



BOUNDARIES: Part 2

This month's tip follows on from last month. Today I'll show you some tools and techniques on how to extend and defend your boundaries, raise your standards and make your boundaries stronger. But let's start with a quick recap.

Boundaries

Boundaries are the lines in the sand that we draw around ourselves for our protection. We can define them as the words, actions and deeds that people say or do to us, that we find unacceptable. For example: *"No-one may hit me"*. Our boundaries define who we are, what we stand for, and how we view our place in the world.

We instinctively know when a boundary has been crossed, because we feel vulnerable, out of sorts, cross or uncomfortable after someone has done or said something. Our boundaries vary in strength according to what we need in terms of our own personal protection. For example: *"No-one may abuse me"* is usually fiercely defended and easy to recognise as a boundary, whereas, *"No-one may me feel bad at work when I have done my best"* might not be so easily recognised, nor defended.

First steps...

The first step in creating stronger boundaries, is to become aware of them. Next time you have an emotional response when someone has said or done something to you, notice it. What did they say or do that caused you to react? Is this a familiar response for you? Do you always react in the same way to those words or actions? Do you react in the same way if someone else says or does the same thing? If not, why is it that this particular person causes you to react? Why might that be? Start to become your own detective. Think it through or perhaps even write it down what causes your reactions. Who makes you react and what the specific words and or actions that trigger your reaction.

After a while you will be able to see more clearly what the triggers are, and who is the biggest culprit for breaching your boundaries. It will also become abundantly clear what your biggest boundary breach is and who is doing it the most. Now you're ready to

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tackle it. Write this boundary down in terms of “No-one may...” My first big boundary breach that I tackled was: “No-one may constantly tell me that they are worried about me over the things I believe to be right for me.” What is yours?

Defending a boundary

It can be daunting to defend a boundary that upsets you, as usually the one you notice the most will be a big one, and with someone with whom you find it difficult to talk to. And, yet it is usually this very boundary that, once redefined and defended, will give you the biggest rewards. Be brave – I know everyone deep down has a courageous heart – even if it doesn’t show up very often! Are you thinking: “No! I can’t tell this person that!” Then let me ask you this. What will you lose by telling the person who has crossed your boundary what you are *really* feeling? What would it be like if that boundary was *no longer* breached? Would it be wonderful? Would you feel a whole lot better if you didn’t have to go through the whole scenario again and again? Are you ready to have a go and talk to the person concerned? Great!

Most people don’t do anything about a boundary that has been breached because they weren’t able to talk to the person about what they said or did at the time. Yet nearly all boundary defending is initially done retrospectively. What I mean by this is that until you become more adept at defending your boundaries, the normal sequence of events is: words or actions take place that cause you to react. Then you realise it’s because a boundary has been crossed. And then you have to pluck up courage to say something. To defend a boundary retrospectively, start with something along the lines of: “Do remember last week when...”, or “Last night...”

Scared? I know for some people to stand up for themselves in this way is quite daunting. They think they are being selfish or petty – yet if it’s getting under your skin, then it’s neither. Rather look at it as the first step to really looking after yourself, for standing up to what you believe in and most of all asking for the respect and love you deserve from others. Also by telling the other person, it gives them a chance to grow themselves too, so be brave!

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Doing it gracefully

When you are defending a boundary, it's important to realise that when most people breach a boundary, they aren't doing it maliciously. Usually it's down to lack of thought or just they didn't realise how important this issue is to you. Remember the level of importance you put on your boundaries is unique. What really matters to you may be so far down someone else's list, it hasn't even registered on their radar.

When talking to the other person about your boundary, make sure that you are coming from your perspective and not judging or blaming the other person. A great way to do this is to use a technique called *"Truth Talking"*. I promise to write about Truth Talking in more depth soon, because it is an extremely useful tool, but for now the key elements of this technique are:

- Begin all of your sentences with: *"I..."*
- Keep all of your sentences very short.
- Keep it to the point – extra details just weaken what you are trying to say.
- Avoid saying: *"You..."* or *"Why don't you..."*
- Avoid justifying yourself with: *"...BUT..."*

Let me give you an example. Suppose a wife is really frustrated with her husband over the parenting of their son, lets call him Jack. The wife thinks she is getting a rough deal and so her boundary would be: *"My husband may not dump all of the parenting on me."* Without some forethought, she might easily express her frustration like this:

"You never have time for Jack. You don't care that our son is practically being brought up in a single parent family! I have so much to do and today my mother really needed me because she is not feeling well. Why don't you read to him sometimes? Or take him to play football?"

The husband on hearing this is likely to defend himself. He is going to tell her that his work takes so much of his time, that of course Jack isn't in a single parent family – he is here isn't he? And so on.



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Lets look at a similar conversation using Truth Talking:

"I am upset. I need you to help me with Jack. I know he would love it if you read to him, or played football with him. He needs you and I need your support on this".

The reaction is now likely to be very different as the husband has nothing to defend, and because he hasn't been judged, is also more likely to really hear what his wife is saying.

Raising your Standards and extending your Boundaries

Boundaries are intimately connected to standards. If our boundaries are essentially things to which we say "No!" to, then our standards are things to which we say "Yes" to.

When we begin working on defending our boundaries, we are, at the same time putting back into place our existing standards. For example if you begin working the boundary: *"No-one may belittle me in front of others"*, then it's likely that one of your standards is: *"I am respected"*.

It is possible, even desirable for us to raise our standards to where we would like to be in the world. For example, if you have your eye on being promoted at work, then you would want to be valued for the work that you are already doing. Your current standard might be: *"I am valued by my work-mates"*. To raise this standard, you might want to make it become: *"I am greatly valued for my work within the company"*. However, if anyone is currently stealing the lime-light for your work, then it will be necessary for you to deal with this boundary before you can start to work on raising your standard.

and finally...

I hope this topic has been useful for you. If you have misplaced last month's email, part 1 of Boundaries, is now on my website – www.reddandelion.co.uk/tips.html.

As always I love to hear from you, and if you need help with sorting out your boundaries, then I would be delighted to coach you on this.

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