

Ep #12: Boundaries



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With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

Ep #12: Boundaries

Welcome to The Life Coach School podcast, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hey everybody, what's up? Oh my gosh, you guys, how fun has it been for me to do this podcast? I had no idea. I would have done this a long time ago. I have loved, loved, loved hearing all of your feedback and getting all your emails and seeing all the comments that you're doing on the website. By the way, if you want to go and make a comment, it's www.thelifecoachschool.com/ whatever episode it is. This is episode 12, so if you want to go there and leave me some comments, today we're going to be talking about boundaries. This is something that comes up with so many of my clients, and mainly, what people think boundaries are, they aren't.

I'm going to go through them in some pretty close detail here and talk to you about boundary issues and some things that aren't boundary issues, so it's good to now. I talked about this a little bit before but I'm going to really spend some time talking about it today because it's something that is really related to what I talked about in the last episode, which was on manuals, and this is very different than that. This is boundaries. A lot of people think that what boundaries are, they are things that we do to control other people and that is not the case. Boundaries are a way that we take care of and protect ourselves. Boundaries are not something that we create for other people. We create them for ourselves.

Let's start and let me just give you a visualization that will really help with this. If you think about your house and living in your house and the boundary line you have around your home, then it's really clear what a boundary is. All of us have either a really clear boundary around ourselves or we don't, and when we don't have clear boundaries, then people don't know if they're violating them or not, because if you don't have a clear boundary set up, then people don't know where it is. The first thing that all

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of us need to do is be really clear with ourselves as to what our boundaries are. An example I can use is most of us have a boundary that we will not be physically struck by anybody else, right?

We don't go around telling people, "Hey, by the way, please don't hit me and if you do hit me, I'm going to leave or I'm going to call the police." We don't have to say that. It's one of those unspoken really clear boundaries that most of us have. That's true for a lot of us when it comes to verbal boundaries too. Many of us will not tolerate being yelled at by other people, and that's a pretty clear boundary for many of us. For some of us, it may not be as clear of a boundary, and what it means to have a boundary is that you're really clear as to what you will stand for basically in your life and what you will expose yourself to. Once you have these really clear boundaries, then you can speak them to other people and you can talk to them about them when necessary.

The only time you need to use a boundary or talk about a boundary is when there's been a clear boundary violation. Now, if you're picturing the image of the house and you have this house and you have this boundary line around your house, if somebody comes into your backyard or if someone comes into your house, they have crossed into your boundary. That is a boundary violation. At that point, you can either freak out, shoot them, yell at them, scream at them or let them know, "Hey, I'm going to call the police." This is how I'm going to handle this. You need to leave, we inform them that there has been a boundary violation and then we let them know what we are going to do because they have crossed our boundary.

It is the same in life. We're not talking about the physical boundary of our house, but we're talking about the boundary of our emotional life, of our physical life. What a boundary is it's a really clear request of somebody else with a really clear consequence. Now, the word consequence there, it can be misunderstood, and so I want to make sure that you really are clear. The consequence is something that you will do. It is a behavior that you will take. Let me give you an example of a really clear boundary. If you smoke a cigarette in my house, I am going to ask you to leave my house. That's a

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pretty clear boundary. We don't really allow smoking here. This is what I will do if you smoke.

Now it's really important to remember that the person that you're making the request of can continue to do whatever they would like to do. Human beings can smoke cigarettes if they want. It is not a boundary violation until they come into our home or come into our car or come into our space, and notice how when I make the request, "Hey, if you continue to do that.", the consequence is the behavior that I will take. It's not you need to do this or you are going to die, something crazy like that. It's always you're making the request and then you're explaining what you will do.

Another example is if you raise your voice to me at the dinner table, when you're at someone's house as a guest, I am going to leave. If you continue to berate me on the phone, I am going to hang up. This can be really clear in working situations too. Even with people that are your superiors at work, it's really important to establish clear boundaries there as well. If you continue to raise your voice at me, I'm going to walk out of the room until you stop raising your voice at me, or if you continue to raise your voice at me, I am going to go speak with the HR Department because this is not something that I feel comfortable in this environment.

