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SETTING BOUNDARIES AT WORK THAT WORK

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Hello, my friends. It is so great to be back this week.

There's been so much going on. But I really want to start with some gratitude. I want to say how grateful I am not to be freezing my butt off up in Canada right now. I'm loving being down here in Hilton Head. We went down to Hilton Head, South Carolina and this is our first year here where we're escaping the Canadian winter. Pretty much in totality, we're down here from January to the end of March and I'm loving it.

When I decided to leave corporate life, one of the things I started thinking about was, what kind of a life do I want to lead? Because my career really fits into my overall life. They're not separate things. So I thought, what kind of life do I want to lead? And one of the things that I decided was, I needed to be able to work from anywhere. I wanted to build a career that would allow me to work from anywhere, mostly because I love escaping the Canadian winter.

I do love traveling. I'm not the kind of person who hooks up my tiny house and drives around or anything like that. I'm not a backpacker. Those days are over for me. But I do like to travel from time to time and I am a hard worker. But mostly, I wanted to escape the Canadian winter. This is the first year that we're really trying out Hilton Head and I love it. Like I said, I love that I don't have to put on 10 layers of clothes when I go outside, I don't have to scrape the car, I don't have to shovel the driveway, and all of that great stuff.

But for the island itself, I really love the pace. I love the ocean. We're staying close to the beach. I love that it has all the conveniences of home but it's not, hustle and bustle. It's not that kind of place. Keep in mind, it's off-season here. I guess the high season is the summer. Most people would think it's too cold to come to Hilton Head Island in the winter. Most people aren't Canadian, I guess. But it's about 15 degrees Celsius here. I'm not good with Fahrenheit, which I think is somewhere in the 65 range. That's kind of spring where I come from.

It's perfect. I love this spring. It's a good 20 to 25 degrees Celsius difference between where I am right now and between home. By the time we leave here at the end of March, or the beginning of April, it's going to be well into the 20s and 30s here in Hilton Head or 80s and 90s, I guess in Fahrenheit. So it would be the perfect time for us to leave and head home in time for the tulips and the daffodils to come back home.

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Because when it gets into the 90s, it's just too hot for me. It's too hot, I don't like that. I don't like the humidity. I don't like stickiness. I don't like all the bugs that come out here in South Carolina when it gets really humid so it would be a great time for us to leave. I just want to say I'm so grateful that we have this opportunity.

Of course, it didn't just happen. I set the goal, I identified what I wanted to do, and then I worked my butt off figuring it out not just to build a career, but to figure out where to go, where to spend time, researching, getting uncomfortable, but still making it happen. You can do whatever it is you want to do, you just have to decide what it is. One of the things I decided I wanted to do was to escape the Canadian winters and build a career that allowed me to do that. As I'm feeling grateful about being in Hilton Head, I wanted to share that thought with you.

This week, what are we talking about? This week, I want to talk about boundaries. I've talked about this topic before in different videos and things that I've done but it came up again a lot for me and for my clients in the last week. So I thought it'd be something that, given I don't have a lot of clients that are dealing with it, and I'm dealing with it too, let's talk a little bit about boundaries. Because it's something that's hard to do.

It's hard to set boundaries or at least that's the story that I've told myself a lot in my life. I'm telling myself about certain situations that I'm dealing with. A lot of people tell themselves that setting boundaries is hard, it's intimidating, it's a struggle. So I really want to talk about that this week.

I have one client who's dealing with boundaries around setting realistic deadlines. She's got a boss who is constantly coming to her last minute with things that need to get turned around. It's turning her life upside down. She's had it struggling with the quality of her work and how that's going to impact how she's viewed in the organization. And she doesn't know how to set boundaries around creating realistic timelines for herself at work.

I have another client who's dealing with people constantly asking for her help at work and she never has time to do her own work. So she's constantly putting people above before herself and that's something that she's struggling with.

The thing that I'm dealing with right now is, working from home, which I love doing, and there are amazing benefits of working from home. Not commuting is a big one that I love, especially when you're commuting in the snow. But here are some downsides. There are people in my home. My husband wants to chat all the time or he wants to go out because it's a beautiful day, or I have friends.

