

16 Ways To Set Boundaries at Work and Why It Matters

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Updated August 31, 2023

Video: Mental Health in the Workplace

Ever felt the weight of the world during a 9-to-5? Let's dive deep into the importance of mental health in the workplace. Join us as we explore ways to maintain well-being amidst deadlines and desk jobs, and why it's crucial to prioritize mental health.

Setting boundaries at work means establishing healthy professional practices for yourself. These boundaries often can help you stay productive and happy at work and allow you to separate your work life and personal life more effectively. If you're struggling with establishing limits and communicating your needs at work, it's important to understand how to set boundaries.

In this article, we explain why it's important to set boundaries at work, discuss types of workplace boundaries and suggest ways to establish boundaries.

Why is it important to set boundaries at work?

It's important to set boundaries at work in order to maintain a good work-life balance and raise your work satisfaction. Setting boundaries at work involves establishing personal goals and limits that you share with your colleagues in order to keep good mental health practices while working. Along with helping you preserve your job satisfaction, setting boundaries at work also offers the following benefits:

- **Raises productivity:** Setting boundaries at work often allows you to be more productive, as you can focus on your own tasks and avoid workplace distractions.
- **Lowers work-related stress:** Setting boundaries often helps you lower work-related stress, as you can manage many workplace issues by establishing limits and boundaries.

- **Maintains a reasonable workload:** A common boundary that professionals set is only accepting a reasonable amount of work at a time. This helps you focus on your job responsibilities and work a fair amount of hours.
- **Reduces the risk of burnout:** Sometimes, an increased workload and stress can cause burnout. Setting boundaries related to these causes can lessen the risk of burnout.
- **Sets an example for others:** When setting boundaries, professionals are often able to set an example for other employees, which may lead to a happier and healthier work culture.

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Types of workplace boundaries

There are different types of boundaries you may set at work, such as:

Physical boundaries

Physical boundaries relate to your physical workspace and your body. These rules establish your expectations for how people interact with you, and they often relate to space and touch. Examples of physical boundaries include:

- Shaking someone's hand rather than hugging them
- Wearing headphones to signal that you're busy
- Going for a solo break during lunch
- Specifying how long someone can borrow an item from you

Emotional boundaries

Emotional boundaries help you process your emotions at work. They help you separate your feelings from how someone else may feel without negating the need for empathy. Examples of emotional boundaries include:

- Avoiding engaging in someone's bad mood
- Delegating work to others appropriately
- Talking to your manager about how you prefer to receive feedback
- Not participating in doubling down on other's negative feelings

Related: How To Delegate Tasks in the Workplace: 7 Tips

Mental boundaries

Mental boundaries support your mental energy and help you focus when working. They typically relate to your opinions, thoughts and values at work. Examples of mental boundaries include:

- Establishing the set hours you work
- Advising management on strategies for more efficient meetings
- Not gossiping with colleagues at work
- Setting messages on instant messaging to alert others that you're focusing

16 ways to set boundaries at work

Consider these methods to help you set boundaries at work:

1. Set priorities

In order to set boundaries, it's helpful to first consider what your priorities are. This can include identifying both your personal and professional priorities, as well as considering the priorities of your supervisor. For example, if both you and your supervisor consider customer service to be the main priority of your position, it's important to recognize that when setting boundaries. Understanding your priorities helps you decide which boundaries to set and which aspects you're willing to compromise on.

Another example of this may be if you're a parent. Because you likely prioritize your child over your job, you may set a boundary that you're only available to work during school hours in order to spend more evenings with your child.

2. Delegate tasks

Remember to delegate tasks when appropriate. While you may need a supervisor's permission, consider asking a colleague for help or to take over a certain task if you're unable to make time for it. This can help you focus on other more important tasks and allow the daily operations of your workplace to run smoothly. Delegation often can help you manage a reasonable workload while still maintaining productive work practices.

3. Understand your workload

It's important to understand the tasks that comprise your workload as well as the number of daily duties you can reasonably handle. Understanding both of these aspects can allow you to set better boundaries regarding your job tasks and help you remain productive throughout the workday. Consider timing how long it takes you to complete tasks or counting how many tasks you can complete per workday. This can help you establish a regular working pace and help set expectations for your role.

