

Ep #23: How to Set & Honor Boundaries



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With Your Host

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You're listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast, Episode 23. We're talking all about how to set and honor boundaries. You ready? Let's go.

Welcome to *The Less Stressed Lawyer*, the only podcast that teaches you how to manage your mind so you can live a life with less stress and far more fulfillment. If you're a lawyer who's over the overwhelm and tired of trying to hustle your way to happiness, you're in the right place. Now, here's your host, lawyer turned life coach, Olivia Vizachero.

Hey there, how's it going this week? I hope you are doing so well. I am marvelous over here. I actually have a little bit of a course correction for this episode. I got to thinking, after I recorded the last episode, and I was ready to dive in to one of the next two P's out of the three P's, I was going to talk about perfectionism or procrastination.

But then it dawned on me, I was like; whoa, need to slow down. After talking about people-pleasing, and how to stop people-pleasing, I realized now is a perfect time to teach you how to set and honor boundaries, so that's what I want to talk about today.

What is a boundary, and how do boundaries relate to people-pleasing? Boundaries are essentially limits or rules that we set for ourselves, within our relationships with other people. If you're thinking about a boundary being an imaginary line, it's between you and the other person. It delineates where you end, and the other person begins.

Now, boundaries are something that we create, to care for and protect ourselves. The proper way to phrase a boundary, they should always be formatted in the following way; if you do blank, so if another person does a particular action, I will do blank. If you do blank, I will do blank.

If you come over unannounced, I will not answer the door. If you email me after 8pm, I will not respond till the following morning. If you bring up politics, I will end the conversation. Notice the format here; it's always about what you do, the action you take, after another person does something. It's not about controlling that person's behavior.

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You always want to make sure that your boundaries take into account the truth, and the reality that other people have free will and they get to exercise it at their leisure. When you have boundaries, you're clear on what you will and what you won't stand for, and what you will and what you will not expose yourself to.

Boundaries are always something that you do for you. Again, it's a way that you take care of yourself. They're not against anyone else. It's a manual that you follow yourself; the actions that you take, so you know that when something happens, when a particular set of facts occur, this is what you do to take care of yourself. The consequence of a boundary violation is always an action that you take, it's not what someone else does.

Now, here are a few things that boundaries can be. A boundary can include a request that you make of someone else to change their behavior. But it doesn't have to include that request, it just simply can. For instance, if you don't want to talk politics with a member of your family, you can ask them to not bring up politics when you guys speak.

But again, you want to remember that a boundary always takes into account someone's free will. Your family members, no matter how many times you ask them not to talk about politics, they get to bring up politics over and over and over again. Your boundary can be that you will not have a conversation with them, that you end the conversation, that you walk away.

Now, you don't have to make the request, you can simply tell yourself, in your head, that under no uncertain terms will you talk politics with family members. When it happens, you can just change the subject or end of the conversation and walk away. You don't have to ask them to be any different.

You also don't have to communicate a boundary. You can communicate it, you can tell the person, to whom it applies, that you're setting the boundary, but you don't have to, it's not required. If you decide to set a boundary at work that you don't answer emails on the weekend, you don't

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need to send an office wide email letting everyone know about your boundary. You can simply just not respond to emails on the weekend.

It may go more smoothly if you're instituting an abrupt change in your own behavior, because you're setting a boundary, to communicate it to other people just so everyone's on the same page. But it's absolutely not required.

A lot of times also, it doesn't even make sense for you to communicate it. You know those memes where it's like: Nobody, and then colon, and then it's blank? And then, it's like your behavior, what you've been doing. So, it's like; nobody asks you something, or nobody does anything, and then you do something anyways. That's kind of what it looks like to communicate a boundary, when maybe the situation doesn't call for it.

I just want you to notice that you might have a tendency to want to be overly communicative, as far as your boundaries go. Normally, we do that, because we want other people to understand our behavior, to be accepting of it, and to not judge what we do.

If you are okay, feeling misunderstood, which I really think is a superpower for us to practice; allowing other people to misunderstand us, or to not get why we're doing something and for us to be okay with that. If it doesn't make sense for you to communicate the boundary, because there hasn't even been a boundary violation, you don't have to communicate it. You can, it's just not required.