My older friends who are retired think, oh, she's got a flexible schedule. When I say, no, I'm working, they're like, let us know when we can spend time with you. I get that sarcastic feedback. Even though everyone knows I'm working, my husband knows, my friends know, and all that stuff, just because I'm in control of my time and if I want to run out and go to the grocery store at 10 o'clock in the morning, I can, people think that I can prioritize them if I choose to.

And when I don't prioritize them, they think I'm choosing my work over them. That doesn't always sit well with people. It's not because they don't love them. It's not because I don't want to chat with them. It's not because I don't think my husband's rants about the tennis match he just watched isn't important. All of those things are important. My friends are important. But I'm committed to the work. I'm working.

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It's hard to set boundaries when you're working from home or again, that's the story that I've been telling myself. So boundaries are required. We all need them. We all need to learn to set them in a way that allows us to create an environment that works for us. Whatever *'works for us'* means to you, setting boundaries is a way that allows you to create an environment that makes you comfortable.

But being comfortable is not always the goal because sometimes, when you create an environment that's comfortable, or you create a situation where you get comfortable, that can create complacency, where you start to get stuck, where you start to not push yourself. The idea here of setting boundaries is not necessarily to create an environment that makes you comfortable. It's about creating an environment that works for you. It's about creating boundaries at work that work.

You might need to set boundaries because you want to create an environment that allows you to align your environment with your values, allows you to be in your integrity, allows you to work in the most effective way for you, or allows you to build strong relationships with people or take care of yourself. All those things are important reasons to set boundaries so that you can create an environment that works for you. Part of this, of course, is identifying what works for you.

I've talked about this before in the podcast, and I'm sorry, I can't remember which episode it was, but I will link to it in the show notes. It's really about identifying your ideal work situation. It could be the role, the place, the environment, the location, and all of these things. I talked about this before, identifying what's ideal for you, and then moving towards that in little bits every day. This is what I talked about in my TED Talk on the secret of your happiness, I will put that in the show notes as well.

Really, it's about understanding how you work at your best. Then when it comes to boundaries, it's about figuring out how you can work within that environment to align with your priorities, whether that's your values, your integrity, how you work, the relationships you build, or how you take care of yourself, all of those things, etc.

A lot of us are afraid to set boundaries because we say that we don't really want to hurt other people or we don't want to risk annoying other people. But ask yourself, is that really the case? Are you afraid to set boundaries because you don't want to hurt someone or you don't want to risk annoying someone? Or is it really that you're just afraid you don't know how to do it?

Sometimes we set boundaries in a way that comes from frustration. We do it from anger that we explode. We've been tolerating something for so long that we just explode and try to set these boundaries from a place of anger or frustration. And that may not get you the result that you're looking for. Or we set boundaries in a way that tries to control other people. And I'm going to talk a lot about that today. I want to talk about what boundaries actually are, and then share some ways to effectively set those boundaries at work in a way that works for you.

Let's start with what boundaries actually are and you might be surprised to learn that they're not what you might think they are. Because a lot of people think that boundaries are about what you ask other people to do or not to do. It's about controlling the behavior of other people, which first of all, is impossible. You cannot control the behavior of other people. Because oftentimes, people don't love it when you try to control them. They don't operate at their best when you're trying to control them. But we try and do it anyway.

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We always try to get people to behave in a way that makes it easy for us to be ourselves, but it doesn't always work. When you're trying to set your boundaries, you might be asking people to stop doing this or not to do that. And we think that that's a boundary. We might say things like, stop giving me things to do last minute, I can't work that way. You need to stop doing that. That's us controlling, trying to control someone else's behavior.

My husband would say, *please don't leave your dirty dishes next to the dishwasher. It drives me nuts.* He's saying, *don't do that, put them in the dishwasher, because you're driving me mental.* Got it. We're telling people what not to do. Even if we say it in a really polite way, our intention may not be to be controlling, but it is controlling because we're telling them how they need to behave in a way that suits us. We're trying to control the actions and behaviors of other people.

