it is important to you and/or it will help you grow
Boundaries and Time

- Establish office hours for clients
- Schedule time for yourself away from clients to do work
- Manage your inbox
- Designate time for yourself during the day for self care
- Be consistent
  - Don’t respond to calls, emails, etc. outside of designated hours
- Organize each week
  - Know what work and non-work obligations need to be met and develop a plan
“When you say ‘Yes’ to others, make sure you are not saying ‘No’ to yourself.”

– Paulo Coelho
Boundaries with clients

- Develop policies and procedures
- Limit exceptions
- Communicate clearly and assertively
  - On paper
  - Reinforce verbally
  - Address concerns directly
- Verify client understanding and expectations
Boundaries with others

• Pause and ponder
  • Respond. Not react.

• Give yourself time and space
  • “Let me get back to you.”
    • Ask yourself:
      • Do I want to do it? Does it align with my goals?
      • Do I have the time to do it? How urgent is it?
      • Do I have the wherewithal to do it? Am I the right person for the task?

• Saying yes to the person and no to the task
  • “I’m sorry I can’t do it this week. I can do it for you next Tuesday after the trial is complete.”
Taking Action

Step One: Identify what really matters to you

- Health
- Family
- Friends
- Hobbies
- Wealth/finances
- Business/career
- Travel
- Spiritual/religious
- Personal enrichment
- Fun
Taking Action

Step Two: Identify why you are doing this

- My identity as a professional
- My view of the world
- My sense of myself as a friend, lover, family member
- My ability to care for myself
- My ability to care for others
Keys to Maintaining Boundaries

- Take care of yourself. Know what your limits are and communicate them.
- Recognize when you are trying to change other people and instead focus on changing yourself.
- Remind yourself daily that the only thing you can change is you.
- Resist taking responsibility for other people’s anger or disappointment when they react to your new boundary.
- Resist the urge to take care of other people when you don’t have the time or energy.
It will feel uncomfortable.
The more you practice the easier it will become.
Future Assessment

• How uncomfortable, resentful, or guilty am I feeling now?
  • Rate your answer on a scale of 1-10 (10 highest)
    • Score 1-3 low zone
    • Score 4-6 medium zone
    • Score 7-10 high zone
  • If you score medium to high may want to look at boundaries.

Remember: Boundaries are meant to protect your well being.
Remember:

If it were easy you would have done it by now!
Services of the Lawyer Assistance Program

- Assessment, evaluation, referral, short term counseling and support/follow up, monitoring.
- Access to a LAP volunteer who is trained and understands what a person is experiencing.
- Consultation with firms or other concerned parties about possible interventions.
- These services are free and confidential to D.C. Bar members, Judges and Law Students in the District of Columbia.

Call 202-347-3131.
Sources

