



creating more intentional **BOUNDARIES**



the concept

In their more limited form, boundaries are for *keeping things in* and *keeping things out*. In their more expansive form, boundaries are the co-creative space between us and another—just the right amount of you meets just the right amount of the other. A poorly-designed boundary may keep too much out, or let too much in.

Our first experience of boundaries is for protection—and the way we apprehend what we are versus what the other is. It's how we discover ourselves in the midst of the overwhelming mix of the world.

But boundaries are not only for differentiation, they can also be the bridge between the world and us. Our best approach to the world. And unless we elevate our boundaries beyond *all or nothing*, our interface is not sophisticated enough to incorporate a super-rich mix.

Ultimately, we progress from setting low-level boundaries to designing the best spaces *in between*.



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Are you clear and intentional about your boundaries?

We all have boundaries that define our personal space in different situations. Whether they are physical, emotional, or mental, we maintain boundaries as a way to navigate our environment. If you lack clarity and intention about your boundaries, sharing space can often be confusing and uncomfortable for you and others.



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Are you sensitive to the boundaries of others?

Being sensitive to boundaries is an act of generosity—giving the other person freedom to be themselves, to shape their environment, and to cleanly enter and exit the space you share with them.



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Describe a relationship where the lack of a boundary let too much in, or a boundary you created kept too much out.

The best boundaries are dynamic and adaptable—they make the way between us and a changing world. But fear may compel us to create boundaries that needlessly isolate us from the world. Or at the other extreme—our desire to experience intimacy may result in us abandoning all boundaries and becoming muddled and overwhelmed.



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What boundary is enabling for you, but disabling for others—or enabling for others, but disabling for you?

Every person is a unique mix of personality characteristics, experiences, gifts, and liabilities. So, the best boundaries must be highly specialized—they must be designed based on the mix. It's easy to assume what works for you works for the other person. Many problems are rooted in the interface between people—not the differences in people.



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How are the boundaries of introverts and extroverts different?

Introverts and extroverts work together well when both understand the boundary tendencies of the other. But often, what's natural for one is unnatural for the other—and what's assumed by one is *anything but* by the other. A well-designed boundary between introverts and extroverts is resonant with the tendencies of both.



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How could you elevate an organizational boundary to limit bad stuff more, and good stuff less?

Some boundaries are a low-level compromise—they limit the undesirable *and the desirable*. But a more sophisticated boundary may transcend the assumed trade-off. This requires evolving and elevating.



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How could you elevate a personal boundary to limit bad stuff more, and good stuff less?

Some of the boundaries we assign high importance to mitigate known risk—but rule out unknown possibility. And we may be afraid to entertain the idea of life without them. It's important to continually question the merit and design of even our most treasured boundaries—and the boundaries others assume for us.



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What is the difference between transparency and disclosure?

The best transparency brings what is most helpful into view—whether it serves our self-interest or not. The worst disclosure shares everything about everything—whether it’s appropriate or not. Healthy boundaries are context sensitive—unconditional disclosure is context numb.



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Are your boundaries more about your needs or the needs of others?

The best boundaries are designed around your needs—and the needs of the other person. Boundaries that are too much about you—or too much about the other—limit the potential of a relationship. But the ideal balance in one relationship may be different than the ideal balance in another.



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What about your boundaries—or lack thereof—is often misunderstood by others?

The people we care about most may not be privy to the inner workings and merit of our boundaries. And they may assign motivation and meaning to our behavior that would come as a surprise to us—or even be wholly counter to the way we feel about them. Because of this, it's wise to check in often with the valued people in our lives to see if what's *working for us* is also *working for them*.



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*What's the best intersection of boundaries,
values, and beliefs in a person you know?
What's the worst?*

Our values and beliefs are foundational to our boundaries. But it's tempting to increasingly assert a boundary without critically examining the foundational elements from which it stems. As if the boundary has unquestionable merit on its own. This lack of neutral examination can create disabling fundamentalism—or in the extreme, a permanent chasm between us and the world.

A vibrant, stylized illustration of a landscape. In the upper right, a large red hand holds a white number '12'. Below it, a rainbow arches across the sky. In the center, a woman in a purple dress and a man in a purple suit carry a large purple square. The foreground features a large, textured orange globe with various colored trees and clouds. The background is a bright blue sky with white and orange clouds.

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What's a well-designed boundary you've created that, if adopted by others, would serve the organization most?

Good boundaries that come naturally for us may not come as easily for others. But we may be hesitant to speak up—and feel it's not our place to step in. Just as with any other high-level skill, the organization misses out when we don't help others master the things we do best.