



A boundary is anything that indicates a border or limit. With reference to human interactions, boundaries may be generally categorized as physical, mental, and emotional. Fred Rogers, better known as Mr. Rogers, once said,

"Providing a framework doesn't take away children's individuality. In fact, structure generally helps them to be more free because it provides boundaries. It's like a fence that offers security for what can happen inside the enclosure. Respect flourishes best within a clear framework, and it's that framework that can allow us all to express more of who we really are."

While the quote referred to children, the message makes a lot of sense in the academic work place. What your boundaries might be and how you go about establishing them may very well depend on your relationship with the other person. Faculty/student, mentor/mentee, tenure/non-tenure, and peer colleagues are a few possible relationships that could benefit from clearly, and respectfully, articulated boundaries. The advantages to creating your own boundaries and to honoring the boundaries of others go well beyond a clearer and more structured relationship. Healthy boundaries are said to raise productivity, lower stress, and help maintain reasonable workloads. In this issue, we look into identifying and establishing boundaries.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions you have on this or other topics related to improving communication with your colleagues and students. §

"Boundaries are important in the classroom. They help maintain respectful behavior and keep students on task. Good boundaries offer structure and limits while offering students certain freedoms and encouragement with that structure. Skilled educators know that effective boundaries can help them avoid the frustrations likely in more coercive, win-lose approaches."

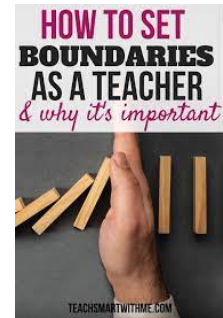
*Dr. Jane Bilstein* on educationworld.com

## Boundaries and the ‘Mindful Pause’

Chalon Johnson, ODR Graduate Assistant

While boundaries in the workplace or classroom can seem obvious, it is important to recognize, articulate, and abide by them. There are many different kinds of boundaries to consider such as time, space, self-disclosure and more. A boundary is viewed and seen differently by each person, and this can create issues if the boundary is not clearly stated.

Faculty-student boundaries involve maintaining the hierarchical structure inherent in that relationship while also creating a supportive learning environment. Being "on call" 24/7 to respond to phone calls, texts, and emails is a boundary that is often crossed professionally. Recently it has become more common for people who tend to email requests at odd hours to conclude their email with a statement that the recipient should wait for regular business hours to reply. It is an explicit recognition that there are boundaries of time that need to be respected.



Consider, though, the case of some students. Students who work full time often do their assignments at night or on the weekend and will email with questions during those times as well. Is it appropriate to email back on the weekends even though you might have expressed that as a boundary to your students? It is important to recognize the difficulty of maintaining those boundaries, such as time, but also supporting your students when they need it.

A few boundaries might be decided for, or dictated to, you by the department or university where you work. For example, it can be up to the professor or suggested by the department whether to allow late work in the classroom. A technique called the “mindful pause” by Tom (1997) can help a professor or faculty member decide if the situation is crossing a boundary or even if a boundary needs to be created. A mindful pause is described as taking a few seconds before responding to that boundary issue. When a student emails you asking for an extension, try taking a mindful pause and reflect on what boundaries will be crossed if you grant it.

During a meeting, you might want to share a funny personal story that popped into your head. Taking a mindful pause to think how this funny personal story contributes to the goals of the meeting or to your responsibilities as a faculty member will help you determine if you should share it. It might take a while for the mindful pause to become second nature, but it is a valuable tool for examining boundaries, understanding when they’re being crossed, and identifying what will work better in the future.

Using the knowledge of the mindful pause and mindfully adjusting the boundaries set out can only better the workplace. Setting boundaries intentionally can better communication, especially in the workplace and classroom. §

### Resources:

Tom, A. (1997). The deliberate relationships: A frame for talking about student-faculty relationships. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, XLIII(1), 3-21.

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## Setting Boundaries Between Faculty and Students

Aasma Batool, ODR Graduate Assistant

Boundary – A word that defines control and discipline in any part of our daily life. There are different parts of our daily life where a boundary is necessary to perform particular tasks smoothly. Boundaries between an instructor and students are extremely important.

Teaching is not just a profession; it is a responsibility. An instructor is also a mentor for students. That includes instilling academic values that can influence students' behavior in arenas far beyond the classroom. While an instructor works hard to provide a solid education for students, his or her presence, mannerisms and behavior in the classroom may also result in unintended influences on students.

The instructor needs to balance the formality required by their role with an engaging informality that encourages learning. The instructor might be a cheerful person who likes laughing and joking but should introduce those characteristics in moderation and over time. In the case of "too much too soon," the instructor may appear to be easy-going and relaxed in the first sessions, making it hard to maintain discipline and enforce deadlines later in the semester.

Good student-teacher relationships are essential for positive classrooms. To ensure safety and to build positive environments, it is important for the instructor to establish and maintain some professional boundaries in the classrooms.

