

THE BOUNDARIES SAMPLER

Seven Excerpts from the
Life-Changing Boundaries Books Series.



WHEN TO SAY YES, HOW TO SAY NO
TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE.

THE BOUNDARIES SAMPLER

Written by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

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WHEN TO SAY YES
HOW TO SAY NO
TO TAKE CONTROL
OF YOUR LIFE



BOUNDARIES

DR. HENRY CLOUD & DR. JOHN TOWNSEND

What Does a Boundary Look Like?

Excerpted from Chapter 2 of Boundaries

The parents of a twenty-five-year-old man came to see me (Dr. Townsend) with a common request: they wanted me to “fix” their son, Bill. When I asked where Bill was, they answered, “Oh, he didn’t want to come.” “Why?” I asked.

“Well, he doesn’t think he has a problem,” they replied. “Maybe he’s right,” I said, to their surprise. “Tell me about it.” They recited a history of problems that had begun at a very young age. Bill had never been “quite up to snuff” in their eyes. In recent years he had exhibited problems with drugs and an inability to stay in school and find a career.

It was apparent that they loved their son very much and were heartbroken over the way he was living. They had tried everything they knew to get him to change and live a responsible life, but all had failed. He was still using drugs, avoiding responsibility, and keeping questionable company.

They told me that they had always given him everything he needed. He had plenty of money at school so “he wouldn’t have to work and he would have plenty of time for study and a social life.” When he flunked out of one school, or stopped going to classes, they were more than happy to do everything they could to get him into another school, “where it might be better for him.”

After they had talked for a while, I responded: “I think your son is right. He doesn’t have a problem.” You could have mistaken their expression for a snapshot; they stared at me in disbelief for a full minute. Finally the father said, “Did I hear you right? You don’t think he has a problem?”

“That’s correct,” I said. “He doesn’t have a problem. You do. He can do pretty much whatever he wants, no problem. You pay, you fret, you worry, you plan, you exert energy to keep him going. He doesn’t have a problem because you have taken it from him. Those things should be his problem, but as it now stands, they are yours. Would you like for me to help you help him to have some problems?”

They looked at me like I was crazy, but some lights were beginning to go on in their heads.

“What do you mean, ‘help him to have some problems?’” his mother asked.

“Well,” I explained, “I think that the solution to this problem would be to clarify some boundaries so that his actions cause him problems and not you.”

“What do you mean, ‘boundaries?’” the father asked.

“Look at it this way. It is as if he’s your neighbor, who never waters his lawn. But, whenever you turn on your sprinkler system, your water only falls on his lawn. Your grass is turning brown and dying, but Bill looks down at his green grass and thinks to himself, ‘My yard is doing fine.’ That’s how your son’s life is. He doesn’t study, or plan, or work, yet he has a nice place to live, plenty of money, and all the rights of a family member who is doing his part.

“If you would define the property lines a little better, if you would fix the sprinkler system so that the water would fall on your lawn, and if he didn’t water his own lawn, he would have to live in dirt. He might not like that after a while.”

“As it stands now, he is irresponsible and happy, and you are responsible and miserable. A little boundary clarification would do the trick. You need some fences to keep his problems out of your yard and in his, where they belong.”

“Isn’t that a bit cruel, just to stop helping like that?” the father asked. “Has helping him helped?” I asked. His look told me that he was beginning to understand.

Invisible Property Lines and Responsibility

In the physical world, boundaries are easy to see. Fences, signs, walls, moats with alligators, manicured lawns, or hedges are all physical boundaries. In their differing appearances, they give the same message: THIS IS WHERE MY PROPERTY BEGINS. The owner of the property is legally responsible for what happens on his or her property. Non-owners are not responsible for the property.

Physical boundaries mark a visible property line that someone holds the deed to. You can go to the county courthouse and find out exactly where those boundaries of responsibility are and whom to call if you have business there.

In the spiritual world, boundaries are just as real, but often harder to see. Our goal is to help you define your intangible boundaries and to recognize them as an ever present reality that can increase your love and save your life. In reality, these boundaries define your soul, and they help you to guard it and maintain it (see Proverbs 4:23).