Speaking of boundary violations, you can also inform someone when they've violated one of your boundaries. But again, you don't have to. You don't have to tell people that they violated it, you can simply do whatever the consequence is, which is always the action that you will take when someone violates your boundary. You don't have to explain yourself, that part is optional.

Now, what is required when you're setting boundaries? All of your boundaries are going to be about the action that you take when there's a

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violation of a boundary that you've set. It really is about the consequence that you're going to enact and follow through with. When you're setting a boundary, that is required. You want to make sure that you're following through on what you've decided the consequences will be, that you will enforce.

If you set a consequence, and then the boundary violation occurs, and you don't enforce the consequence, you don't follow through, you haven't actually set a boundary. What you've simply done is made an idle threat.

And, you make it a lot less likely that people are going to honor your boundaries going forward, because they've learned that there's no consequence that they're going to suffer if they don't honor your boundary. So, you make it much less likely that people will honor and respect your boundaries, if you don't enforce them and stick to the ones that you've set.

Now, let's flesh this out a little bit more: What's the difference between a boundary and a threat? A threat is always about what you want that person to do, it's about controlling their behavior. And then, you threaten some negative consequence, in hopes that they'll change their behavior. Threats and ultimatums are very similar this way.

A boundary isn't an effort to control someone else's behavior. It's just simply always about what you will do for yourself, to care for yourself. If you make a boundary request of someone and they violate your boundary, and you do not follow through on instituting that consequence that you previously decided upon, all you've done is make that idle threat.

I want you to remember, that isn't a boundary. Boundaries aren't about manipulating someone else's behavior. Boundaries are not about expecting someone else to change for your sake, to make your life easier, to make your life more comfortable. That's not what they're about. Other people don't have to do anything that you want them to do. They certainly can, and you're welcome to ask them. But that's not the point of setting a boundary. Boundaries aren't intended to control other people's behavior.

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Why are they not intended to control other people's behavior? Because you simply can't control other people's behavior. People, and we can go back and forth on this, whether it's a good thing or a bad thing, but people have free will. We just have to acknowledge and accept that that is the way the world works; that people have free will and they get to do with it what they want.

You also have free will and you get to do with it what you want. If what you want to do is set an honor a boundary, you're more than welcome to do it. But we don't set and honor boundaries, in order to control or manipulate another person. We do it to protect ourselves and to keep ourselves from people-pleasing and doing things we don't want to do, or putting ourselves in situations we don't want to be in. It's always about the action we take to take care of ourselves.

Now, another huge misconception I see when people are setting and honoring boundaries, is that they mistakenly believe that it's another person's job to respect their boundaries. People will set a boundary, and then they will think that other people need to respect their boundaries.

That is false. The only person who ever has to respect your boundaries, is you. Why is that? Well, it has the misfortune of being true, because honestly, you're the only person within your control. If it was someone else's job to respect your boundaries, and they get to have free will and do whatever they want, chances are, they may not respect your boundaries. It just doesn't work that way.

The only person who ever needs to respect your boundaries is you, because boundaries are truly about what you will do when someone else takes a certain action, or engages in a certain behavior. Okay? Boundaries are not ultimatums. It's not about manipulating someone or controlling what they do or don't do.

They're also not opportunities to blame other people for your behavior. I see this a lot. People will say, "Well, this person did this. And they're just

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forcing me to act this way because of what they did.” No, no, no, that's not how it works. No one ever forces you to act a certain way.

If you're saying no to something, or you're refusing to do something, or you're taking a particular action, it is not because of another person's behavior. You're always exercising a choice. You never have to do anything, you've heard me say this before, except eat, breathe, drink some water and sleep sometimes.

No one's forcing you to do anything. You really want to make sure that you step into emotional adulthood here, and you honor your choice that you're making. No one's forcing you to take a particular action. You're always making a decision and exercising your own free will.

Boundaries also aren't escape routes. Oftentimes, people will say, “You know what? I'm done with this person. I don't want to have anything to do with them. I'm cutting them off. I want them out of my life.” They're doing this, A, not from a clean space. What I mean by that, is they're doing it from a highly emotional space, they're really worked up. And, they're being a little reactionary, in making that decision to cut someone out of their life.

But they do that rather than going through the trouble of actually creating proper boundaries, and learning how to navigate what may feel like a triggering relationship in their lives. Learning how to set a boundary and honor it and how to take care of themselves, rather than having to go to the extreme end of the spectrum, and just eliminate people entirely.