Even though they may comply for a little while, they often comply with a sense of resentment and frustration. I put my dishes in the dishwasher, not because I want to, but because I don't want my husband to get mad and I don't want to have this conversation again. So I'm avoiding something. But every time I put my dishes in the dishwasher, I'm like, *ugh*. That's what I'm thinking. It's anger and frustration.

Your boss or your colleague, who's giving you that last-minute work, may not give it to you anymore, but they're not happy about the fact that they can't give it to you anymore. They feel like they can't do it. They feel like they can't do what they want to do and that can create resentment on their part. At the end of the day, that's why oftentimes, people don't set boundaries because that's what we really fear, making people unhappy or upset, especially at work.

Here's the thing about boundaries. Telling people how you want them to behave is not setting a boundary. Boundaries are about how you behave. It's about how you behave when something happens. Because the only thing that you can control is how you behave. So boundaries are really about being clear with people or being clear with yourself, even on how you are going to behave when or if people behave a certain way.

Sometimes, boundaries don't have to be communicated. Sometimes, boundaries are really about, *when this happens in this situation, here's what I'm going to do.* It's something that you talk to yourself about. Sometimes it's the things that you need to communicate to other people. But when you set boundaries, the important thing to understand is that it's really about how you intend to behave in certain situations because that's the only thing that you can control when you set boundaries.

You control how you show up and what you do when a situation arises or if someone does something that crosses a line with you or creates an unideal environment for you. That is what a real boundary is. A boundary is what you will do when a situation comes up.

If that's what a boundary is, how do you set a boundary? First of all, you can just decide. You can just decide for yourself when x happens, here's how I'm going to behave. Those can be just general principles that you have in your life. But sometimes, you need to actually communicate and create alignment with other people, especially at work.

A basic principle that you can nuance for different situations and I'll come back to that, is a fill-in-the-blank situation. So you would say something like, *if you *blank*, I'm going to *blank**. That's a basic outline. Nuancing is so important because you don't want to be threatening. Basically, *if you give me work last minute, you won't get*

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my best work. If you tell jokes like that, I will leave the room. If you leave dishes by the dishwasher, I won't be cleaning up after you. It's always about *when *blank* happens, I'm going to fill in the blank*.

The main thing to understand with this is that you're not trying to stop the other person from doing their thing. You go nuts, buddy, you do your thing. I'm telling you right now how I intend to react or what you will get from me when you do that thing. And it's creating that common understanding.

The key here is you're not blaming them. You're not blaming them for how you feel or how you show up, you are taking accountability for yourself. You are simply giving them a heads-up on how you're going to be taking accountability for yourself, if or when a particular situation arises. The nuance of how you communicate this is really critical in the situation based on the person that you're dealing with.

I'm going to give you some things to consider. If you walk around the office or even your life saying things like, *If you do this, I'm going to do this.* It could sound threatening, and when people feel threatened, they also don't respond well. It's important to be selective on the boundaries you're setting. It's really important to deliver the boundary in a way that can be heard and creates mutual understanding. That's where you start.

I've got five things for you to think about that cover both the idea that you should be selective on your boundaries and deliver them in a way that can be heard.

The very first thing. Take the emotion out of it. This is not personal. Don't make it personal. The more tentative you are, the more people get concerned, or the more likely they're going to take it personally. So if you're like, *well, it kind of really bothers me. I don't want to upset you or anything…* The more you start qualifying it and get really tentative in your language, the more people get their backs up, and they're like, *what the hell, something's wrong here.*

So take the emotion out of it, don't be tentative. Just talk about it. It is what it is. You're taking the emotion out of it. The more angry you are, obviously, the higher the likelihood you're going to get an angry response back. People are going to mirror how you're showing up. Or the more sarcastic you are, like, *I know that you do this, and when you do this…*, The more you're like that, people are going to come back and be sarcastic back at you.

