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Boundaries 1: Creating Boundaries with Other People

By Brooke Loening

Most people who want to eat the vegetables from their garden build a fence around it to keep the deer and other animals out. This creates a clear boundary to protect your produce. Having animals eating all your food that you worked hard to cultivate may not feel good and may even make you a little angry.

Sometimes people will experience anxiety, discomfort or anger when other people they are interacting with get too close in some way or step over a personal line. What a lot of people don't know is that it is OK to create boundaries in order to keep personal space sacred. Some of my clients have a hard time with the idea of creating a boundary because of thoughts like these-

- I don't want to make them mad by drawing a line
- I don't have the right to create a boundary here
- I am being too controlling

These are all subconscious thoughts that might keep you from creating a boundary that would be healthier for all parties to have. Any time you feel negative emotions about relating with someone, keep in mind that a good clear boundary might be just the answer.

I had one client whose mother liked to have a few scotches after dinner. Invariably, the mother would call her late in the evening after those drinks. My client always dreaded these calls because it was never a productive or fun conversation for her, and it could even become unpleasant. What she did not realize was that she did not really have to answer the phone. After a little brainstorming, we created a clear rule or boundary; she would not speak to her mother on the phone past 8:00 under any circumstance unless it was a true emergency. She informed her mother of this new "policy." She told me that this boundary really worked and was much easier to enforce than she thought.

I have another client whose wife would always critique his driving and try to teach him the basics of driving. This made him very angry and always seemed to lead to a heated argument, which then ended up in an entire day of the "silent treatment." I asked him if he needed help on his driving and whether his wife was qualified to provide that level of instruction. He answered yes to both questions, and that *it was the way it was presented and the time that the advice was given that did not work for him.* We created a new boundary, which stated that driving instruction was welcome from his wife, but only at a prearranged time and for a maximum of 45 minutes. At no other times would criticism or instruction about his driving be welcomed or tolerated. With this new structure he was able to receive the instruction on his own terms with an ending point clearly agreed upon

in advance. This strategy enabled the two to get what they wanted without creating bad feelings.

A good affirmation is “when I feel that someone is stepping into my space, I create a boundary, and that improves the relationship in the long run.”

Brooke Loening is a life coach in Sharon who works with individuals, and runs weekly coaching groups on achieving growth in career, health and relationships. For more information and previous columns visit theloeningplan.com. Columns can also be found at tcextra.com