Me and Not Me

Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership. Knowing what I am to own and take responsibility for gives me freedom. If I know where my yard begins and ends, I am free to do with it what I like. Taking responsibility for my life opens up many different options. However, if I do not “own” my life, my choices and options become very limited.

Think how confusing it would be if someone told you to “guard this property diligently, because I will hold you responsible for what happens here,” and then did not tell you the boundaries of the property. Or they did not give you the means with which to protect the property? This would be not only confusing but also potentially dangerous.

This is exactly what happens to us emotionally and spiritually, however. God designed a world where we all live “within” our- selves; that is, we inhabit our own souls, and we are responsible for the things that make up “us.” “The heart knows its own bitterness, and no one shares its joy” (see Proverbs 14:10). We have to deal with what is in our soul, and boundaries help us to define what that is. If we are not shown the parameters, or are taught wrong parameters, we are in for much pain.

The Bible tells us clearly what our parameters are and how to protect them, but often our family, or other past relationships, confuses us about our parameters. In addition to

showing us what we are responsible for, boundaries help us to define what is not on our property and what we are not responsible for. We are not, for example, responsible for other people. Nowhere are we commanded to have “other-control,” although we spend a lot of time and energy trying to get it!

To and For

We are responsible to others and for ourselves. “Carry each other’s burdens,” says Galatians 6:2, “and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” This verse shows our responsibility to one another.

Many times, others have “burdens” that are too big to bear. They do not have enough strength, resources, or knowledge to carry the load, and they need help. Denying ourselves to do for others what they cannot do for themselves is showing the sacrificial love of Christ. This is what Christ did for us. He did what we could not do for ourselves; he saved us. This is being responsible “to.”

On the other hand, verse 5 says that “each one should carry his own load.” Everyone has responsibilities that only he or she can carry. These things are our own particular “load” that we need to take daily responsibility for and work out. No one can do certain things for us. We have to take ownership of certain aspects of life that are our own “load.”

The Greek words for burden and load give us insight into the meaning of these texts. The Greek word for burden means “excess burdens,” or burdens that are so heavy that they weigh us down. These burdens are like boulders. They can crush us. We shouldn’t be expected to carry a boulder by ourselves! It would break our backs. We need help with the boulders—those times of crisis and tragedy in our lives.

In contrast, the Greek word for load means “cargo,” or “the burden of daily toil.” This word describes the everyday things we all need to do. These loads are like knapsacks. Knapsacks are possible to carry. We are expected to carry our own. We are expected to deal with our own feelings, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as the responsibilities God has given to each one of us, even though it takes effort.

Problems arise when people act as if their “boulders” are daily loads, and refuse help, or as if their “daily loads” are boulders they shouldn’t have to carry. The results of these two instances are either perpetual pain or irresponsibility.

Lest we stay in pain or become irresponsible, it is very important to determine what “me” is, where my boundary of responsibility is and where someone else’s begins. We will define what we are responsible for later in this chapter. For now let’s look more closely at the nature of boundaries.

Good In, Bad Out

Boundaries help us to distinguish our property so that we can take care of it. They help us to “guard our heart with all diligence.” We need to keep things that will nurture us inside our fences and keep things that will harm us outside. In short, boundaries help us keep the good in and the bad out. They guard our treasures (see Matthew 7:6) so that people will not steal them. They keep the pearls inside, and the pigs outside.

Sometimes, we have bad on the inside and good on the outside. In these instances, we need to be able to open up our boundaries to let the good in and the bad out. In other words, our fences need gates in them. For example, if I find that I have some pain or sin within, I need to open up and communicate it to God and others, so that I can be healed. Confessing pain and sin helps to “get it out” so that it does not continue to poison me on the inside (see 1 John 1:9; James 5:16; Mark 7:21–23).

And when the good is on the outside, we need to open our gates and “let it in.” Jesus speaks of this phenomenon in “receiving” him and his truth (see Revelation 3:20; John 1:12). Other people have good things to give us, and we need to “open up to them” (see 2 Corinthians 6:11 – 13). Often we will close our boundaries to good things from others, staying in a state of deprivation.

