

Boundaries: Skills and Strategies for Nutrition Entrepreneurs

CYNTHIA MOORE

MS, RDN, CDCES, NBC-HWC, c-IAYT

CPE ARTICLE

OBJECTIVES:

- 1 Recognize that our own emotions can help signal where we need to be setting boundaries.
- 2 Be able to identify at least two actions that contribute to healthful boundaries.
- 3 Learn or practice a skill to improve boundaries for personal/professional benefit.

HAVE YOU EVER ASKED YOURSELF, “IS THERE A WAY TO BE IN THE FLOW?”

You enjoy working with clients and doing all the things that running a business requires, but you also want to be fully present for friends/family time. Fitting in self-care activities and personal interests are important too. In this article, we will explore what good boundaries look like, the benefits of good boundaries, and how they can help you be in the flow. We will also discuss how to recognize the need for stronger boundaries and some ways to create those boundaries.

WHAT DOES “HAVING GOOD BOUNDARIES” MEAN?

Healthy boundaries define appropriate behavior in our relationships:

- 1 Boundaries can help keep both parties safe.
- 2 Setting healthy boundaries is crucial for self-care and positive relationships.
- 3 Having “good boundaries” means that individuals have the capability to know themselves, recognize when their values and expectations aren’t being met, and to speak or act on their own behalfs to clarify their preferences.

BENEFITS

This topic is one that is near and dear

to my heart, as setting limits and boundaries is a work-in-progress for me. “Candy ass” was the (playfully delivered) nickname one of my bosses had for me. As painful as hearing that was, that boss was not entirely wrong. At the time, I let my inexperience and internal dialogue – what we’d call imposter syndrome today – set me up for having too-soft boundaries. Internal questioning and insecurity delayed my decision making and didn’t allow me to stand in my own power and worth in ways that would have better served me and my team.

WHAT’S POSSIBLE WITH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES?

Let’s consider our skin. Our skin serves as a boundary to help keep us safe from infections; it also serves as a container. Healthy boundaries work similarly to our skin. They enhance a personal sense of agency, contribute to effective productivity, and allow rewarding, personal-professional relationships. Those skillful at boundaries can thicken boundaries when needed and allow thinner boundaries when in a highly trusted setting.

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When we have healthy boundaries, we get stuck less often in patterns of people-pleasing, indecision, regret, victim-status, isolation, dismissiveness or confusion.

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With effective/healthy boundaries, we’re able to say “yes” when we mean yes, and “no” when we mean no. We know what we feel and respond in real time, honestly sharing feelings and experiences. Sharing problems directly with the person involved, rather than with third parties, is another hallmark of healthful boundaries. People with healthy boundaries make expectations clear and explicit, rather than assuming others will have similar expectations or be able to mind-

read. Clarifying expectations and boundaries can help us and those we care about know what to expect.

On the other hand, when a person does not have clear boundaries, it can lead to dysregulated hyper-arousal or hypo-arousal states where we are outside our “window of tolerance.” Stress hormones compensate for dysregulation, adding wear-and-tear on major body systems: “the brain, the autonomic nervous system, the immune system, and the endocrine system.” (2, p. 203).

RECOGNIZING WHEN WE’VE LOST OUR PERSPECTIVE OR BOUNDARIES:

When we’re under threat, we don’t have full access to our thinking brain/executive function. We will only see limited options. We’re out of touch with what we’re feeling, making it more difficult to recognize the need for a limit or to be able to offer a wise response in real time.

Under stress/threat, the executive function or thinking brain goes essentially offline, so it narrows the possibilities we see, critically limiting the options; we are less likely to make the best decisions in this state.

By paying attention to the breath and body several times a day, we can learn to identify what we’re feeling and more directly identify what we need. Knowing what we feel and need is a great first step to setting and tending boundaries.

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Practicing mindful awareness and stopping to pause for a full belly or box breath can rekindle connection.

