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Setting Boundaries to Get the Staff You've Always Dreamed Of

Dawn Russell

Setting Boundaries to get Your Dream Staff

Are you making this mistake with your employees?



Our first mistake as business owners is that we believe others should behave the same way as us – uphold the same standards as us.

Our second mistake is believing that employees will pick up on our standards by osmosis.

WRONG!

People have their own set of standards, but unless you clearly specify what **YOURS** are, they'll bring their own...as well as any other bad habits they learned at their last workplace. And they'll bring them really fast.

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YOU GET JUST 10 DAYS TO SET YOUR STANDARDS AND IMPOSE YOUR BOUNDARIES.

And if you don't mark out those boundaries in the first 10 days, it'll take you 90 days or more to undo the standards they bring with them!



I guess you can see now why you've got a problem, huh?

Because if you're like most of the business owners I help with this problem, you never communicated the boundaries in the first place, did you?

You just assumed they'd have the same standards as you, or that they'd figure yours out pretty fast.

And then when people didn't live up to your expectations, you didn't call them on it, did you? You just kept your mouth shut and swallowed down your frustration.

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YOU LET THEM GET AWAY WITH IT.

And when you let someone get away with a behaviour you don't want, guess what? It becomes the new accepted standard. Your silence condones their behaviour.

Can you now see why you're getting the crappy behaviour you're getting?

Can you see now how you've *inadvertently* allowed it to happen...thinking that they're all sensible adults and share similar standards to you?

You haven't drawn your boundaries clearly enough and you haven't policed those boundaries to enforce your expectations.

YOU'VE LET BAD BEHAVIOUR SNEAK IN.



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Sure, you'll be able to justify the lapse:

- you're busy running a business
- these are adults we're talking about
- they should know better
- you don't like confrontation
- your self critic says you're being too hard on people
- those closest to you tell you you expect too much...and so the list goes on.

Realities, excuses, stories...

But at the end of the day, I only have one question for you...

DO YOU WANT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?

Because if you don't...

(a) you probably haven't read this far anyway or

(b) you're getting some kind of enjoyment, or payoff, for being at the mercy of your employees' behaviour – you know, like you've got some sort of martyr thing going on (probably do elsewhere in your life too)...and don't want to get off the merry-go-round.

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But if you DO want to do something about it, this report will help you:

- Decide what things to put boundaries around so that you cover all the important aspects of the business
- Get clear on what your own expectations are because it's your business and you get to decide how you want people to behave
- Get your employees to buy into the process, so that everyone contributes to the type of behaviours that will and won't be tolerated
- Describe the sort of behaviours that belong to each expectation so that everyone has clear examples about what is expected
- Communicate those behaviours clearly to all your employees so that no one can claim they didn't know or understand
- Deal with behaviour that doesn't match the agreed standard in order to uphold the agreed standards and retain the respect of your employees
- Model the right behaviour so that you (and any other leaders) walk the talk and can't be accused of having double standards.

So read on...

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Get clear on what your boundaries and expectations are



If you don't know your boundaries, how can you expect your employees to know the boundaries? Boundaries are like rules. They draw the line in the sand and establish your expectations. We all have different expectations, so you need to make yours clear – employees do not have ESP!

To figure out what your boundaries are, take various areas of the business and write down what you expect.

For example, let's look at working hours. Do you expect people to work from 9.00am – 5.00pm? Or do you expect them to work their 8 hours within an agreed window – e.g. they can start anywhere from 7.00am and finish anytime until 7.00pm, as long as they work their 8 hours?

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Do this for each area of the business that you can think of. Here are a few aspects to get you started:

- Personal presentation – grooming, hygiene, uniforms etc.
- Punctuality
- Answering the phone
- Communicating with each other
- Following up
- Handling enquiries
- Receiving feedback
- Giving feedback
- Managing deadlines
- Office cleanliness
- Winning business
- Talking to customers
- Sending emails

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Describe the behaviours that support each boundary



Once you've decided what your boundaries and expectations are, you now need to describe the **behaviours** that support those boundaries. Ask yourself how people would behave if they met the expectations. Ask yourself what behaviours would demonstrate that people were NOT meeting expectations. So this is about describing behaviours you expect to see as well as those you won't tolerate.