In short, boundaries are not walls. The Bible does not say that we are to be “walled off” from others; in fact, it says that we are to be “one” with them (see John 17:11). We are to be in community with them. But in every community, all members have their own space and property. The important thing is that property lines be permeable enough to allow passing and strong enough to keep out danger.

Often, when people are abused while growing up, they reverse the function of boundaries and keep the bad in and the good out. When Mary was growing up she suffered abuse from her father. She was not encouraged to develop good boundaries. As a result, she would close herself off, holding the pain inside; she would not open up to express her hurt and get it out of her soul. She also would not open up to let support from the outside in to heal her. In addition, she would continually allow others to “dump” more pain into her soul. Consequently, when she came in for help, she was carrying a lot of pain, still being abused, and “walled off” from support from the outside.

She had to reverse the ways her boundaries worked. She needed fences that were strong enough to keep the bad out and gates in those fences to let out the bad already in her soul and let in the good she desperately needed.

The concept of boundaries comes from the very nature of God. God defines himself as a distinct, separate being, and he is responsible for himself. He defines and takes responsibility for his personality by telling us what he thinks, feels, plans, allows, will not allow, likes, and dislikes.

He also defines himself as separate from his creation and from us. He differentiates himself from others. He tells us who he is and who he is not. For example, he says that he is love and that he is not darkness (see 1 John 4:16; 1:6).

In addition, he has boundaries within the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one, but at the same time they are distinct persons with their own boundaries. Each one has his own personhood and responsibilities, as well as a connection and love for one another (see John 17:24).

God also limits what he will allow in his yard. He confronts sin and allows consequences for behavior. He guards his house and will not allow evil things to go on there. He invites

people in who will love him, and he lets his love flow outward to them at the same time. The “gates” of his boundaries open and close appropriately.

In the same way he gave us his “likeness” (see Genesis 1:26), he gave us personal responsibility within limits. He wants us to “rule and subdue” the earth and to be responsible stewards over the life he has given us. To do that, we need to develop boundaries like God’s.

What’s Within My Boundaries?

The story of the Good Samaritan is a model of correct behavior in many dimensions. It is a good illustration of boundaries—when they should be both observed and violated. Imagine for a moment how the story might read if the Samaritan were a boundaryless person.

You know the story. A man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was mugged. The robbers stripped him and beat him, leaving him half dead. A priest and Levite passed by on the other side of the road, ignoring the hurt man, but a Samaritan took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day the Samaritan gave the innkeeper some money and said, “Look after him. When I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.”

Let’s depart from the familiar story here. Suppose the injured man wakes up at this point in the story and says:

“What? You’re leaving?”

“Yes, I am. I have some business in Jericho I have to attend to,” the Samaritan replies.

“Don’t you think you’re being selfish? I’m in pretty bad shape here. I’m going to need someone to talk to. How is Jesus going to use you as an example? You’re not even acting like a Christian, abandoning me like this in my time of need! Whatever happened to ‘Deny yourself?’”

“Why, I guess you’re right,” the Samaritan says. “That would be uncaring of me to leave you here alone. I should do more. I will postpone my trip for a few days.”

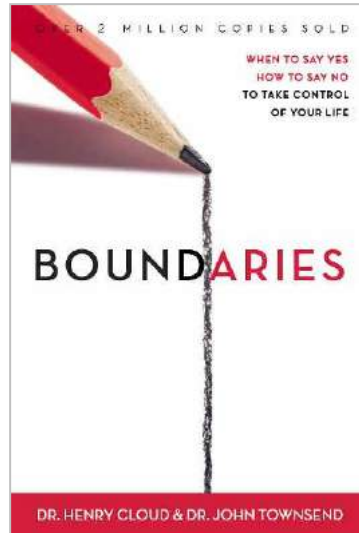
So he stays with the man for three days, talking to him and making sure that he is happy and content. On the afternoon of the third day, there’s a knock at the door and a messenger comes in. He hands the Samaritan a message from his business contacts in Jericho: “Waited as long as we could. Have decided to sell camels to another party. Our next herd will be here in six months.”

“How could you do this to me?” the Samaritan screams at the recovering man, waving the message in the air. “Look what you’ve done now! You’ve caused me to lose those camels that I needed for my business. Now I can’t deliver my goods. This may put me out of business! How could you do this to me?”