You make the request, you give them the option to do whatever they would like to do, and then you follow through on that request. A lot of people want to make requests with things that are not boundary violations. Here's what I mean by that. Some people will say, "Well, I would really like my husband to take out the garbage, or I would really like my husband to be more romantic, or I would like my boss to give me more praise, or I would like my girlfriends to call me back when I call them." Those are not boundary violations. Those are not boundary issues, and therefore, boundaries are not appropriate in that situation.

If for example, when you call your girlfriend, if she doesn't call you back, she has not crossed a boundary. She hasn't come in to your property and to your space, so then that is not a boundary violation and it's not

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appropriate for you to make a request with the consequence there. That's more of a manual issue. You would prefer that she call you back, but because it's not something that's infringing on your rights basically or your space, then it's not appropriate for a boundary. Now you could always say to her, and this is something I talked about in the last session, you can always say to her, "Hey, I would really love it if you'd call me back.", but just don't hang your happiness on what she does, because then we've moved in to trying to manipulate and control someone else's behavior for our own benefit. That's very different than somebody crossing into your life and into your boundary, and violating it and making it necessary for you to create a consequence.

Let's use another example. Let's say that somebody keeps coming by your house unannounced and knocking on the door and wanting to come in and see your kids. Let's say that this person is your mother in law. This is actually a real client situation that I had with one of my clients recently. The mother in law would just come by, knock on the door, want to come in, and in fact, sometimes, she wouldn't knock on the door. She would just come in to see the kids, and this is clearly a boundary violation. This is where it sounds like it's not clear that there's even a boundary there because my client just kept letting her come in, didn't say anything to her about it. Now, she needs to let her mother in law know that there is a boundary there, first and foremost, and that's really important because the mother in law may not even have any idea that that's a boundary issue and that it's something that is important to my client that she understands.

The first thing you say is, "Hey, I'd really appreciate it if before you come by, you give me a call." That's the first part, we've made the request, and the consequence is the behavior that we'll take, "If you're unable to call, the door will probably be locked and I may not be able to answer it or I may not answer it, just so you know. It would be better for you and for me that you call ahead and then I can let you know if it's a good time to come over and that way, it's not like you're going to come over and have a locked door and not be able to get in the house or I may be working on something else and not answer the door." That is a very valid boundary.

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Now, here's the tricky part. Most of us want to have clear boundaries, but we don't want to follow through on the consequence part. We don't want to take the action that we say we're going to take, and that is the most important part of the boundary because otherwise, that boundary won't be taken seriously. There won't be any validity to that boundary because even though you've stated it's there, you're not following through on establishing it.

In this example, my client was going to have a really hard time locking that door and not answering it when the mother in law came by because of how she imagined the mother in law would feel. This is why boundary work is so, so important, because as long as she's not establishing a clear boundary there and as long as she is not taking care of following through on it, what's happening is the mother in law is coming over, she's coming into the house and my client is getting filled with resentment and anger and frustration, and she's biting her lip and she is ultimately creating a lot of resistance and a lot of problems in this relationship with her mother in law. Now, her mother in law is totally oblivious to this. She's coming over just to see the kids. She may assume, "Oh my gosh, my daughter in law loves this. She loves that I'm coming over and playing with the kids and aren't I a great mother in law?"

My client is really creating a lot of unnecessary resentment and drama, but the alternative is that she has to speak her truth and then follow through on it, and I will tell you what, this is hard work. I have done this work myself. This is hard work because this is the work of true intimacy. This is the work of really honoring ourselves and what's authentic and true for us, and being willing to let other people interpret it and make it mean what they will. We can explain to them, "Hey, this has nothing to do with you as a person. We love having you here. We'd love spending time with you.", but what this is about is me planning my day and just really wanting to know when you'll be here so I can prepare myself and be ready, and then the rest of the time, I can just know that I'm not going to have anyone knocking on the door and not possibly being ready. It's really important for

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me to know when people are going to be coming over to my house so I can plan for it.