So, you want to check in with yourself. Are you doing that to avoid having to do the heavier lifting that comes from setting and honoring a boundary? Are you going to that drastic extreme, where you just say, “Absolutely not; I don't want to deal with this at all?”

Can you cut people out of your life? Sure, you can. That can be a more draconian boundary that you set. But you want to make sure that you like your reasons for doing that, and that maybe you've tried a more subtle approach before you get to that extreme outcome.

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Maybe that you've learned how to set and honor boundaries that make the relationship work. Where you make yourself clear about what you're looking for in the relationship. You might ask them to do certain things for you. And then, you get to decide what you will do if they don't follow suit, if they don't make space and accommodate your request.

But people that trigger us can often be our best teachers. I want you to be careful with how you set boundaries. Ask yourself; have I put in the work yet to make this relationship work for me, in my life? Have I figured out what my own limitations are in this relationship? What would it look like if I believed that we could have a healthy productive relationship, rather than needing to go to this extreme?

Let's talk about some examples of boundaries. I mentioned this earlier, but I'm just gonna reiterate it. If someone comes over to your house unannounced, and I don't know if you grew up in a family like I did, but I did not grow up in a 'drop over whenever you want, without letting anyone know, or without being invited' kind of family. That was a big no-no, growing up for me.

But I know not everyone is like that. Some people think; oh, it's no big deal. We're friends, I'll drop by whenever. But if you grew up like I did, and that's not normal, and you don't really enjoy it, a proper boundary would be; if someone comes over unannounced, I will not answer the door. A boundary is *not* you telling everyone in your life; do not come over unannounced.

The reason that's not a boundary is because it doesn't provide for people to exercise free will. People get to come over unannounced as often as they want, simply because they can come over whenever they choose to. A proper boundary here, is you deciding what you will do if they do it.

This is how boundaries and people-pleasing relate to one another. People-pleasing might be someone coming over unannounced and you answering the door, even though you really don't want to, because you think that it would be rude if you didn't, and you'd feel guilty not answering the door. So, you choose to answer it, even though you'd really prefer not to. A

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proper boundary is how you take care of yourself, if someone doesn't listen to your request, for them to call before they come over.

Another example of a boundary would be choosing to end a conversation if someone brings up a topic you're not comfortable talking about. Now, you can communicate this boundary and ask them not to discuss a certain topic ahead of time. But you don't have to, that part's optional. But if they bring it up, which they're able to because again, they have the free will, it's about what you will do in the event they do bring it up.

I used to date someone, and he always liked to talk to me about politics. Now, we didn't agree on our political ideologies. It was really a source of tension in our relationship. Finally, one day, I decided to set a boundary in this area; if you bring it up, I will not respond. It wasn't always easy, but I did start to honor that boundary.

Lo and behold, if you stop talking to someone and you refuse to engage in a conversation, guess what they stop doing? They stop bringing up conversations that you don't want to talk about. Same thing, if you don't answer the door every time someone comes over unannounced, chances are they will stop wasting their own time, and coming over unannounced. Because they don't get what they want, when they do it.

Another really good example, and this is kind of just an everyday example, but this has come up in my personal life, too, boundaries with food. If you have certain things that you'd like to eat, and certain things that you would like to not eat, a proper boundary is what you will do if someone serves something that you will not eat.

You can certainly ask other people to take your dietary preferences into account, but they get to ignore your preferences, and they get to prepare whatever it is that they want to prepare. You can have a boundary that looks like; if you serve pasta, and I'm not eating gluten, or I'm not eating carbs, I will just not eat it.

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If you consistently serve something that I'm not eating, I will stop coming over for dinner. If you invite me over for dinner, rather than me trying to control everything you serve, I will bring something that I can eat myself. And, I won't worry about offending you, or you being upset by that, or feeling disrespected. I'm just going to take care of me.

An example of something that isn't a boundary; is telling people what they need to serve and then getting mad at them if they don't. That's just trying to control other people's actions, which you don't want to do. You'll be very upset if you do because they get to act in accordance with what they want to do. Not with what you want them to do.

Another example of a great boundary; is to not work on weekends. People will often say, "You know, I told people I don't want to work on weekends. And clients keep calling me, or they send me emails, or my colleagues keep sending me emails. And, I told them to stop sending me emails." That is not a boundary. That's trying to control other people's behavior. A proper boundary is; if you email me on the weekend, I will not respond until Monday, because I don't work weekends.