4. Take time off

Many full-time positions offer a certain amount of paid time off per year. If your company offers this benefit, try to take advantage of it. Taking breaks from work allows you to develop your personal life and take time to relax. Even if you don't have paid time off, it's beneficial to plan to take breaks away from work. Additionally, if you ever feel sick, it's important to stay at home to recuperate and recover instead of working through your sickness.

5. Communicate often

Try to develop strong communication skills in order to express your thoughts to others and set clear boundaries. This can help you explain what your boundaries are and why you need them. Communication often can solve issues that cause the need for boundaries, so learning how to communicate with your supervisor and colleagues may help you create a healthier work environment.

6. Ask for advice

If you're facing a problem at work, consider asking your supervisor or one of your colleagues for help. They may have experience with a similar issue or can

sympathize with your problem. Other professionals also may be able to help you set boundaries and recommend practices for you to adopt in order to maintain a better work-life balance.

7. Set limits

Once you have an idea of your workload, work hours and priorities, try to set limits for yourself and others. For example, you may set a boundary of not bringing in personal items, such as a laptop, from home in order to complete your work. Instead, you may want to request the company to provide you with any tools you need to succeed in your position.

It's also often helpful to limit the number of hours you can work per week. For most full-time positions, this may mean working 40 hours per week. Alternatively, for a part-time job, you could set a boundary of only working up to 25 hours per week.

8. Establish a clear schedule

Try to establish a clear working schedule and share this schedule with your colleagues. This can entail meeting with your supervisor to discuss the best hours for you to work in order to meet your professional goals. For example, you may set a boundary that you're only available to check your email during work hours or between specified times. This allows you to focus on other tasks and reminds others of your availability.

9. Recognize your emotions

In order to set better boundaries, it's important to recognize your emotions and understand what causes them. In some cases, you may need to work through a personal issue to solve a work problem, while other situations may require you to set a professional boundary. Try to develop your emotional intelligence skills to better understand and recognize your emotions and learn how to manage them at work.

10. Be honest

When setting boundaries, be honest with others about your intentions and reasoning. This can help other professionals understand your boundaries better and even help you maintain them. Being honest with your supervisor about your

concerns regarding your work and professional goals can also encourage them to help you decide which boundaries to set and allow your supervisor to provide any additional materials you may need to build a balanced professional life.

11. Build professional relationships

While it's often beneficial to make close friendships with your colleagues, consider being mindful about the type of relationships you build. Try to maintain professional relationships within the workplace to ensure that you keep your personal life separate from your work. This can also help you set personal boundaries for yourself.

12. Respect others

Remember to respect other professionals' boundaries while setting your own. Learning what boundaries your supervisor and colleagues set and respecting them encourages them to do the same for you. This practice creates a safe work environment. In order to discover your colleagues' boundaries, consider asking them when appropriate or recognize their work patterns. Having an established form of communication within your workplace also helps with this.

13. Establish boundaries at home

Be sure to establish and follow your boundaries at home just as you would at work. This may mean leaving all work-related tools at your office and only completing professional tasks at work. Another example of establishing boundaries at home may be not checking your email on the weekends.

If you work from home, this can be challenging, so consider dedicating one space in your home to working. It's also helpful to be mindful of your working hours, as it can be easier to work longer than necessary when working from home.

14. Prepare for confrontations

While most professionals respect boundaries, you may encounter someone who disagrees with a boundary you've set. Because of this, it's helpful to prepare for confrontations by understanding what you can compromise and practicing patience. If someone tests your boundary, try to calmly explain your limits and what you would prefer the professional to do instead. While many confrontations don't progress to this point, consider informing your supervisor and human

resources contact of the situation. This allows them to document the situation and manage any future issues if the professional continues to test your boundaries.

15. Identify your job responsibilities

When establishing boundaries at work, be sure to identify your job responsibilities in order to set limits that don't interfere with your duties. This practice also may allow you to notice if you're taking on additional responsibilities without credit. Discuss your responsibilities with your supervisor to ensure that you're continuing to meet their expectations and negotiate any additional accommodations you may need to set healthy work boundaries.

16. Practice saying no

It's important to understand how to say no politely in work situations, as it allows you to maintain boundaries. While some may find this difficult, try to remember that it's acceptable to decline some requests. For example, if you receive an invitation to attend a meeting during your lunch hour, it's understandable to decline the invite so you can relax on your lunch break.