

Tips for Staff Members on Setting Boundaries

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At the staff level, you attend to many expected and unexpected tasks on a daily basis. In addition to overseeing the duties of people in your working space, which may include the classroom, the kitchen, the office, or the hallways, you might also oversee tasks that need to get done outside of the school building. All of this is done to ensure everyone is fulfilling their responsibilities to help provide for the students, families, and staff you serve.

But with so much to accomplish, how do you set realistic expectations for yourself and for others? Well, you call a **C.A.B.** (Conversations, Advocacy, and Boundaries).

Conversations

- When an expectation is set, engage in conversation.
 - Ask yourself where did this expectation come from?
 - Did it get passed down to you from someone in a higher position?
 - Did it come from an expectation you've quietly (maybe subconsciously) placed on yourself?
- If it's an expectation that will impact the students, get feedback from them.
- If it's a self-imposed expectation, try to identify its origin. "Talk back" to it.
- If it is an expectation that was passed down to you, schedule a meeting.
 - Prior to the meeting, encourage yourself. After all, we live in a culture where it's unfathomable to question authority. And, let's be honest: fear is real. Fear of rejection. Fear of being reprimanded. Fear of being considered anything other than a team player. And, guess what? Catastrophic thinking is fear's not-so-distant cousin. Trust me. I've been there. Fearing and pondering worst-case scenarios simply because I wanted to discuss something. That fear often caused me to hold conversations in my head or with my teacher friends. But those conversations rarely lead to solutions. So instead, think of all of the positive outcomes that can take place just by initiating this meeting. In the end, you'll realize those purposeful conversations aren't so scary after all.
 - Present questions that help you clarify the expectation(s) and/or shift the conversation into forward-thinking mode. In doing so, you help create an atmosphere that says, "I am a partner in this. I am not here to resist arbitrarily but to collaborate on a solution that works for everyone." With each conversation I've had like this, the result has been positive each time. Each positive result can cause these conversations to occur more often and ultimately become part of the school culture.

- *Why* is your BFF - your best forward friend. Use it. Even if you are worried about how the person will receive it, ask *why* in a genuinely inquisitive way. Doing so compels the other person to clarify, inquire for themselves if the expectation is hard and fast, or reset to have a more realistic expectation.
- Follow up about the process that helped you meet/not meet the expectation.
- At a subsequent meeting, discuss what needs to change moving forward, and within your means, change it.
- Reflect alone or with others about the process that helped you meet/not meet the expectation. Doing so informs everyone's future goal setting.
- If it is an expectation you've set for yourself, list your daily responsibilities and duties and mark off what's doable within your scheduled workday.
 - Where will this new expectation fit?
 - Can something be replaced?

Advocacy

- Request time to reflect before making a decision. The amount of time requested may vary. From experience, I've learned that most are willing to grant that time.
- Learn how to speak grace to yourself. (After all, you just made a list that shows what you do is not doable within the scheduled workday. The more you practice this with yourself, the more you'll be able to do it with others, including your colleagues and students.
- When you are tired, sick, in need of taking care of someone, speak it. Speak it to yourself and to others. Then, honor it by taking the time needed to tend to it.
- Advocate for more rest and more requests for extensions; kick the crafting thrill of sending late-night emails signifying that a deadline was magically met in the middle of the night. Less rest leads to stress and burnout, not healthily-earned promotions.

Boundaries

- At least one day per week set a time to leave and leave.
- Say no to a request when you really feel and mean no.
- Say yes when you really feel and mean yes AND include parameters.
- Say, "What would you like me to take off my plate, in order to meet this new request?"
- Set aside certain lunchtimes/dates that you are unavailable.
- Learn about the difference between when you are physically present vs. when you are mentally and emotionally available. Note the difference and honor it.
- Schedule emails to be sent during the hours you want people to have access to your support - preferably work hours. In a subtle, yet powerful way, it reinforces your boundaries about personal time.

Initiating conversations about expectations and setting boundaries does not make you less of a teacher or worker, less caring, nor less willing to help the students or

the school succeed. The two are not directly correlated. Yes, you can be the most caring AND limit access to you. Yes, you can be involved AND set parameters. In the end, if we are all doing our part and calling a cab more often than not, then maybe, just maybe, it'll ultimately carry us from where we are now to where we're trying to go in education. To a place that requires less magic and more real. To a place where staff are healthily and effectively rewriting and living out the new narrative of setting and meeting realistic expectations in education.