These kinds of conversations are so difficult for so many people, so what we do is we stay in these relationships where we're pretending, and then we wonder why our relationships aren't deep quality, intimate relationships because we're all just smiling at each other, pretending that everything is great, and not really telling each other the truth and not having the conversations that really matter. This is something that I really, really encourage because I feel like it gets us locked into relationships that end up blowing up and having so much drama involved because what happened is we blame the other person for our lack of boundaries. My client is sitting around complaining about her mother in law, raging to her husband about it, complaining, constantly seething every time she comes over.

What she's doing is creating this for herself and in her relationship, and that ultimately is just going to explode. The mother in law is either completely oblivious because my client hasn't been taking care of her boundaries, or she's doing it on purpose but why not, because there's no consequence. There's no reason not to. One of the best books I've read on boundaries is a book called *Boundaries* by Henry Cloud, and in this book, he talks about the idea that we have to love ourselves enough, we have to honor ourselves enough to tell the people in our life the truth, and to set proper boundaries, not just for the sake of ourselves and our own honor, but also for the sake of the person that is doing the boundary violating.

We need to take full responsibility because when we start blaming other people and resenting other people, not only are we powerless but we've created this unnecessary conflict with somebody else. I would say I did some boundary work with my families and people in my family, and I would say it is the most difficult thing because, as Henry Cloud says, you have to be willing to sacrifice the relationship if there is a consistent boundary violation, and when you're dealing with your mother in law or your mother or your father or someone else in your family that means a lot to

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you, are you willing to let that person walk away from you versus letting them violate your boundaries?

I know for me, some of the work that I had to do was telling people like someone in my family, "This is what's important to me. I need you to understand this." Of course, the person didn't need to understand it and they didn't understand it, but regardless, I still stated it and I said, "This is important to me. This is my boundary, and if you don't honor my boundary, I just won't pick up the phone. I just won't answer the door because it's that important to me." When I did this in my life, it really did sacrifice me having that relationship. That person was so upset that they didn't talk to me for a long time. It was very challenging, but I will say there was this level of I think honesty and purity that came over me, where I just felt clean. I felt like, "Aah." What happened is even though it was very difficult for me to have this person be upset, I knew that I wasn't ultimately responsible for their feelings. I was just responsible for mine, and I was the one creating all this resentment. I was hating on this person.

I was so frustrated with this person. What happened after that was we came back together basically as family members in a new and healthy way that had the established boundaries. This person doesn't necessarily like that. This person may want there to be fewer boundaries so they can do whatever they want, but there is that boundary that has been established and is respected. Let me tell you what's amazing about that. I no longer have any resentment. I no longer have any frustration, so when I am with this person, because I have honored my boundaries, I'm in a space of much more love and connection and intimacy.

Even though I was in a situation where I had to risk the relationship, kind of all or nothing, what ended up happening is something so much more true and real and honest between us. One of the things that comes up again and again for us is this idea that if we tell people the truth, and we're not telling them our opinion of them, we're not attacking them. We're not yelling at them. We are simply telling them our truth from our perspective. Now, if they choose to use that to be hurt or if they choose to

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use that to be upset, that honestly is not on us. Our truth isn't about them. Our truth is for us, and that is one thing that I did say when I was establishing my boundaries. This isn't against you at all. This is for me and for my family.

That was the same thing that happened with my client because she was so worried about being viewed as bad, and being viewed as rude and being viewed as uncaring. I told her it's so interesting because that's how you act, when you don't have proper boundaries. When she comes over unannounced, you are rude to her and you do act frustrated and you do snap at her, and then you have this pasted on smile that is just seething underneath, and you're doing those exact things because you don't have a proper boundary, and the reason why you're not setting the proper boundary is because you're afraid of doing those things. You can see how it's catch 22, but I will say when you set a proper boundary, when you tell someone the truth about yourself and about where your boundary is, that opens up the space for honesty and truth.

