

Ep #17: How to Effectively Set Boundaries



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Ep #17: How to Effectively Set Boundaries

Welcome to *The Empowered Principle Podcast*, a not so typical, educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy, by refining your most powerful tool: your mind. Here's your host, certified life coach, Angela Kelly Robeck.

Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 17. Are you having an amazing week? I hope so. I hope you are enjoying spring in your neck of the woods. I see that the East Coast is finally getting some reprieve from all of that snow and cold. It's just been an amazing late winter. I mean, it's been so rainy on the West Coast, so snowy on the East Coast, so I hope we're all getting a little fun in the sun. It's been sunny here the last few days and it's awesome.

So, last week, we talked about how easy it is to fall into the trap of believing other people are the source of our problems. We will do this for the rest of our lives too, by the way. So just because you're aware that you're thinking this, doesn't mean that it goes away. I just want to share that with you now.

So it is important to recognize it so you can self-coach through it and take back your responsibility, your ownership and your empowerment in terms of your feelings and your approach to situations and to these people in particular.

So remember that every time we think somebody else is a source of our problem, we give away our control and power over ourselves, and that is not who we are. That is not who we are meant to be. That's not how we're meant to live. So remember that your thinking about other people's behavior is the source of your problem, and the pain, right.

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So at the end of that podcast, I talked about boundaries. It was a very quick conversation about boundaries and I didn't want to get fully into boundaries because it is its own topic. And I wanted to take some time to share with you the definition of what I mean by a boundary and how you set boundaries from a real space of self-love, compassion for yourself and the other person and the difference between what we typically think a boundary is and what I'm talking about when I refer to a boundary.

So there is a difference between taking responsibility for your actions and allowing other people's actions to cause harm, to harm you or to not serve you in a way that best supports you. So it doesn't have to be just physical boundaries, like boundaries about hitting or physically hurting your body; I'm talking about emotional boundaries.

And there is a difference between blaming somebody else for your emotional state and actually being in a very empowered state and deciding that this person's behavior is not acceptable to you and you will not allow it to happen. So you are responsible for the way you think, feel and act, and this is how you produce the results that you want.

Other people are responsible for how they think, feel and act and this is how they produce the results that they want. So you can be taking full responsibilities for your actions and you can be in an empowered space and a state of mind and someone can behave in a way that oversteps your personal or emotional space.

And this is when setting a boundary is appropriate. So let me define what I mean by a boundary. A boundary is something you create for yourself. It's taking responsibility for your own wellbeing. So it is important and it is a crucial part of self-empowerment. However, people usually think that it means that you tell somebody else what to do if they cross a boundary with you.

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So oftentimes, we believe that if they cross your boundary, you tell them what they need to do or not do and they better do it, or else; almost like a threat, right. You're telling them, they better not do that, or else. We do that to kids sometimes, but anyway.

That doesn't work because, again, you don't control people's behavior. So telling them what you're going to do if they cross your boundary is not helpful. They're already doing something you don't want them to do. It doesn't work because it relies on them to take the action.

So when you set a boundary, there's the request which you would like them to do or not do and then there's the consequence, which is what you are going to do if somebody crosses the boundary. So there's the shift. It's not about what they need to do. You're going to request that they adjust their actions or their approach to you, but if not, the consequence doesn't involve what they do or don't do. It's about what you are going to do if they cross that boundary.

So, the shift is that you take the action. You're not trying to control their behavior. So just like your home – I think of your home as a physical boundary for you. Like, you are in a space that's yours and you don't expect people to cross into that boundary. Well, the same holds through for mental and emotional boundaries.

And this is how you can create boundaries. So first of all – these are some precursor thoughts or steps before you have to actually create the boundary. So step one, to me, is having a clear understanding of your own boundaries and know that there's no one standard set of boundaries out there.

It's not like you can Google boundaries and say, oh here are people's emotional and mental boundaries. Everybody has their own set of values, backgrounds and expectations about how they want to be engaged with

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emotionally and mentally. So you need to have a clear understanding for yourself of what you will allow and what you will not allow.

So, for example, do you allow other people to yell at you, call you names, get up in your physical space in your face? Or are you pretty relaxed? Like, do you take yelling as it's all about them? Some people are mellow like that; other people are like, "Hey, we're not going to have a conversation with yelling involved. We're going to take this down." So different people have different limits.

So you need to understand what are your limits in the way that you want others to treat you. And it's funny how we skip over this part. We don't think too often about something until it actually happens. So I can understand that sometimes you don't even fathom the types of situations you will run into. And when they occur, you think, "Wow, that felt like a violation to me. I'm going to think on this and think about my values and what it is I expect of other people so that I can clearly communicate how I want to be treated."

So sometimes it happens after the fact. Now, this is kind of getting into a step two – I believe it's helpful whenever possible, and I recognize that it's not always possible, but when it is, it's helpful to decide your response, or the consequence piece, to a boundary violation before it happens so that you can remain in a calm state when you are implementing your set of actions, what you're going to do.

Let me share an example so that this isn't so nebulous. Let's say that you have a very engaged and active mother in law who loves to call or loves to come over unannounced and you adore her, but you're finding that she's coming over so often that you don't feel you're able to get your work done or your errands done or whatever it is that you're doing. It feels like an interruption and it's becoming a violation of your time.

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So you have to decide what your consequence is going to be. Now remember, you can't just say to her, "Stop coming over here. You need to stop, or else." Like, what are you going to make her do? You can't control her behavior. So what you have to do is say, "What will you do if she continues to come over unannounced?"

So you have to decide, I could not answer the phone. I could not answer the door. I could lock the door. I could not be at home. Maybe I go and do my work elsewhere so there isn't that interruption. You can come up with whatever consequence you deem necessary to try and alter the situation to stop the violation of the boundary, right.

