**Setting Healthy Workplace Boundaries –12**

When we talk about interpersonal or workplace boundaries, it can sometimes be a difficult concept to grasp because it isn’t something that we can see. But just because we can’t see a boundary, it doesn’t mean that it isn’t there or that it isn’t important. The definition of a boundary is the ability to know where you end and where another person begins. When we talk about needing space, setting limits, determining acceptable behavior, or creating a sense of independence, we are really talking about boundaries. It is a general misconception that having good boundaries will distance you from others. However, the truth is that when you know where you end and others begin, you can then closely engage with others because you won’t feel overwhelmed or unprotected. Having a sense of independence prevents the need to distance our self from others with a barrier.

Professional boundaries are important because they define the limits and responsibilities of the people with whom you interact in the workplace. When workplace boundaries are clearly defined, the organization works more efficiently because redundant work assignments are eliminated and task performance is accountable. When everyone in an organization is made aware who is responsible for what, healthier workplace environments are created. It then becomes very difficult for someone to blame others for their failed or inadequate performance and good job performance can clearly be identified.

**Establishing and Maintaining Boundaries**

Your professional boundaries become more clearly defined when you can answer all of these questions:

* Who gives you your assignments?
* To whom do you report?
* Who gives you feedback?
* Who sets your work priorities?

Another important area that should be negotiated is interpersonal boundaries, because professional and interpersonal boundaries substantially impact workplace productivity and the quality of social environment. Interpersonal boundary parameters include:

* The tone people use with each other.
* The attitude and approach co-workers use with each other.
* The ability to focus on work objectives even with people you don’t like or with whom you are having personal conflict.
* The ability to effectively set limits with others who have poor boundaries.
* Clearly defining the consequences when a boundary is violated and sticking to it.

Boundaries will have no meaning if your actions don’t back up your words.

**Where to Start**

Ideally, workplace boundaries are carefully negotiated in an open discussion about responsibilities, goals, and priorities prior to starting a new job or beginning a project. Even if this type of understanding wasn’t reached beforehand, it’s never too late to improve your interactions with your team members. Here are three core skill areas to help you get started:

**1. Know your limits: what you can do well within the allotted timeframe.**  
Don’t exaggerate your ability by overselling it. Give accurate estimates. Delivering a good product on time will improve your credibility, while missing deadlines or delivering a substandard product will only hurt your reputation.

**2. Tactfully and openly communicate about goals and limitations.**  
Don’t try to undersell or misrepresent your ability. Underselling artificially prevents you from being able to demonstrate your professional skills, which might affect your career advancement. When discussing your limitations, focus on what you want and what you are willing to do to get it. Keep your focus on your positive intentions; ask for help when it’s needed to ensure good quality work; actively engage in problem solving, and don’t complain about the problem. Ensure that others are receiving the message you intended by asking for feedback when it’s not forthcoming.

**3. Be available to discuss differences and reach agreements.**  
Reflect back your understanding of the other person’s needs, interests, and concerns. Attempt to negotiate win-win solutions.

Establishing boundaries and priorities go hand in hand because they both help manage interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Together they go a long way toward establishing productive work environments based on trust.

**True or False**

Complaining about another a co-worker’s work to your co-worker T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Asking for help T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Taking on a job you cannot complete because you do not have the skill T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Asking for a time off in advance T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Calling a co-worker after work to complain about work T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Making any kind of sexual reference to a co-worker T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Touching co-workers (hugging, arm touch, back touch) T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Telling a supervisor that you are unsure of how to do the job T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Yelling at a co-worker T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Telling a co-worker you do not want to gossip T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Helping a co-worker T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Taking on a co-workers work because they are not doing their job T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Accepting an evaluation from a supervisor that you do not agree with T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Telling co-workers how to do their job T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Doing something you feel is ethically/morally wrong T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Pushing your spiritual/political beliefs on co-workers T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Telling co-workers about your past abuse/incarceration/problem T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Allowing others to treat you bad T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Asking for a ride to work when you are at the interview T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

It is okay to voice your frustration with your employer/company via Facebook post, tweet, and/or social media post? T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Posting that you called off work and then went and did fun activities or posting pictures of what you did instead of going to work is okay. T\_\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_

Listing where you work on your Facebook page is appropriate? T\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Becoming friends with your co-workers/boss  is appropriate on Social Media forums? T\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Posting something about an illegal activity (underage drinking, smoking pot, using drugs, destruction of property, etc.) is okay when you’re employed? T\_\_\_\_\_\_ F\_\_\_\_\_\_