FREE GUIDE

5 Rules for Setting Boundaries at Work

Keep the lines clear and the relationships healthy.

1 2 3 4 5



> *Healthy boundaries don't push people away. They help us understand how to work together well.*

A WORKPLACE RESPECT & BOUNDARIES RESOURCE

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INTRODUCTION

Why you need rules at work

Work is a shared space, and the relationships you build there operate differently from the relationships you have at home.

You can care about the people you work with. You can develop genuine friendships, trust your colleagues and enjoy working with your leaders. But warmth does not eliminate the need for boundaries.

When the lines become blurred, we can start confusing roles, expectations and responsibilities. We may share more than we intended, take responsibility for things that don't belong to us, avoid necessary conversations or carry workplace interactions long after the workday has ended.

Healthy boundaries help us keep those lines clear while still building warm, respectful working relationships.

These five rules will help you think differently about the relationships around you and make more intentional choices about the boundaries you need.

YOUR BRAIN NEEDS BOUNDARIES TOO

Think about what happens when you don't know where you stand with someone.

- You replay the conversation.
- You wonder what they meant.
- You anticipate the next interaction.
- You think about what you should have said.
- You try to predict what might happen next.

All of this requires mental resources.

Research on stress points to an important relationship between areas of the brain involved in stress responses and areas involved in executive control. The amygdala plays an important role in processing responses to stress, while areas of the prefrontal cortex support higher-order processes involved in regulation and decision-making. Research has also found associations between perceived stress and differences in communication among these neural networks.

Boundaries cannot eliminate stress, but clarity can reduce some of the ambiguity we carry into our interactions.

A boundary can help answer three important questions:

QUESTION 1	QUESTION 2	QUESTION 3
What is my responsibility?	What belongs to the other person?	What needs to happen next?

BOUNDARY REMINDER

Healthy boundaries are not about becoming cold or distant. They are about becoming clearer about how you engage.

RULE 1

Your work friends are not your home friends.

You can have genuine friendships at work. Those relationships can make work more enjoyable and create a sense of connection.

But a friend at work is still part of your workplace environment.

There may be conversations, information or personal details that you freely share with a lifelong friend that require more thought before sharing with someone at work.

The question isn't whether you trust the person. The question is whether what you are sharing belongs in that relationship and that environment.

THE BRAIN CONNECTION

Familiar relationships can make communication feel easy and automatic.

That is exactly why a pause can be useful.

Before sharing something personal, confidential or emotionally charged, give yourself a moment to move from automatic conversation to intentional choice.

Ask: **Does this belong in this relationship?**

That one question may help you distinguish between something you can share and something it would be wiser not to share.

TRY THIS

Before disclosing something personal at work, ask yourself:

Is it appropriate?	Is it necessary?	Is it safe to share?
Does this information belong in a workplace relationship?	Why am I sharing it?	Would I be comfortable if this information became known more widely?

ASK YOURSELF

What do I share freely with friends outside of work that I need to think twice about sharing with a friend at work?

BOUNDARY LANGUAGE TO TRY

> *"I'd rather keep that part of my life private, but I appreciate you asking."*

Or simply:

> *"That's something I prefer to keep outside of work."*

You don't have to reject the person to protect the boundary.

RULE 2

Work is a shared space.

Workplace boundaries do not exist in isolation.

Other people share the environment with you, whether that environment is an office, meeting room, virtual workspace, group chat or shared communication channel.

Confidentiality and privacy also need to be understood within the policies and requirements that apply to your particular workplace.

Instead of assuming a conversation is private, make an intentional decision about what you say, where you say it and who needs to hear it.

THE BRAIN CONNECTION

Uncertainty influences decision-making, and research has identified a role for the lateral prefrontal cortex in processing uncertainty.

In everyday workplace life, you don't need a neuroscience lesson every time you speak.

You need a pause.

TRY THIS: PAUSE, ASSESS, CHOOSE

1 PAUSE	2 ASSESS	3 CHOOSE
Do I need to respond or share this immediately?	Who is involved? Where am I? What information is appropriate here?	What is the clearest and most appropriate response?

A few seconds of intentional thought can change the direction of an interaction.

ASK YOURSELF

Would I be comfortable if what I'm about to say or do were known by others in this workplace?

If the answer is no, pause before proceeding.

BOUNDARY REMINDER

Just because information was shared with you doesn't automatically mean it belongs with someone else.

RULE 3

Set boundaries with your leaders.

Boundaries with leaders can feel more complicated because authority is part of the relationship.

Your goal is not to challenge authority unnecessarily or expect your leader to read your mind. Your goal is to understand your responsibilities, communicate respectfully and get clearer about expectations.

You have a working relationship with your organisation. You provide certain services and responsibilities, and the organisation compensates you according to the terms of that relationship.

Understanding that boundary matters. It can help you separate a work request from the emotional response you may have to the person making the request.

BEFORE YOU RESPOND, ASK:

- What is actually being requested?
- Is the expectation clear?
- What part of this belongs to me?
- Do I have the capacity to do it within the requested timeframe?
- What clarification or conversation is needed?

