

Ep #33: Setting Boundaries and Sticking to Them



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 33.

Welcome to *The Design You Podcast*, a show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth, and joy. Here is your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hello my fellow creative, I hope you're having a fabulous fall. I'm happy to say that this is my most productive fall ever. My virtual team that I told you about all last week and a few other times because I love them to death and I keep talking about them, they just keep blowing my mind in the best sort of way. And we're adding new consultants and experts all the time and man, is this exciting stuff. Like, I would talk about it all day long.

And if you're not that excited about your life and biz, you really should join me in my Design You coaching program because man, are we doing amazing work together over there. Because I'm taking all the stuff I'm doing with my team and I'm putting it right into my Design You coaching program, so it's like you're looking over my shoulder basically, with everything I'm doing and you can do it in your own business too. So super-duper cool.

Okay, so let's talk about boundaries today. I told you last week we were going to talk about boundaries because they're definitely something that can give your life a boost. So if you're not feeling good about fall, if you're not feeling good about your relationships in particular, let's figure it out.

Most of us fall short when it comes to taking responsibility for our own feelings and actions. And we also struggle with holding other people accountable for theirs. Part of this is that we are not clear or practiced in setting appropriate boundaries and sticking to them.

And most of us are even confused on what a boundary even is, honestly. Boundaries seem like something that we set for other people to abide by, but guess what, unfortunately or fortunately, whichever way you look at it, glass half full or half empty, boundaries are actually about us. They are what we will do in various situations.

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Now, most of us confuse boundaries with really what would be a threat. So threats are really about what you want another person to do. When you threaten people, you're attempting to control their behavior, not your own. And guess what? Yup, as we talk about almost every week on this podcast, we cannot control other people, ever. Therefore, threats are not effective.

When I'm thinking about threats, I always think about parenting. Like, threatening your kids, because we all do that, right? We're constantly threatening our kids. Now, children are a little bit different. They're not adults so they're not completely in control of their actions. They don't get to decide every move they make.

But threats still really are not that effective with kids, right? And we've all either been the parent that's threatening, or we've seen that parent like, in the grocery store line, threatening their kids about their behavior. And when their kids are wanting candy or something else, the parents are threatening, threatening, threatening, if you don't do this, you need to - and you're trying to control their behavior.

And eventually, what happens when this threatening is happening by the parent? Yeah, they usually cave and end up letting the kid do or have whatever they want just so they'll be quiet, right? Now, that is a super effective strategy, right? I mean, that's a terrible strategy.

I remember my mom telling me the minute I became a kid, "Whatever you do, don't just threaten your kid all the time and then never follow through. They won't believe a word that you say ever and they're going to be horrible brats." She's right. That was really good advice.

And this is not an effective strategy, right? Of course not. But boundaries are not threats. Boundaries, when used correctly, can be a great way to improve your life, pretty much instantly because you are talking about what you're going to do in a situation where there's a boundary violation.

So the first thing we want to do before we set the boundary is stop trying to control other people. Please stop that. That alone will end a ton of suffering

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that you're creating in your life. But after that, if needed, when needed, boundaries can be so helpful.

So let's dig into what boundaries are and see how they can help us with our own behavior, since that's the only behavior we can control anyway. So what is a boundary, specifically? A boundary is an appropriate action that you will take if a person is committing a boundary violation, which means - a boundary violation means that they are coming into either your emotional or your physical space in a way that you believe is inappropriate for you.

So you get to decide what's appropriate and if these people are coming into your emotional or physical space in a way that is not appropriate for you, then that is a boundary violation. So you create boundaries when you need a set of rules for yourself - not for the other person - about how you will respond to those people in situations when a boundary violation happens.

You set boundaries for yourself. Not for other people. This is probably a shift for you. We think we set boundaries for them, but guess what? They can do whatever they want. We set the boundaries for us.

So let me give you some examples. So a boundary that you set with a spouse or a mate might be if you yell at me, I will leave. If you yell at me again, I will leave this room or I will leave this house or I will leave you. Whatever you decide. That is a boundary. You don't say, if you yell at me, what they need to do. You say, if you do this, I will do this.

Another example might be to your father or your father-in-law or someone else that you have a relationship with, you might say something like, if you curse again around my children, we will not visit anymore. So again, if you do this, I will do this.

Even something not quite so violent or negative, it might even be just something like to a friend, if you show up late for our lunch date one more time, I'm going to leave after the first five minutes, I'm tired of waiting on you. So you can show up late, but I won't be here, and it's not a threat. You're not threatening them. They don't have to change their behavior, but

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just pretty much be aware that if you get here and it's been more than five minutes, I've probably left.

Or maybe you say something to a sibling or to a nephew or to a niece or someone else that has a behavior that's a violation to you, something like this, like, maybe even to your child, your grown adult child, if you take money from my purse again without asking when you're in my home, I will not invite you back to holiday events with our family.

Do you see how each case, each example, you are saying what you will do? Not what you want them to do. They get to decide. Your dad, if that's who you put the boundary about cursing in front of your kids, your dad doesn't have to stop cursing ever. You're just putting him on alert that if he chooses to, which is completely his right, it's his house, it's his mouth, he can do both of those if he wants to.

