

ROCHESTER

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## Set boundaries to protect yourself, foster success

WOMEN AT WORK

**Sally Ward**

When is the last time you felt taken advantage of or inconvenienced by someone's unreasonable demands or unacceptable behavior?

Those feelings of frustration, annoyance or being pulled in too many directions are prime indicators that you may need to set or enforce a boundary to protect your time and energy.

Boundaries are the invisible lines that safeguard you from unintended or purposeful harm by others. You'll find that knowing and articulating your boundaries contributes enormously to your productivity, well-being and success.

Here are six key points:

**Ask for what you need.** Dawn Schnell, manager of staffing operations at Bausch & Lomb, didn't place many limits on her time at the office until she became a parent. Now, she said, "When the clock hits 5, whatever is done is done. I have to leave." She's just as committed to her work, but when there's a crunch, her boss knows that she needs the option to finish it after the kids are in bed.

**Don't worry so much about being liked.** It isn't easy to set boundaries. But don't let fear of conflict or your desire to be liked stop you. After all, if you don't care enough about yourself to stick up for your needs, who will?

Twyla Cummings, a professor at Rochester Institute of Technology's School of Print Media, clearly posts her office hours and asks students to schedule appointments. "Nevertheless," she said, "many still drop by without an appointment during non-office hours and expect me to accommodate them. Even if my door is closed, I'll get a knock if

they see my light on. I've learned to ignore it. It's not well received by the students, but it's important to do because I'm not productive otherwise."

**Learn to say no without apology.** Cummings said that a challenge she faced when she came to Rochester was that she got involved in volunteering on a small scale. "Then people see that you're engaged and they ask you to do more and more. It's easy to get overwhelmed." Her advice? "Don't feel bad about saying no."

**Respect yourself and know that your needs are valid.** Do you ever find yourself saying yes when you really wanted to say no? Or keeping silent when someone violated your boundaries? If so, you're sabotaging yourself. Making others' needs more important than your own on a regular basis can leave you depleted and resentful.

**Use boundaries to move toward healthier relationships.** One of my clients is a CEO who rose through the ranks and is now leading others who were once her peers. She has had to design different relationships and establish new rules of engagement with her team. She no longer tolerates workplace complaining and refuses to play the role of dispute mediator. If people have problems, she makes it known that she expects them to propose solutions.

**Develop your script, venting any anger beforehand.** To be most effective, present your boundary in a nonjudgmental way, using a neutral tone and body language. Acknowledge the importance of the relationship, then ask what you need or expect.

Remember, the more competent and successful you are, the more people will expect of you and the more you'll need boundaries to achieve your business and personal objectives.

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