Then communicate.

BOUNDARY LANGUAGE TO TRY

WHEN PRIORITIES CONFLICT

> *"I can have this completed by Thursday. If Wednesday is essential, which of my other priorities would you like me to move?"*

WHEN EXPECTATIONS ARE UNCLEAR

> *"I want to make sure I understand what you need. Can we clarify the expected outcome?"*

WHEN YOU NEED TIME BEFORE COMMITTING

> *"Let me review what I already have scheduled before I commit to that timeframe."*

These responses don't guarantee that you'll get the answer you want. **They help you communicate with clarity.**

ASK YOURSELF

- What boundaries do I need to interact well with my leaders?
- What expectations have I been carrying that I have never actually communicated?
- What conversation would help create greater clarity?

BOUNDARY REMINDER

Respect and boundaries can exist in the same conversation.

RULE 4

Your co-workers are not your family.

We all belong to different networks of relationships.

Family **Friends** **Colleagues** **Leaders** **Clients** **Stakeholders**

Each relationship comes with different expectations. Problems can start when we unconsciously bring expectations or habits from one kind of relationship into another.

For example, you might find yourself:

- trying to fix everything for everyone
- avoiding disagreement to keep the peace
- taking responsibility for another person's reaction
- automatically saying yes when you want to say no
- expecting personal loyalty from a professional relationship
- becoming overly involved in problems that aren't yours to solve

This doesn't mean you've done something wrong. It means there's an opportunity to notice the pattern.

THE RELATIONSHIP PATTERN CHECK

When a workplace relationship begins consuming more energy than you think it should, pause and ask:

What role does this person actually have in my life?

Then ask:

Am I responding to this person according to that role?

That distinction can create enormous clarity.

ASK YOURSELF

- Am I treating this co-worker the way I would treat someone in my family?
- What am I expecting from this relationship?
- Does that expectation actually belong at work?

BOUNDARY REMINDER

Caring about someone does not require carrying what belongs to them.

RULE 5

Keep the right boundary with the right person.

Not every workplace relationship requires the same boundary.

The boundary you need with your leader may be different from the one you need with a colleague. The relationship you have with a client is different from the relationship you have with a work friend. Stakeholders may require another set of boundaries altogether.

The key is learning to recognise the role before deciding the boundary.

THE RELATIONSHIP BOUNDARY CHECK

LEADER	COLLEAGUE	CLIENT
What does respectful, clear communication require in this relationship?	What belongs within our working relationship, and what doesn't?	Where does professional service end and personal involvement begin?

STAKEHOLDER	WORK FRIEND
What information, access and communication are appropriate?	What can we comfortably share while still respecting the workplace context?

ASK YOURSELF

- What is this person's role in my work?
- Does my current boundary match that role?

WHEN BOUNDARIES STAY UNCLEAR

Sometimes the conversation lasts ten minutes, but you carry it for ten hours.

- You replay it.
- You anticipate the next interaction.
- You wonder what you should have said.
- You monitor the person's response.
- You keep thinking about something you cannot control.

That is where boundary confusion can begin consuming resources that you need for the rest of your day.

Through the lens of Currency of Resilience™, this is an important distinction. **Your attention has value. Your capacity has value. Your energy has value.** Boundaries help you become more intentional about where those resources go.

YOUR TURN

Build your boundary

Knowing that you need a boundary is one thing. Knowing what the boundary is, how to communicate it and how to maintain it is another.

Use these questions to work through one boundary that would create greater clarity for you this week.

1. **THE SITUATION**
   What keeps happening?

2. **WHAT IS MINE?**
   What am I genuinely responsible for?

3. **WHAT IS NOT MINE?**
   What responsibility, reaction, expectation or problem am I carrying that belongs somewhere else?

4. **THE BOUNDARY I NEED**
   What needs to change?

5. **HOW I WILL SAY IT**
   Write one clear sentence.

6. **THE DISCOMFORT I MAY NEED TO TOLERATE**
   Someone doesn't have to like your boundary for you to communicate it respectfully. What reaction are you worried about?

7. **IF THE BOUNDARY IS TESTED AGAIN**
   How will you respond consistently?

THE 10-SECOND BOUNDARY PAUSE

Before automatically saying yes, ask:

- Is this mine?
- Do I have the capacity?
- Is this appropriate for this relationship?
- What am I actually agreeing to?
- What might this yes require me to say no to?

A thoughtful answer is still an answer. You don't have to respond immediately simply because someone has asked.

YOUR BOUNDARY FOR THIS WEEK

With whom: _____

The boundary: _____

How I will communicate it: _____

When I will do it: _____

WANT MORE TOOLS FOR HEALTHY WORKING RELATIONSHIPS?

Boundaries become easier when you learn how to recognise relationship patterns, communicate expectations and stay clear about what belongs to you.

Continue learning with my Respect and Boundaries course.

interpersonalwellness.com/courses

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