But if you believe that's a boundary violation for you and your children then you're just saying, hey, I won't come visit you anymore. Or maybe you say, I'll come visit you but I'm not going to bring the kids anymore. If you keep doing this, I'm not bringing them. And then he gets to decide what to do about it. He doesn't have to change, but you're just making it clear.

Or maybe it's not even spoken because here's the thing, boundaries don't always have to be spoken. Sometimes it's important to speak them to the other person, but a lot of times, it's not because ultimately, boundaries are for you and your behavior. Not for the other person anyway.

One of the important things to know about boundaries is that we don't use them a lot of times when we should. And instead, what we do is we blame the other person for the violation, but we don't take responsibility for our own actions around the violation.

And here is the thing, y'all, it's not their responsibility to know what's a boundary violation for us and to take responsibility for that. That's our responsibility. We're the ones who have to protect ourselves. They don't have to.

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So most of the time, when we have a situation that needs a boundary, we haven't protected ourselves because that feels scary, right? It feels really scary and uncomfortable, especially if the choice is to speak it out loud. It feels scary, it's frightening, it can feel awkward to tell other people that we're not okay with a behavior, so we just keep hoping that they'll change, that surely they'll stop this behavior on their own.

But guess what? They don't because probably, they don't even know that anything is a boundary violation to you. Now, sometimes obviously, they may know if someone's being violent or something like that, they probably know they shouldn't be doing that. But so many times, it's not something that serious. It's just something more minor that's happening, but it still needs a boundary.

And in our minds, we imagine boundaries are part of a fight or a confrontation with the other person. So we make all these stories up in our head like how scary it is and it's going to be uncomfortable and we're going to get in a fight, and that's really not how boundaries work. At least not how they work well.

It is not a good idea when setting boundaries as confrontational. Boundaries that work well need to be set with love, and they must be followed through on no matter what every single time or they will mean nothing and be completely ineffective. Remember the kid in the grocery store? That was a threat, but still, same idea. If you're constantly threatening and then you don't follow through, it's going to mean nothing, right? Same thing with a boundary.

So if you always give in, then why even have one to begin with? Why even say it to them or think it to yourself if you're not going to follow through with it? Because it's going to mean nothing, right? So yeah, threats don't work at all because people - adults anyway can do whatever they want, whether you like it or not, but boundaries do work if you follow them and if you set them with love and you always abide by them once you set them because boundaries are about you controlling you and you take the action to take care of yourself.

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So they'll work every single time if you follow them. So I bet you're thinking right now of some places in your life that might need some boundaries. And yeah, you might be feeling uncomfortable about it. It is a little uncomfortable at first until you get used to the idea that it's set with love and it's not a confrontation and it's really about you.

But the fact that you're noticing a few areas that might need a boundary is great. Here's what I also want you to notice. It's a little refresher from last week's podcast. This is when it's not a boundary issue. So that's a great question. When is it not a boundary issue? And the answer is it's not a boundary issue when it's really just a request that you want to make or something you want to see happen but that has nothing to do with an actual boundary violation.

So a desire for someone to behave a certain way just so you can be happy or feel good but it doesn't have a boundary violation involved, that was last week's episode. Remember, that is called having a manual for someone. Not needing a boundary. So if you're like, my husband never takes out the trash, I need a boundary, nope, you don't. You need to let that expectation go. That's a manual.

And having an owner's manual for other people does not serve you well in relationships pretty much all the time, but boundaries can. So yes, we're all guilty of having manuals and if you're still struggling with manuals, go back to last week's episode. And just to be clear, let me show you a few instances. I read a whole bunch of them in that episode, but just a reminder, a refresher, here's a few things that are not boundary violations, they're manual issues, and this is what those look like.

I wish my husband would take out the trash so I could relax. I want my boyfriend to be more romantic so I can feel loved. I wish my boss would give me more praise so I could be more confident. I want my girlfriends to call me or text me back so I can know I'm important to them. I want my mom to like my cooking so I can feel proud of myself.

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Every one of those, manuals. Not boundary violations. No one else has to do anything for you to have any of those feelings, except you. So you just need to think the thoughts that make you feel relaxed, loved, confident, important, and proud, and none of those people have to do those things you're wanting them to do. You can just go ahead and let them off the hook for your emotions.

But boundaries are different. And boundaries are great for all relationships when a violation does occur. One of the things that comes to mind to sort of give us an example and make this really clear is thinking about client, if you do own a business. So for instance, if clients are constantly texting you day and night, that probably needs a boundary. That is likely a boundary violation for you.

And telling them what you will do if they continue this practice of texting night and day is great. It's so helpful. And it's especially great in theory unless you just continue to text them back anyway every time they text you because you don't want them to be upset with you. That is not following through with the boundary.

So with any boundary, the most important step really is that you follow through. And remember, just because you follow through with a boundary and setting one and how you're going to behave does not mean that you're having a conflict with these people or that you're being rude just because you're clear about how and when you will take their calls and texts.