So take the emotion out of it, because people will mirror the emotion back to you. It just is what it is. You're having this conversation. You do not have to make it a super big deal. You don't have to set up a specific meeting to talk about this thing if it doesn't need that. You would be the one to understand that you can actually just tack it on to the end of another meeting if you want to.

You can say, *By the way, before we finish, there's been something that I've been meaning to talk to you about. I've noticed, there are a lot of instances where I get work at the last minute with a super short deadline. And I understand that. I want to do my best work for you but that's not possible within that kind of a timeframe. I want you to know that when that happens, you won't get my best work. You're going to get the work that I can do in that timeframe. And we can talk about what's doable in each circumstance that comes up. But I wanted to have this conversation with you and I want to put that on the table. How does that sound? Does that make sense to you?*

Open up the discussion. Boundaries aren't about you saying your piece and then you walk away. Just say it and stop talking. Don't apologize for saying it, don't try to qualify it or try to make the other person comfortable

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because you cannot do that. You cannot make them comfortable, they have to make themselves comfortable. You're just going to say it and stop talking. Then listen and be curious about what the other people have to say.

You're in a relationship with this person so it's about having a relationship type of conversation. Even if it's your boss, it's okay. The authority piece does not have to kick in. You can absolutely be clear on what you can deliver. In fact, as a boss, I depend on my people to tell me what's achievable. I can't guess what you can and can't do. You need to tell me those things. So it's even more important if it's your boss, but certainly, any type of colleague. Take the emotion out of it and have a conversation. The more you make it a big deal, the more of a big deal it becomes. That's the first thing.

Second. Is this a random act or a regular one? if it's a random act, you can decide at that point if it's worth you doing the work to even set a boundary with this person. Or it could be one of those situations where you just behave in the way that you would behave. If you were setting a boundary, you have a boundary for yourself in your mind, and you just behave that way. If it's random, it may not be worth sitting down and having a conversation with the person.

If it's a one-off, and your boss or a colleague gives you an impossibly short deadline, you can just manage expectations at that moment. *I hear you. I got it. I'll do the best I can in that timeframe. Here's what we can deliver. Or let's agree on what can be delivered in that timeframe.* If it's a regular occurrence, you might need to have that conversation.

Again, maybe it's tacked on to something else. Maybe it's something that you do need to sit down and have a special conversation about, especially if you've been letting it go for a long time and you've created an expectation and now you're trying to change that expectation. You're trying to reset a boundary with someone, and then sometimes, you need to sit down and have a conversation.

In that case, you might have to explain. *Look, this has been bothering me for a while. I've been letting it go. It's on me. Here's what my challenge with it. Here's what I like to suggest moving forward.* Have a calm conversation. The calmer you are, the calmer they're going to be. They're going to mirror that back to you.

By the way, I really do recommend, that if you've been letting something go for a while because you are not comfortable having the conversation, you need to sit down and address it. Because the longer you let it go, the longer you are operating inside your integrity or doing something that is uncomfortable for you… I want to say uncomfortable because again, uncomfortable can sometimes be good, but you're doing something that is not aligned with your ideal situation, and it's getting tougher and tougher to do that, you really want to sit down and have a conversation before the frustration and anger and resentfulness kicks in.

Because the longer you tolerate it, the less patience you're going to have to have that conversation. Quite frankly, the fact that you let it go this long, whose fault is that? It's your fault. You are the one in control of how you think, how you feel, and how you act. That doesn't mean that you can't walk it back. It's totally fine but take accountability. Walk it back, reset the boundaries. So number two was, is it a random act or a regular one? Understand that.

Number three. Give people the benefit of the doubt. They may not even know that they're doing this thing that they're doing that's getting in your way. They're not doing it maliciously. If you feel like you want to have a

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conversation with them, if you decide that that's the way to go, give them the benefit of the doubt. You can start with something like, *You probably didn't know you were doing this, but…*,

Like the *'Me Too' Movement*, which I love, and I'm so happy it has arrived. It's making it okay for women, for us to set boundaries. But again, the reason it's been tough, a tough integration at some organizations is because it's being implemented in a threatening way. And some people, take it to a place where they don't give people the benefit of the doubt. There are monsters out there. Some people deserve to be threatened, have action taken against them, or have their livelihood taken away.