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Years ago, a therapist colleague mentioned she set a quota on the free/discounted public service talks she’d give each year. Once she’d met the quota, she declined other

requests for that year - a boundary I too found helpful in my early days in practice. Once I learned how to set one boundary, setting others became easier. Through experience, I have learned that once I set a boundary, it doesn't mean I can't revisit it. Boundaries don't need to be set in stone; it's a normal part of business (and life) for boundaries to evolve.

WHAT ARE THE SKILLS FOR HAVING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES?

- 1 Identify what matters to you - your values and needs. Nurture your own garden. There are many online resources to help determine your values if this doesn't come easy for you.
- 2 Communicate your required or preferred boundaries as you deem appropriate in your varied life contexts. Convey or educate others in your work/home or other settings so your needs have a better chance of being honored. See #4 if you want to improve how you communicate.
- 3 Recognize what's important for you in keeping your own brain/body in optimal balance. Cultivating the skills of adequate sleep, stress resilience, movement, and healthful, adequate nutrition are key foundations. Yoga, meditation and other mind-body practices help act in our own best interests so we are better able to maintain healthy boundaries.
- 4 Buff up your communication skills. Jo Nash, Ph.D., offers these skills and worksheets as options for rounding out your own boundary-setting skills (1). These links may best be viewed in the online version of *Ventures*.
- Visualize your ideal boundaries. See yourself sticking with the promises you make to yourself, working with focus for just the time you've planned, completing projects on time, having a great mix of time to relax, play or create, and celebrating worktime accomplishments. The visualizing boundaries worksheet: <https://positive.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Visualizing-Your-Boundaries.pdf> (1)
- Practice getting to "no" <https://positive.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/How-to-Set-Boundaries-Saying-No.pdf> or asking for what you want <https://positive.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/How-to-Set-Boundaries-State-What-You-Want.pdf> (1)
- Setting boundaries at work (video) <https://positivepsychology.com/great-self-care-setting-healthy-boundaries/> (1,4)
- Eight steps to deal with boundary violations <https://positive.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Dealing-With-Boundary-Violations.pdf> (1)
- 5 Setting reasonable expectations. With boundary violations, it's often a mismatch of our expectations. If we're able to feel our feelings and identify what we've been expecting in each setting, it can help "name" what is present and allow us to see if we can re-craft an unreasonable expectation into a more reasonable expectation that serves us well. (3)
- 6 Making win-win requests. Being in a balanced state nets better outcomes, using mind-body skills for self-regulation often helps. It's useful to offer a connecting statement such as "I can appreciate or understand that ...", then to follow with an "I feel (your own feeling) ... I need ..." and your request. Another honest, empathic statement such as "I appreciate that you took the time to listen and hear this request" could be a good way to close the message. (3)

HERE'S AN INVITATION FOR 2023:

What are the areas in your life where better boundaries would serve you? Is it the interactions with others? In work, at home, or with service organizations? Is it the structure of your own work time? Or perhaps you want to become more skillful at interrupting and redirecting your own thoughts, i.e., to set limits with worry or fear? What would be the advantages of developing better boundaries around those areas of your life?

Are you willing to visualize your own ideal boundaries for even five minutes once a week for a month? Being, "in the flow" requires us to recognize our boundaries and then honor them. What boundaries are most important for you?



"You can be in a healthy relationship with others and take care of yourself. Healthy people want you to be able to be happy and healthy. You are not kind to yourself when you neglect your needs for the needs of others."

NEDRA GLOVER TAWWAB,
MSW, LCSW

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Cynthia Moore offers integrative nutrition and health coaching, serves

as contracted faculty for the U.S. Veterans Administration's Whole Health initiative, is CEO of the Hygeia Wellness Park and is the author of *Live, Love, Lead: 10 Simple Skills to Transform Stress* and co-author of *Nourishing Resilience Essentials*. She lives near Charlottesville, Virginia.



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