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For instance, if people were answering the phone according to your expectations, would they be picking up within 3 rings, 5 rings or some other number? Would they sound enthusiastic and welcoming? Would they make the customer feel like they're the most important person in the world for the time they're on the phone? Would they be polite? What does polite look like to you (what are your expectations about "polite")?

If people don't know the answer to the caller's enquiry, how should they handle it? And so on.

At the same time, draw up a list of behaviours that are absolutely NOT acceptable.

Using the same example, behaviour that you wouldn't tolerate might include ignoring the ringing phone to talk to a colleague, or hoping that someone else will pick up.

It could be sounding bored and uninterested when answering the phone. It could sound like impatience when talking to a customer. And you may hear sarcasm or condescension instead of being polite.



You need to establish both sets of standards so that when we get to the next step, you can communicate them in such a way that there is no ambiguity. In other words, employees can't say they didn't know that ignoring the phone ringing was unacceptable.

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Communicate the boundaries and expectations



You can't expect people to abide by the boundaries and expectations if they have no idea what they are. You need to communicate them. And you need to communicate them in a very clear and unambiguous way.

Frankly this is the thing that most business owners get wrong.

They have this set of standards in their own head because, like the rest of us, we all have our own moral compass. But then they make this assumption that other people are going to know what that is. Or they assume that other people should have the same standards as them, and if they don't have that standard then they're not in the same league. So we judge them when they don't behave the way we expect, or the way we would have behaved.

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Because we all come from different upbringings, it's only natural that we will have different beliefs and values. It's those beliefs and values that drive our behaviour and therefore our set of standards.

What is considered correct or appropriate by one person may be totally unacceptable to another.

We also need to consider that unless the person you are employing is straight out of school, they'll have picked up standards from the previous places they worked at – both good and bad.

Let's say they worked in an office before coming to yours where meeting deadlines was considered "optional." In other words, they discovered that if they missed a deadline at the old place, there were no consequences – no one chewed them out, no one docked their pay, in fact, no one said a word!

What's happened here is that their previous boss "trained" them to miss deadlines.

The bottom line is, you can't expect people to uphold a standard they have no knowledge of. Saying standards are common sense or that people should "know" what's acceptable, is going to trip you up every time.

You need to be clear and you need to spell it out. Which brings us to the next step.

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What to do when people behave in a way that is outside the boundaries you've set



It's inevitable that people will step outside of the boundaries – some deliberately, some unintentionally. But the best thing about having written boundaries is that you can refer to them when someone goes astray and remind them where the line is drawn.

If you've followed this process, you'll end up with a list of what we call “above the line” behaviours as well as a list of “below the line” behaviours.

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This list can be something that forms part of your induction pack or something you simply display around the office. Some business owners include it in their staff manual, so that everyone gets a copy. The main thing is, you can then use the list to have the performance conversation when someone goes astray.

Let's use our punctuality example here. Imagine one of your employees is making a habit of turning up 10-15 minutes late every morning.

Having already communicated your expectations, you can now quite comfortably say to them "You know, we agreed that punctuality was an important expectation and we both know our start time is 8.30am. So at the moment, where are you at, in terms of meeting that agreement?"

The employee will most likely say, "Yeah you're right, I'm outside the boundaries," or, you know, "I'm not doing what we'd agreed to."

So instead of telling them off for not meeting the standard, you're using the list to remind them what they agreed to.

The beauty of this approach is that they'll be the ones telling you where they are in terms of the acceptability of the behaviour. And this makes them own their own behaviour, rather than you being the micro-managing ogre.

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Here's an example of the type of document you could create that encompasses behaviours for each of the areas of the business you identified that you want to put boundaries around.

