



## **Setting Work and Life Boundaries**

### **Own the job; don't let the job own you.**

When you work with a group of people, whether you are the CEO or you work for someone else, setting boundaries can carry risks. If you work for a company that frowns upon employees taking their full vacation allotment or leaving earlier than the norm to pick up children at daycare, bucking the prevailing unstated rules may lead to unpleasant consequences. Think about the risks of having your job overwhelm you: poor health, conflict with your spouse and burnout. Are those consequences a fair tradeoff for a bigger bonus or a promotion?

If you are the CEO and you have an employee whose needs are outside of the norm, consider the options. Would this employee be able to job share with another person? Would it be possible for the employee to come in a bit early? Look at your options; make sure that your organization is not so rigid that it limits your employment pool.

Depending on the particulars of your job and your company's culture, your ability to balance work demands with your personal life may be quite doable or it could be limited. The most important thing is to be aware of the tradeoffs you are making as you prioritize the time spent on work, family, social activities, exercise, hobbies, etc. We can get so wrapped up in our professional lives that we don't fully realize what we're sacrificing in our personal lives until we reach a point of crisis.

As employees go through different stages of their life, their ability and willingness to put in long hours may vary. When we are in our 20's and have not yet started a family, for instance, 70-hour workweeks may not have been a burden. They are when we are raising young children. I advise taking periodic assessments, say, once a year, of where your employees are in their careers and in their lives. Using this information, decide whether the work situation is appropriate to their life goals and your company's mission.

What may have been a great job three years ago may no longer be so hot even though the job itself has changed little. It may be that their lifestyle has changed and the job now creates too many work-life conflicts. You may need to change the requirements of the job. You can negotiate with the employee to reduce the amount of work-related travel in order to meet some of their personal needs. Failing that, it might be time to recommend a new position at your firm or have the employee start looking for one elsewhere. If you are a business owner, as your priorities and lifestyle change, it may be time to delegate more responsibility to your employees and/or tell clients that you are unavailable more often.

### **Setting priorities**



To avoid having your job completely take over your life, make a list of weekly activities outside of work that you need to sustain your well-being and healthy state of mind. These may include:

- At least one weekend afternoon with your kids
- One evening out with your spouse
- An hour of exercise every other day
- At least one relaxed, unhurried meal a day
- A few hours spent on recreation or a hobby that you enjoy

Schedule these activities into your day planner in ink. Treat them the same as an important meeting with clients that can't be canceled unless there's a darn good reason.

### **Negotiation and trade-offs**

Now comes the hard part, negotiating with your boss for a more balanced schedule or explaining to your employees why you won't be available during certain periods of the week. Before you have this talk, keep in mind that, though it carries some risk, the

consequences of not changing the status quo also carry risk. Don't be afraid to take some risks when necessary.

When you have one of these conversations with a supervisor, it is probably best to start by accentuating the positive. Explain what you like about your job before going into the negatives. Present the changes to your job requirements that are necessary for you to remain productive. Make the point that you will serve clients better when you are fresh and undistracted by work/life conflict issues. Many managers are fairly enlightened about these issues today; you may be surprised at how amenable to change yours is.

If you're a business owner, particularly a founder of a start-up, you have different issues to deal with than if you work for someone else. As your business grows, demands on your time and the nature of your role changes. For many, delegating responsibility; doesn't come easily. In order to reduce the demands on you, you have to trust your people to make some decisions. That means accepting the idea that they may make mistakes from time to time.



My advice is to use those mistakes as learning opportunities. Do not demean or holler at your staff. Screaming and ranting is guaranteed to cause problems and reduce trust and communication. It is critical that your staff be well trained so that when they assume more responsibility, their mistakes won't be disastrous to the company.

As far as dealing with clients, you may be surprised. Many will respect you if you are firm in setting limits on demands for your time. Though we want to treat clients as well as possible, some make unreasonable demands. You may have to risk losing their business. If they are unreasonable, however, losing them could be a blessing.

**Make A Commitment:** I will learn from my mistakes.

**Deadline:** \_\_\_\_\_