### **Emotional Boundaries:**

- Considering all the students equal
- Not giving preferential treatment to specific students
- Not allowing personal problems to interfere with professional performance
- Develop emotional independence among students

### **Relationship Boundaries:**

- Not forming personal and/or inappropriate relationships with students
- Not arranging informal or social meetings with students
- Not integrating themselves into students' lives and their families personally

### **Power Boundaries:**

- Rewarding or punishing students inappropriately, without proper basis or based on personal grudges
- Asking for favors related to personal benefits
- Bribing, manipulating, humiliating or threatening students
- Failing to respond to students' claims of bullying or abuse
- Not reporting inappropriate behavior of students with teachers

### **Communication Boundaries:**

- Avoiding the sharing or requesting of personal information
- Giving proper instructions for times when students can contact
- Involving personal communication
- Informing parents of all communication

- Avoiding use of first names for students

**Physical Boundaries:**

- Refrain from inappropriate touches such as stroking or hugging
- Respect physical space and proximity when interacting with students
- Give students privacy in restrooms, locker rooms and dressing areas.

Even with clear boundaries in place, there can be instances in which the correct behavior for an instructor is not obvious. Above all, it is important for instructors to hold to the boundary basics and use their judgement on a case-by-case basis when necessary. The instructor should make the rules very clear and be sure the students understand them. When both the instructor and the student have clear, mutually understood boundaries, the learning experience will be improved.

Educators should think about their behavior in the classroom and the importance of being healthy role models for their students. In *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* Paolo Friere reminds us that “sometimes a simple, almost insignificant gesture on the part of a teacher can have a profound formative effect on the life of a student.” (p.46). §

**Resources:**

Friere, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

## Boundaries

Margaret Ménache, ODR Interim Director  
Ombudsperson for Faculty

**8 Ways to Establish Healthy Boundaries at Work**

1. Assess Your Personal Boundaries First
2. Communicate Upfront
3. Create Clear Structures
4. Keep Your Relationships Professional
5. Delegate Work When Appropriate
6. Say No
7. (Actually) Take Time Off
8. Use Technology to Help

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Generally speaking, setting boundaries involves being clear in your own mind about what your boundaries are and then being able to communicate them simply and respectfully. The image at the left from the "career contessa" is one of many sets of guidelines for establishing boundaries. The article elaborates on what the steps involve and how to communicate the information that establishes and maintains your boundaries. Of course, simply following these steps does not mean the other person will immediately concede that your vision of appropriate boundaries honors their perceptions of appropriate boundaries for the relationship.

So, it's also important to have a strategy for responding to people who, inadvertently or not, attempt to disregard your newly articulated boundaries. While it is true that "No" is a complete sentence, it is not a helpful sentence for opening discussion and improving a relationship. Keeping an open mind and asking questions to understand the other person's perceptions of your stated boundaries will frequently improve the situation.

Boundaries may need to be renegotiated when a relationship changes. This often happens when a formerly peer relationship becomes hierarchical, with one person having some managerial authority over the other. The dual nature of the changed relationship includes the newly established hierarchical relationship which is layered on top of a longer standing peer relationship and possibly a friendship. If the relationship was strong and positive, a simple conversation may suffice to establish the new boundaries in such a dual relationship. Simple, of course, is not the same as easy. A new chair once said, "I had taught in that department for more than ten years. I thought I had good relationships with my colleagues. It all changed once I became chair."

Oberlander and Barnett (2005) wrote about dual relationships focused on graduate assistants. Among their recommendations were a series of questions to ask about dual relationships including: Is the dual relationship exploitative? Who does the dual relationship benefit? Is there a risk that the dual relationship could damage one party? Is there a risk that the dual relationship could disrupt the educational/professional relationship? Answering these questions can help determine where the boundaries need to be set to protect both people.

Promotion to chair will affect relationships with colleagues. The questions posed by Oberlander and Barnett can be useful tools to think about the ways a former relationship might need to be adapted to new conditions. Pragmatic tasks and reporting structures will also change. Some specific changes might relate to availability, responsiveness to requests, and even tone of voice in meetings.

It is certainly tempting to establish the new boundaries by edict. It is more productive and preserves the relationship better to work together to find acceptable ways to navigate the various changes in the relationship, including how boundaries might need to change. Setting boundaries is an ongoing, incremental process in many cases. The good news is that ongoing work on setting boundaries can increase trust, improve personal relationships, and generally make the workplace more productive. §

**Resources:**

Career Contessa

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKewj5oP\\_o1M31AhVOKlKEHXtZARcQFnoECCwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.careercontessa.com%2Fadvice%2Fhealthy-boundaries-at-work%2F&usg=AOvVaw2GcWYQsPIP3EXulvWJeNn](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKewj5oP_o1M31AhVOKlKEHXtZARcQFnoECCwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.careercontessa.com%2Fadvice%2Fhealthy-boundaries-at-work%2F&usg=AOvVaw2GcWYQsPIP3EXulvWJeNn). Accessed 24 January 2022.

Oberlander, SE and JE Barnett. 2005. Multiple relationships between graduate assistants and students: ethical and practical considerations. *Ethics & Behavior*, 15(1): 49-53.