ANSWERING THE PHONE

↑
The ABC Company Way

- ✓ We answer the phone promptly, unless there is a good reason we can't
- ✓ We are polite at all times
- ✓ We listen carefully
- ✓ We speak clearly
- ✓ If we don't know the answer to a question, we find out and get back to them
- ✓ We pass on information accurately, promptly and to the correct person
- ✓ We return calls promptly

↓
NOT ABC Company Way

- × We are not insensitive to customers' feelings, concerns or situation
- × We don't let the phone ring out
- × We don't wait for others to answer the phone
- × We don't say "I don't know" or "It's out of our hands"
- × We never mumble
- × We never never use in-house jargon

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Act on breaches of boundaries



Just like children, employees (in fact it's true of the human race, full stop) will try to stretch the envelope to see just how much they can get away with. If you ignore behaviour that breaches the agreed boundaries, you are demonstrating that the boundaries are meaningless – that they aren't worth the paper they're written on.

This is where that previous, imaginary boss went wrong. Not only was no line drawn around meeting deadlines, there were no consequences for failing to meet the deadlines.

You can't afford to ignore breaches of boundaries, because what you ignore you condone!

And if people are allowed to get away with something once, they'll consider that to be the new standard...and then you've got all sorts of problems!

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It's actually no different to bringing up children. You know, you say to them "I want you to go make your bed and put all the stuff that's on the floor away." And you go in there an hour or so later and all that's changed is the bed cover has been crookedly pulled up to hide an unmade bed.

You sigh and inside your head you go, "You know what, I'm just not going to say anything because I can't be bothered with all the fuss, and the eye rolling and the yelling and screaming that goes on so I'm just going to turn a blind eye and shut the door."

And the minute you do that of course, the child knows that they've got away with it and so next time they'll try to push the envelope a little bit further.

And that's exactly what they want, of course. They want to get out of doing the work, so they figure if they do a crappy job, you're just going to throw up your hands and go "Yep, I knew I should have done it myself!" and you take over and do it for them.

However, if you hold them to the standard even though they don't like it – and yes, there'll be all sorts of complaining about it – what you're doing is raising a child that will grow up having high standards around vacuuming or cleaning their room or whatever it is.

Later on in life that will stand them in good stead. The hard thing is holding the line and putting up with the ranting, the whingeing and the looks of thunder.

The thing is, there's a price for wanting people to uphold standards and that means you need to be prepared to go the distance, or forever be at the mercy of other people's standards.

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Walk the talk!



Just like you can't afford to ignore poor behaviour because of the message it sends, you also can't ask people to behave in a way that is contrary to the way you behave.

You have to lead by example. You have to live up to those standards yourself.

People will always do what you do. They won't do what you say.

If you want employees to smile when dealing with a customer, you need to smile when dealing with a customer.

If you want employees to maintain neat and tidy overalls or work attire, you need to keep your overalls neat and tidy.

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Your employees need to see you living up to your standards. They need to see you setting the example. If they don't see that, you're going to have a really big misalignment between how you're asking people to behave and what you're demonstrating by your own behaviour.

If you're not prepared to "live" those standards of yours – the ones you've been told are too high, or unfair – then you're either using other people's opinions as an excuse to let them get away with poor behaviour, OR you really you don't have the standards you say you have – you've just been lying to yourself!

Make a choice.

In a nutshell

If you want staff to behave the way you've always dreamed of. If you want staff who add value to the business, who treat it like it's their own, you have to

- define your boundaries
- communicate your boundaries
- address behaviour that breaches boundaries, and
- lead by example by living up to your own standards, every single day.

The good news is, the behavioural challenges you face in your business right now CAN be fixed by following these 6 logical steps, and by making a decision that you WANT to change things.

So let's stop employees taking advantage of you and let's start a conversation right now! With our unique, 10-minute **PeopleProbe**, we'll be able to identify some quick wins that will set you on the path to lifting standards in your workplace, within moments.

Simply click on this [link](#) and choose a time to start that conversation. I promise you, it'll be the best 10 minutes you've ever spent.