Same thing with unscheduled calls. You can ask people to only call you at certain times, but guess what? They get to not listen. A proper boundary is; if you call me, and we don't have a call that's been scheduled ahead of time, I will not answer. That's proper boundary there.

Another great example: is people speaking to you in a certain manner. If someone yells at you, a lot of times people think, "Well, I'm not going to let him talk to me like that. I'm not going to let her talk to me that way." We'll try and control someone else's behavior, and how they act towards us. That is not a proper boundary.

A proper boundary is; if you yell at me, or if you swear at me, I will end the conversation and walk out of the room. That you're just not going to be here to tolerate that kind of behavior.

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Another great boundary example, this happens to people all the time is interacting with people who are perpetually late. This tends to be a source of great frustration for people. If you're dealing with someone who's late, you might think that setting a boundary is; well, I'm going to tell them that they need to be on time. That is not a proper boundary. That is, again, trying to control other people's behavior.

What a boundary would look like, in this instance, a proper boundary would be; if you show up more than 15 minutes late, I will not wait for you. Either I will leave, or I'll order without you. But it's always about what you will do, in the event someone does that thing, in the event that they're late.

My cousin once set a great boundary with friends who had wedding showers and bachelorette parties. My cousin lived out of town and a lot of her friend group lives back here in Detroit. She decided that between bachelorette parties and bridal showers and weddings, it was just too much travel for her.

So, she decided that she would only attend bachelorette parties and the wedding, that she would skip bridal showers. Her boundary was; if you invite me to a bridal shower, I will politely decline. She didn't make people cancel their bridal showers on her account. Or, think that they shouldn't have them just because she didn't want to travel home for them. She simply decided that she wouldn't attend them. It was about what she would do if a certain factual scenario arose.

Here are a couple more examples of what boundaries aren't: Telling people that they can't ask you for money. People get to ask you for money as frequently as they want to. And, you get to have a boundary that says; if you ask me for money, I will tell you no.

If someone asks you to take on more work. I coach people on this all the time. They're like, "I've told my boss a million times, I'm too busy. I can't take on more. He needs to stop giving me work. She needs to stop assigning cases to me." Yet, their supervisors still assign them more work.

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Then, they take it and then they're resentful because they end up people-pleasing, instead of honoring their boundary.

A boundary does not look like; you can't ask me to take on one more case. Of course, they can keep asking you. A proper boundary would be, when they ask you to take on one more case when you're already overwhelmed and behind, you say no; no matter how uncomfortable it is.

Another famous example of an ultimatum is when you've been in a relationship with someone for a long time, and you say, "We've been dating for X number of years or months, or whatever the case may be, by this point in time, you have to marry me." Of course, they don't have to marry you. Of course, they don't have to propose.

A proper boundary wouldn't be about controlling them and dictating what they have to do. A proper boundary would be; if you don't propose, I don't know, let's say within the next six months, then I will leave. Then I will go date someone else. That would be a proper boundary, not the ultimatum of telling them what they have to do.

Those are some examples of boundaries that come up for a lot of the people that I work with. They are just different random examples, but I hope they inspired you to start thinking about the boundaries that maybe you've set in the past. Maybe you didn't actually set proper boundaries, you set boundaries that weren't boundaries; they were threats or ultimatums, or attempts to manipulate other people's behavior.

If that's the case, you just want to go back to the drawing board and really rethink those boundaries. Think about what you would need to change, in order to set a proper boundary. If a particular set of events or facts takes place and you encounter them, what do you want to do? How are you going to follow through? How will you react? Boundaries are always about what you will do when a particular factual scenario arises.

Now, I want to give you a framework for setting boundaries; a process that you can always walk yourself through. Step number one is to decide on the

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boundary that you want to set. And, you want to make sure that it fits follows 'that if you blank, I will blank' format. So, it is a proper boundary, and it's not an effort to control someone else's behavior.

From there, you want to ask yourself; what are my reasons for setting this boundary? Do I like them? If you don't like your reasons, you want to go back to the drawing board and decide; do I want to actually set this? Do I want to not set this?

Then, I want you, if you decide that you like the boundary and you like your reasons for setting it, you want to decide on the consequence that you will enact if there's a boundary violation. Okay? So, get really clear on that.

