



**“Good boundaries always produce freedom, not control”**

Henry Cloud

## Setting boundaries

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Boundaries are like the fence you build around your yard. They protect your personal space. In the context of corporate life, you can set boundaries around your time, availability, types of work you are willing to undertake, your relationships and/or ethics, to name a few areas.

Boundaries communicate to others what you will and will not tolerate and how you want to be treated. And the clearer the communication, the better.

## Boundaries are a necessity, not a luxury

Marking and safeguarding your boundaries protects your sanity, focus, health, family, private life and even your ability to think, plan and perform at a high level. Healthy boundaries give you the necessary space to care for your personal needs. Other people can take care of tasks, but only you can take care of yourself. Boundaries reduce stress, prevent burn-out, and allow you to enjoy life instead of spending it in constant service to others.

## Boundary setting can be challenging

If you tend to be a people pleaser, always wanting to be seen as kind and helpful, boundary setting would feel unnatural. If you were conditioned, possibly from a young age, to obey authority, saying 'no' may feel like an act of rebellion.

In corporate cultures Fear - a powerful, primary emotion - may also play a part: fear of missing out, fear of being looked upon unfavourably or the sheer fear of losing your job – all may be reasons for not daring to say 'no'. ING's "take it on and make it happen" has many good sides, but also encourages you to say "yes", where "no" may at some times, have been a better answer.

## Standing your ground

Boundary setting may cause some emotions, people may not like your no's, especially if they are used to you saying 'yes'. Your clear lines may cause disagreement, disappointment, or even anger. Remind yourself that other people's emotions should not decide your limits.

### Saying no for the right reasons

Ask yourself a few practical questions to qualify whether a 'no' is the right answer.

- Do I have the time and headspace to complete this task without compromising my priorities and responsibilities?
- If I say 'no' to this request, what am I saying 'yes' to?
- If I say 'yes' to this request, how aligned is my answer with my values and my priorities? How thin am I stretching myself? How much stress is it likely to cause?
- Is there a tangible benefit in saying 'yes' other than pleasing someone?

### Setting boundaries effectively

- Delay your response to a request. Take some time to reflect how achievable the request is, and what impact saying 'yes' will have on your current assignments. Using the questions above
- Communicate your borderlines boundaries clearly and assertively. Share your reasons for saying no (for example, if I say yes to this, it means working till midnight every day and I am not willing to do that)
- Consider giving options for your boss to choose from instead of refusing a task outright.
- Avoid excuses, justifications or defending position.

### Hone your boundary setting skills

If setting limits feels challenging, practice saying 'no' so keeping your boundaries becomes a reflex.

- Think of common scenarios and prepare ready scripts as an answer: 'I'm not available', 'it's not possible', 'that doesn't work for me' or 'let me get back to you'. Find words you're comfortable saying and practice them.
- Begin with small steps, for example by saying 'no' in a text before you do it in a conversation.
- Practice taking a short pause before making a choice. It increases decision accuracy.

## Call for action

What is one thing you can say 'no' to within 24 hours of reading this paper? And by doing so, what are you saying 'yes' to?

## Conclusion

Setting boundaries means marking the limit or space between where you begin, and the other person ends. It is therefore an important part of establishing one's identity, values, and priorities. Learning boundary skills is a primary self-care act, designed to align you to your purpose and mission and stop you from spreading yourself too thin.