

Published in the Lakeville Journal, Millerton News and Winsted Journal January 21, 2010

## **Boundaries 2: When Someone Disrespects Your Boundaries**

*By Brooke Loening*

A few weeks ago, I told you it was a good idea to create a boundary when you feel like someone is stepping into your space. Since then readers emailed me to say that some people just do not respect their boundaries even after they were clearly communicated. I suggest that you have several options when someone does not respect your boundaries. Today I would like to cover one strategy, which could be your first line of defense.

I had client who generally had a good relationship with his mother but there seemed to be consistent petty fights that cropped up when they got together. When his mother brought up certain subjects, he felt like she was judging him and his way of life, and he felt the need to defend himself- which turned into an argument. He set boundaries with her by asking her not to criticize him. Despite having asked her not to “go there” she continued and he found himself bickering with her about the same subjects.

### Be Clearer

My advice to him was to be even clearer and more specific about the boundary he wanted to create. When he set his boundaries the first time, they were too general and seemed to be more reactionary to when his buttons were pushed. I suggested to him that he needed to be more precise and detailed with his mother about what worked and did not work in their relationship.

After some discussion with him, it appeared that almost all the problems came up when four specific topics were brought up. Interestingly, there seemed to be very few issues between them beyond these four topics.

- Kids-His mother liked to advise him on his kid’s education strategy which they would never agree on.
- Food-They had differing views on how to eat- she was macrobiotic and organic and he was more meat, potatoes, and vegetables.
- Sister-They had different goals as far as his relationship with his sister. His mother wanted them to spend more time together and be closer, and he did not want that at that time.
- Politics- he was right and she was left.

### Try it in Writing, Be Specific

Since he felt like talking to his mother face to face about this might put her on the defensive, and he wasn’t sure that he could be as clear and direct as he needed to be, I

had him draft a detailed letter to his mother outlining his boundaries so there would be no confusion. I had him include specific examples of things she might say and his corresponding feelings that arose when he heard them. “When you say ‘Billy should be in a private school,’ I feel angry, and then I don’t want to talk to you or invite you down to visit again.”

#### Use a Team Approach

He was afraid his mother might take a letter like this quite hard, so I suggested he open with by stating their mutual goals. Since they both wanted to have a more tension-free relationship, he started with that and then suggested the boundaries that could help them get there. He acknowledged that they both had valid viewpoints but neither was willing to agree with the others, so keeping them off limits seemed to be a smart solution. This strategy got his mother on a “same team” wavelength, which allowed her to be more open to solutions. The key was that he was clear and wrote the letter from a loving place with a mutual goal as the starting point. The letter was a slam-dunk in terms of success, because they both wanted the same thing and were willing to make some sacrifices to get there. All they needed was some clarity on the matter and a game plan.

In my next article I will address what to do if the other person is not on the same “team.”

An affirmation is “When someone does not respect my boundaries, I am not afraid to be clearer and specific.”

*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. To make column suggestions please email him at [bloening@snet.net](mailto:bloening@snet.net).*