Don't get me wrong, but there are some people out there who just need to understand that what they think is innocent, is not so innocent to you. If it's not a random act and if it's regular behavior, then you can start by saying, *Look, you may not know that you're doing this, but when you say blah blah blah, you're sending the message that blah, blah, blah…*, and then maybe you stop, and see what they have to say before you add the what you will do part, before you add the, *If you do this, I'm going to do this*.

Just say, *Look, you may not know you're doing this, but when you do this, you're sending a message that…,* and then stop and see what they say. See if they notice. See how they handle it. They might be mortified. They're like, *Oh, my goodness, I never thought about that. Thank you for letting me know.* That might be the end of the conversation. You're just putting it out there and you're going to see how things go.

But if the person knows that they're doing something, and they don't care, or they're trying to tell you like, *This is you. It's your fault you're taking it that way. It's got nothing to do with me*. Then you can say, *Okay, I hear you.* Then share the action that you intend to take when they behave that way. Leave the room, document it, whatever it is. It's hard for me to give you advice on this because I don't think a particular situation is and how long it's been going on.

My point here is, if it's regular behavior, maybe give the person the benefit of the doubt and you'll know whether you should or you shouldn't based on a situation that you're facing in front of you. Once again, I want to underline these conversations. They don't have to get emotional. I know it's tough. But like I said, the calmer you are, the more effective the conversation. So start by giving people the benefit of the doubt.

Number four. Don't gossip about it. Talk to the person directly. Don't talk to the people around them, really. If you've talked to the person directly, and you're not getting anywhere, you might need to talk to your boss or HR. But that's it. Gossip only hurts you.

The reason people gossip is because they have all these feelings and thoughts and emotions about the situation that they think they can't talk to the person directly about, the right person about. They're afraid of sharing how they feel or they haven't worked through how they think and feel about it and so they're really anxious to have a conversation.

My recommendation to you is to start by having a conversation with the person that you're having a challenge with or the person that you want to set the boundary with. If you're really struggling with how to do that, get a coach, get a mentor, get someone to roleplay it with you. But gossiping is not going to help you. It's only going to make things worse for you and potentially take away your credibility on the issue because no one keeps a secret.

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Everybody's sharing everything. So what happens is these people that you shared your feelings with, even though it was cathartic for you at the moment, these people are sharing your story. But now they're sharing it in their words with their perspective and their thoughts so you've lost control of your own story. Other people have it now and the broken telephone begins, and that can get you into big trouble. It can put you into a corner so you need to be really careful. Don't gossip. Deal with the situation directly.

Number five, big one here. Do not bluff. Be choosy, and be thoughtful about the boundaries that you want to set. But once you set them, you need to do what you said you were going to do. So make sure you think it through before you say anything. If you don't do what you say you're going to do, people are going to keep crossing the boundary. They're not going to think that you're serious.

If you tell your boss that he or she's not going to get your best work by giving you a crazy deadline of 9 a.m. tomorrow morning, but then you pull an all-nighter and do amazing work, they're not going to believe you. Manage the situation, agree to what the boundaries are on the situation, and then you need to act on it. You cannot bluff. Otherwise, people are going to see you're not serious. Then it gets really hard after that to reset the boundary again and any future boundaries you set are going to be tougher, too because you're going to have lost credibility there as well. So make sure you're not bluffing.

Boundaries are what you're going to do when something happens, not what you want others to do. And those are the basics.

I would love to hear your boundary stories or hear your boundary questions. You can leave them in the comments. I would love to hear from you.

I am summarizing all these notes and all these points, etc. You can get them at thecareerreset.com/22. If you need a refresher on this, or you're in your car and you want it didn't have a chance to write this down, you can head over there and check it out.

Thanks for joining me. I am so grateful to you. I'm so grateful for my career. I'll talk to you next week. Bye for now.

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