And sure, they may not like it, especially if you've been doing it for years and then all of a sudden you want to stop. But that's okay because you can stay calm and be totally happy even if they don't like it. Setting this sort of boundary can really come in the form of something that doesn't even have to feel like a conflict because it doesn't really even have to be a conversation. You can send them over something by email that says how we work and tell them that you have some new policies, and this how we work document could tell them all kinds of things about how you work and how you're going to take phone calls and texts and when.

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So for example, it might say things like, we do not discuss project details via text message, they're handled either in person and followed up with an email for clarity or just by email so that we have a record of the details and the decisions made. Easy peasy. Step number one.

Step number two on that document might say text messages are used only to communicate things like status of arriving at a meeting or to discuss directions to a location for projects or meetings. For example, if you or a team member are running late to a meeting, texting can be used for this type of communication but it's not used to decision-making on the project.

So that's super clear. The next little step or number might say we do not take calls or text messages before 9am or after 6pm weekdays, and we don't take them at all on weekends. Calls, text messages, or emails that arrive after hours or weekends will be returned within 24 to 48 hours starting the next business day in the order they were received.

See how clear and easy it could be to set a boundary with a client in the form of a document? And even better if you do this from the beginning, right? Even better if you haven't been having bad behavior and letting them violate your boundaries for years and then you decide you're tired of it. That's okay too if that's been happening. It's never too late to set one.

But this is an easy and professional way to see how you could get really clear with if you do this, we're going to do this. If you text us on the weekends or after hours, we're not going to answer you for at least 24 to 48 hours and starting the next business day. Super easy.

And when you set this sort of boundary with a client, you've just made it really clear to them how you'll respond, but realize that you cannot control them. So you cannot keep them from continuing to call and text and email you in ways that don't align with your policy, and that's okay. You can't control them, but you can control whether you answer them.

And it's super-duper important that you not break your own rules ever. I mean, ever. Period. Never. And guess what, if they don't like this way of

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working, that's okay. They don't have to like it. They can choose if they stay your client or not, but let them be responsible for all of that. Most people are not going to quit working with you over this but if they do, that's probably a good thing. You probably didn't want them as clients anyway.

But it's not your responsibility. Their emotions are not. Their emotions come from their thoughts about your boundary, so just completely release yourself from taking any responsibility for their emotions or trying to please them. You don't even need to know what they think about it. It's just the facts. It is what it is. It's how you will work.

Now, if you're always wanting to please them and you find yourself taking responsibility or being afraid of what they're going to do or how they're going to react, you need to know this, and I want you to ask yourself why. Why am I trying to make them happy all the time? Why am I afraid to allow them to deal with their own emotions? Why do I feel responsible for making them happy all the time?

And if you're doing that, you probably want to go back and listen to my podcast on people pleasing. It's a really good one. I want you to stop this behavior though. So enabling these other people to not be emotional adults. Their emotions are on them. It really has nothing to do with yours. You're in charge of yours, they're in charge of theirs.

And when setting boundaries with clients or anyone for that matter, the only emotions you need to manage are your own. But you do need to manage those too, and here's why. I want you to avoid creating drama over these situations with your own thoughts. Because drama never serves you well. Drama is always optional, and drama will likely not result in a good working relationship with the client.

Plus, it can derail you from all the other important tasks that you were going to deal with that day or that week if you go into this whole thought spiral with all these dramatic thoughts of oh my gosh, I can't believe they're still doing this, or that they got mad. You know what? Just don't go there. Manage your thoughts.

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And discussing or gossiping with your team or other people, other clients about how the clients continue to ignore your policies and boundaries or how they reacted to them doesn't help you stay calm and non-confrontational. And you can control that. So even when you have the urge to say, "Oh my gosh, they're still texting me," don't.

Just don't respond to them. Just let it go. It's no big deal. They know the policy. Follow the policy. Follow up during business hours with an email or on the phone or whatever you said you would do and that's it. Because creating drama around situations with boundaries wastes so much time and zaps all of your energy and your productivity.

Boundaries are not conflict or drama unless you allow them to be, unless you make them conflict or drama. Boundaries are just the facts about how you will behave in a certain situation and that's all. And nothing you do causes other people to be upset. Their own thoughts do that and again, their thoughts are on them. That's the good news. They are on them.

So use boundaries to take care of you and your health and your wellness and your schedule and your productivity and all the other beautiful things that boundaries can do for you and leave what others think about your boundaries completely on them and let them deal with those thoughts.

Feeling good about boundaries now? I know, me too. Boundaries are awesome if you need them. So go do the work on boundaries and go back again if you need to and listen to last week's podcast on manuals and I'm going to see you next week when we're going to talk about dealing with stress during the holidays.

So believe it or not, we're there. We're just a few weeks away from holiday season, and I'm going to get us armed with all these tips and tools to make the holiday season easier on us because of our mindset and our relationships than it's ever been before and that's going to be awesome, right? I love that and I know you're going to love it too. So I'll see you then. Thanks for listening, and bye for now, friends.

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Thank you so much for joining me for this episode of *The Design You Podcast*. And if you'd like even more support for designing a business and a life that you love, then check out my exclusive monthly coaching program Design You at tobifairley.com.