Let me just say this. There are some important things to remember when you're setting a boundary. One of them is all boundaries can come from a place of love, so if you're frustrated and angry and mad, my suggestion is you work through those emotions, you write down your feelings about them and you work through those until you can get to a space of calm, peace and love, before you ever talk to someone else. The reason why you are frustrated and resentful and upset is not because of this other person, not because the person is coming to your door and trying to get in and coming over unannounced. The reason you're frustrated and resentful is because you don't have proper boundaries and you haven't been speaking the truth. When you own that and you really take that on as your responsibility, then from that place, you can clean up those emotions, then you can have a conversation with someone else and you can tell them how you feel, what your boundary is and what you will do if the boundary isn't honored.

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Really important, this is not manipulating someone's behavior. This is not expecting them to change for your sake, and that's the hardest part is I've worked with clients before that they set boundaries with people and they think, "Well, of course this person should honor my boundary. I've told them what it is.", and a lot of times people don't honor them, so then you have to follow through on that consequence. The following through on the consequence can sometimes come from a place of real frustration and anger, because you're like, "What the hell, I asked you not to come by. You came by and now you're forcing me to lock the door." They're not forcing you to do that. That is your boundary and your consequence, and try to get yourself in a space where you can do that from love.

When this happens, this is how I take care of myself, this is for me, not against you. Make sure you're really clear with your boundaries. The example with the mother in law coming by, let's say you do lock the door and let's say the mother in law does come by and you don't answer the door. Well then maybe the mother in law calls you later, and you have an option there. You can be furious that she came by, "Look, I told you not to come by. You came by so I had to lock the door. I mean I don't know why you're calling me.", and being angry, or you could say, "I understand how you're feeling. I just want to remind you that I talked to you about this before. This is the boundary I'm honoring. I'm happy that you want to come by and see the kids but it's just not something that we're going to be doing without some pre-arranged appointment."

You can do it from a place of love and you don't have to ridicule anybody or make them wrong or bad because of their behavior. I will tell you what, that's a beautiful thing because a lot of times, people have learned how to violate your boundaries because you haven't had any, and so they're going to keep doing what they've always been doing of course, and you just continually honoring yourself and taking care of yourself by following through on your boundaries will change that for you.

Here's how you know if you're not doing boundaries in a really proper way. If you don't feel peaceful, it's not time to set a boundary. If you don't

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feel loving towards the other person, if you are trying to manipulate their behavior for your own benefits so you won't have to follow through on any kind of consequence, if you are blaming and negative and frustrated, if you are trying to delete someone from your life. Let me expand on that just a little bit. A lot of my clients will come to me and say, "Okay, I'm ready to set some boundaries so here's what I'm going to do; I'm basically going to remove this person from my life. I'm done; I don't want to deal with this anymore." That is not a boundary. That is an escape route. I understand the desire to delete people from your life, to not talk to them because they trigger you in a way that's difficult.

If you can just eliminate that person from your life, then you won't have to deal with what they bring up in you. I want to encourage you to explore the idea that the people in your life that trigger you the most can be your greatest teachers, and I know that sounds so clichéd and my clients get so annoyed with me when I say that, "Well, that's great, but I don't want this person as my teacher. I don't want this person in my life.", but the reason why you don't want the person in your life is either because you haven't learned how to set proper boundaries or you don't have them at all, so this person is able to violate your boundaries in such a way that you haven't been able to follow through on any kind of consequences and you haven't set them properly.

Those are the people in your life that will give you an opportunity to learn how to be in relationship with people without having them violate your boundaries. You don't have to eliminate the person completely in order for that to happen, and you can notice that there is that temptation to just remove the person or you can really sit down and consider, "What can I learn from this relationship?", especially if it's a family member, somebody that really has been involved in your life for a long time. How can I use this as an opportunity to take care of myself and actually create some real authenticity in my relationship with this person through this conversation?

I think that it's challenging to be on the other side of that, then I will say that I've had people in my life that have set boundaries with me, and I

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will say it triggers also on the other side of that too, because we think, "Oh my gosh, I've done something bad. This person thinks I'm a bad person. This person doesn't want me in their life." We go through this drama around it, and if we can just stay present and notice, "Hey, look, this person has taken the time to tell me the truth about how they feel about something. They've told me how they have a boundary that I'm violating."