So you need to decide ahead of time whenever possible because when you're in the moment and the boundary has been violated, your emotions tend to escalate and it's harder to be intelligent when our emotions are really high. So we want high intelligence and low emotion, the higher the emotion, the lower the intelligence. So we want to make sure that we are in a space of calm and clarity when we are implementing our consequence to the boundary violation.

So step three is more of an understanding or a tip or a suggestion, but boundaries only need to be communicated to a person after the violation has occurred. Now think about it, you don't run around to strangers on the street and say, "Hey, do not hit me in the knee with a pipe or I'm going to call the police," every time you meet someone; you just don't do that.

Okay, that example came from I, Tonya. I just watched the movie. I was trying to think of a situation that would be silly, but I was like, yeah, you don't go around telling people not to hit you with a pipe. That's very weird and people would think you're strange. So you wait to tell them about the boundary violation after it's happened.

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So let me think of an example here. A parent comes in to your office yelling at you and can't calm down. Screaming, yelling – I've had this happen to me more than once. They're so agitated about something that they cannot take it down and effective communication doesn't occur when someone's in that agitated state of emotion. So when that happens, you can say, "Mister Jones, if you cannot calm down and talk in a softer tone, I will end our meeting and we will reschedule for another time."

Calm, simple, to the point, you're asking, you're requesting that they calm down and talk in a softer tone or you're letting them know you're going to take action; you are going to end the meeting and reschedule it for another time when he's ready to have a calmer conversation, right.

So you give the boundary after the violation occurs, but, this is kind of my step four, it's not necessary to verbally communicate the boundary. You can simply just take action. So even in that scenario with Miser Jones, you could get up, walk out of your office, go to your secretary and say, "Can you please book another time for him to meet." And just say, "We need to meet at another time when you are calmer." Boom, done.

I also think of it in terms of, you know, like back to the whole somebody hitting you with a pipe – if someone hits you with a pipe, you're not going to say to them, "Hey, if you do that again, I'm going to run away." You just take the action; you run away. You don't need to tell them what the boundary is, right.

In terms of work, this is what I think of. I think of being at a conference. So let's say you're sitting at a workshop or a conference with a bunch of people you don't know and there's somebody at the table who continues to tell offensive jokes or just is inappropriate in some way shape or form and you're just not comfortable with it; you can simply get up and move to another table, either at the break or right there on the spot. But you don't have to approach that person with your boundary.

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So it's not necessary unless you want to give an opportunity for them to shift or adjust their approach with you immediately. And oftentimes, it's helpful to communicate the boundary, especially when it's somebody that you have a long-term relationship, like a family member or a work colleague or a friend. You want them to have the opportunity to make the adjustment because if you just get up and walk away, they're like, hey, what just happened.

A lot of people don't realize they've crossed mental or emotional boundaries because everybody's are different; there's no one standard set. So it's fair, if possible, to communicate the boundary violation to those you love or those you work with or those you are friends with because you want to give them the opportunity to adjust.

Now, let me say that there are times where it is not a boundary violation. When you want to control or change somebody's behavior, that's a manual, not a boundary violation. So you can request that somebody act in a certain way or speak in a certain way, but when you approach them with the intended result of controlling them and their behavior for your emotional benefit, this is the key.

So, the difference between boundaries and manuals is that you're trying to manipulate their behavior for your emotional benefit, that's a manual. You're slipping into manual territory. However, when you want to have a relationship with this person and you want to not feel that they are violating your physical, mental, emotional space, then you can set a boundary form a very loving place.

The more compassionate you can approach the person and understand that perhaps they don't realize they're crossing a boundary with you and that you just want to communicate it very lovingly that this is what's going on for me and I would really like you to understand. And if it continues, I'm

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going to have to do this in order to protect my time, space, emotional energy, whatever.

So when you approach somebody you care about and love and have this long-term relationship with, with compassion and an understanding that they may not realize they have crossed an emotional, mental or physical boundary with you, sharing that with them and letting them know is a very loving way to handle this. And many times, it will be much more well received.

So, why is it so hard to set boundaries with some people? It's hard because we are afraid of the person's response and we are afraid of negatively impacting the relationship. We don't want to have more negativity going on that you are already feeling, right.

So we often shy away from creating a boundary because we believe that person will respond negatively towards us or that the boundary will be ignored. We are afraid that they will get angry at us if we say something. We're afraid that they will be mad or they won't speak to us and that will impact the relationship, so we find it challenging to set boundaries because we don't want to come across as being rude or upset, angry.

However, boundaries are a healthy part of self-care, especially when they're created from a state of love for yourself and the other person and they are absolutely necessary as part of self-empowerment. You cannot live life with zero boundaries and be empowered. It does not work.

So start with defining what your values are, what you will tolerate, what you won't tolerate, and get clear with yourself first before you decide to set a boundary with somebody else. And you'll know, you'll feel it. You can feel when somebody's impacting you.

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It might be slight or it might be significant, but it's up to you to communicate that and allow them to adjust. And if they don't adjust, then you can simply take action. But they'll know ahead of time if you let them know and you tell them and you say, this is what I will do if this continues. They don't have to change, but you're giving them the opportunity to adjust and that is a healthy part of relationships.

So there you have it. If you have further questions on boundaries, just send me an email, drop me a line, write in the comments, find me on Facebook, Instagram – I'm all over the place, guys – LinkedIn, Twitter, just send me a note and I will help you with boundaries.

So, first of all, get clear in your head, then you can communicate them after they occur with your loved ones. Alright, have an empowered week, my friends. I will talk to you next week. Take care; bye-bye.

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