Now, I want you to be honest with yourself; are you willing to implement that consequence, in the event you encounter a boundary violation? Someone violates your boundary. If the answer's no, then it's just going to be an idle threat.

You want to decide; is this really a boundary that I want to institute? Chances are, it's probably not. If you are unwilling to follow through with the consequences that you identified, then you probably want to give up the boundary in the first place.

If you decide that you are willing to follow through and implement the consequence, for the boundary violation, then all you have to do is wait. Again, you can communicate the boundary ahead of time if you want to, but it's not necessary. You just need to wait and do nothing.

In the event a boundary violation occurs, then you get to decide what are you going to do? Are you going to communicate the boundary? If you are, ask yourself how? Go ahead and do that, communicate it, and then you get to wait again, for there to be another boundary violation. In the event there is another boundary violation, you get to follow through with the consequence.

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Decide on the boundary, identify your reasons, and make sure you like them. Decide on the consequence for the boundary violation. Wait for there to be a boundary violation, you don't have to do anything, unless there is one. If there is one, you get to decide; do you want to communicate the boundary and the fact that there was a violation to the person and wait to see if they violated again? Or, do you just want to institute the consequence, immediately?

Whatever you choose is fine, you get to decide. And then, in the event that there is another violation, you get to institute and implement that consequence, follow through with it, over and over and over again. Okay? that's just the process; it's as simple as that.

Now, the second part. That first part is the process of setting boundaries. The process of honoring boundaries is a little different and much simpler. Most people think the hardest part of having boundaries is honoring them. That makes sense. Normally, it's going to be requiring you to change your behavior, and do something different than what you've done in the past.

That's not always going to be comfortable. That's okay, the discomfort doesn't have to be a problem. You just want to anticipate it. If you expect setting an honoring your boundaries to be comfortable, you're probably going to be disappointed. Normally, it's uncomfortable.

You might have to feel afraid; you might have to feel guilty, or emotions like that. You might have to feel worried. You might have to feel judged or misunderstood. Because chances are, some people won't like that you're setting and honoring your own boundaries, that you're enforcing them. A lot of people benefit when we people-please them instead of setting and enforcing boundaries.

I just want you to know that it's okay, if going to work and setting and honoring your boundaries is uncomfortable, especially at first. You just want to identify the specific flavor of discomfort that you're experiencing, or that you anticipate that you'll experience, and make a deal with yourself that you're going to allow yourself to feel that negative feeling. It can't

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actually hurt you; you'll be able to survive it, I promise you. You've survived every negative emotion you've ever felt.

I also like to remind my clients that, the truth of the matter is, that there's discomfort both ways, in setting boundaries and in not setting them. I highly recommend people choose the route that gets them the results they want.

If you people-please and you don't set and enforce a boundary, chances are you're going to feel really resentful, and frustrated and disappointed in yourself with how you spend your time. Maybe you'll feel angry with people, or very annoyed.

On the flip side, if you put a boundary in place and honor it, you might have to feel guilty or afraid, or worried or exposed, or misunderstood or judged; any of those negative emotions. If there's discomfort either way, there's no way to avoid it ultimately, I'd like you to decide; which discomfort would you prefer to choose? Which discomfort would you rather experience?

My hope for you is that you choose the one that has you spending your time in the way you want to spend it. To have you choose the option that feels most loving and caring to yourself. Okay? I promise on the other side of setting and honoring your own boundaries, you get to live the life you want to live.

If you're a chronic people-pleaser, and you're ready to put an end to it, because you really want to live a life that is in integrity and in alignment with your preferences and what you value, and how you want to spend your time, think about the boundaries you want to set and honor. Decide ahead of time, that you're willing to feel the discomfort that comes from setting and honoring them. And, get to work curating the type of life you want to live.

That's what I've got for you this week. Get out there, identify the boundaries you want to set. Remember, it's always; if you do blank, I will do blank. It's always about what you will do. Boundaries always take into account that other people have free will, and get to do whatever it is that they want. You

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don't have to like that they do whatever it is that they want, but you do have to acknowledge that they get to.

Alright, have a beautiful week, my friends. I will talk to you in the next episode.

Thanks for listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast. If you want more info about Olivia Vizachero or the show's notes and resources from today's episode, visit www.TheLessStressedLawyer.com.