That's a pretty intimate challenging thing for most people to do, and the fact that this person felt like they could tell me that means, and it was probably pretty difficult for them to say that to me, that means there's something here. There's something important here. I will say I've seen it happen with my clients so many times and I've seen it happen in my own life so many times that when you're honest with someone and you're really clear with them what your boundaries are, then it's this established thing and it doesn't mean if they violate your boundaries, you have to eliminate them or it also doesn't mean that you have to get angry at them.

I have a girlfriend. She was always late to everything, and I told her, I said, "Hey, I just want to let you know that if I'm going to meet you for lunch or I'm going to meet you somewhere and you're more than 15 minutes late, I'm really genuinely just going to leave. I'm not just saying I'm going to leave, I'm just going to leave and I'm not going to be mad at you and I'm not going to be frustrated, but I'm just not going to wait." I actually planned on that happening. It's important enough for me to still have lunch with her, so in many instances, some of you may have just decided, "Look, I'm not going to make lunch plans with you anymore because you don't show up on time.", or "I'm only going to make lunch plans with you when there's other people involved and then you can just show up when you want.", or "I'm going to make lunch plans with you and if you're more than 15 minutes late, I'm just going to leave."

Now, I don't have to berate her. I don't have to tell her that she's wrong for being late. I don't have to make it mean that she's a horrible person or inconsiderate or doesn't respect my time. I don't have to make it any of that. All I need to do, instead of attacking her, is take care of me,

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and it leaves me in a space where that I don't have to be resentful and I don't have to be upset and I can just let her be who she is and I can work around it if I want to. I may decide at some point that I don't want to have lunch with her anymore, but I'm not there yet and I don't want to be there.

That's true for a lot of us. It's like I don't want to not have dinner with my dad but I'm going to let him know that if he brings up my mom and starts talking about her, that I'm going to leave. I'm going to ask him once to please stop and if he doesn't, I'm going to leave. That way, you set the boundaries from the beginning and you can maintain that relationship without having to say, "Well I'm not going to see my dad anymore because all he does is talk about my mom and so I don't want to be anywhere near him." Now, you've just completely blocked the opportunity to continue a relationship with your dad when there may be so many wonderful things there, but because you haven't set the boundary, now you don't even have him in your life at all because you've built up some resentment about him.

I just think that boundaries are the most amazing, wonderful and difficult things to implement. They are beautiful tools that we need to use in our life to create intimacy, not to block it. A boundary doesn't keep people out of our lives. A boundary just keeps people from violating important spaces in our lives, and when we have boundaries; the intimacy is increased, not decreased. The truth is told more often, not less often. I feel like I can tell, the people in my life that I have boundaries with, I can tell them, "Hey look, this is one of those boundary things for me. I'm just not feeling like it's okay for this to go on and I just want to let you know that if it happens, if you do that again, this is what's going to happen and I love you and I think you're magnificent.", instead of, "I can't believe you did that to me and that's so terrible and I hate you and I'm never talking to you again."

How many of us do that, and then we lose these relationships that are so important to us because of this all or nothing thinking. Now on the other flip side of that is we misuse our boundaries to try and manipulate people and get them to behave in a way that is much more manual oriented versus boundary oriented. Make sure that you recognize the only time you

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set a boundary with someone is when there's a boundary violation, someone has come in to your property and is violating it in some way, either emotionally or physically, and only then do you set a proper boundary, by making a request to someone and having a consequence that you are 100% willing to follow through on with love and with peace.

If you are able to do this, it will increase the intimacy in your life. It will increase the authenticity and the honesty in your life. If you are willing to have enough courage to honor yourself, tell the truth and ultimately, protect yourself from any boundary violation. I would love for you guys to go to the Comments section, www.thelifecoachschool.com/12, because this is episode 12 and ask me any questions you have about boundaries and whether you need to set one, whether you did set one, whether someone set one with you, what feelings you have coming up around boundaries, and you know, it doesn't have to be big boundaries. It can be little boundaries that you're setting in your life. I would love to hear about them and I would love to talk to you about them.

Head on over to the website, check out the Show Notes and tell me about your boundaries. Otherwise, I will talk to you all next week. Take care, have a good one. Bye bye.

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