



SETTING BOUNDARIES

STEPS TO SETTING STRONG BOUNDARIES IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS

1. Identify the specific behavior that was hurtful / unacceptable
2. Identify a possible positive intention behind the behavior.
3. Identify a preferred behavior that would accomplish the same positive objective
4. Have a conversation with the offending person, using a script that goes something like this:

THE BOUNDARY SETTING CONVERSATION

1. Ask, "When you did X (identify unacceptable behavior), were you intending to Y (identify possible positive intention)?"
2. Wait for response and make sure to clarify the intention behind the behavior. Listen fully until you get it and they agree that you got it.
3. When you did X, this is how it affected me (explain gently but HONESTLY, how it made you feel and what thoughts you had as a result of the comment).
4. Wait to hear their response - you will most often see embarrassment and possibly defensiveness
5. I know now that your intention was (whatever you agreed on at #2). Next time you could do W or Z (possible alternative behaviors), and that would achieve your purpose without hurting me.
6. I request that you no longer do X around me.

You don't have to use the exact words - the gist of this exercise is that most people are not aware of how their behavior affects others, and when it is brought to their attention with the assumption that the intent was malicious, they feel angry and defensive, and it's difficult to have a productive conversation. When there is no anger, and a positive assumption of intent behind the behavior, it depersonalizes the behavior and makes it easier for the person to agree to change behaviors. In this scenario, even if the intent WAS malicious, the person can save face, and will be highly unlikely to repeat the behavior.

However, in most cases there is either a positive intention or no thought at all behind the comment. Have you ever blurted something out or casually thrown out a joke or comment, only to find out later that it hurt someone? Likely that for every time you find out, there are at least 30 times you never found out - because most people don't have the courage to talk to you about it.

You give yourself a lot of power by taking it upon yourself to confront every behavior that is unacceptable to you, and surprisingly - the gentle process above is TONS more powerful and once you get good at it takes FAR less energy than using anger.

WHAT IF THE BEHAVIOR DOESN'T CHANGE?

If you've had a good boundary setting conversation, and the behavior doesn't change, you need to have the conversation again, but add a 7th step:

7. This is the second time we have talked about this. If it happens again, I will (insert consequence).

Choose a consequence that is easy for you to do. If you threaten to do something and don't follow through, you will lose credibility and the negative behavior will not change.