At some level this story may be familiar to all of us. We may be moved with compassion to give to someone in need, but then this person manipulates us into giving more than we want to give. We end up resentful and angry, having missed something we needed in our own life. Or, we may want more from someone else, and we pressure them until they give in. They give not out of their heart and free will, but out of compliance, and they resent us for what they give. Neither one of us comes out ahead.

To avoid these scenarios, we need to look at what falls within our boundaries, what we are responsible for. But taking care of what lies within our boundaries isn't easy; neither is allowing other people to take care of what lies within their boundaries. Setting boundaries and maintaining them is hard work. But, as you'll see in this book, the benefits are always worth it. Boundaries make life better.

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BEYOND BOUNDARIES

LEARNING TO
TRUST AGAIN IN
RELATIONSHIPS

DR. JOHN TOWNSEND
Foreword by **Dr. Henry Cloud**, coauthor of *Boundaries*

Don't Settle in Your Relationships

Excerpted sections from the Intro and Chapter 15 of Beyond Boundaries

If you don't want to settle in your relational life, this book is for you. Settling or adapting to less than you're capable of is often necessary in other aspects of our lives. Golf pros have to settle for playing the senior tour at some point. Individuals and families have to settle for spending less and adjusting their financial budgets to fit their circumstances. Parents eventually have to settle for releasing control of their children and allowing them to make their own choices. But in the world of relationships, we often settle far too soon.

When we experience a difficult and uncomfortable relationship—in marriage, dating, family, friendship, or work — we have a tendency to withdraw. That is natural and often necessary. Pain creates a withdrawal response to protect us from further discomfort or damage. When I was a teenager and started shaving, I used to nick my face with the razor. I hated that sharp slicing pain, and I would quickly pull the razor away and finish the job, staying away from that area of my face. I didn't look forward to my next shaving session and wanted to avoid it. But in time, I learned how to keep the razor at the right angle and to use a smooth stroke.

People settle in different ways, adapting to what they think is the best possible scenario. Some settle by staying in a pleasantly tolerable marriage — not adversarial, but not close. Some by dating a succession of people without ever making a commitment. Some by keeping even their most important friendships at a comfortable distance. And some by redirecting their energies and focus into activities rather than relationships.

Settling in relationships isn't the worst way to go through life. It's fairly painless and often predictable. There is some value in pain avoidance and predictability, but it is far from how you are designed to live. More than anything in the world, you are meant to connect and relate in deep, meaningful, and positive relationships—with both God and people. This is the means and the end of a good and happy life.

The challenge comes when our closest relationships become unhealthy or even toxic. At such times it's essential to establish healthy relational boundaries to protect ourselves. When Henry Cloud and I wrote about this issue two decades ago in our book *Boundaries*, we had no idea how much interest people would have in the book, nor in the succeeding books on marriage, dating, parenting, teens, and having difficult conversations. But in conferences, radio interactions, emails, social network connections, and one-on-one conversations, we discovered that many Christians had no understanding of what the Bible teaches about personal responsibility, especially where it ends and where it begins.

Although they had learned a great deal about giving, caring, loving, sacrificing, and forgiving, they had little understanding about other significant issues—what they should and should not take ownership of in a relationship, what choices to fight for, and how not to enable toxic patterns such as addictions, sin, and abuse. We were happy to see so many people finally learning to say no when they needed to and finding the freedom of choice that God promises us: “It is for freedom that Christ set us free; stand firm, therefore, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). People were learning to make their own decisions, based on their own values, and were finding a great deal of happiness and fulfillment.

But over the years, a significant question emerged: Once I have had a relational problem and have had to set a limit, how do I know when to take a risk again with someone? This is a question driven by a desire for connectedness and relationship, which God embedded in every human being. By definition, learning to set appropriate limits causes a degree of separation between you and another person. It may mean staying within the relationship and not allowing someone else access to your deeper self. It may mean taking a timeout from the relationship. Or it may even mean ending the connection altogether, depending on the circumstances. Whatever the situation, people found that though they were happy with the freedom their boundaries provided, they still wanted connectedness and often didn't know how to reestablish it—in their existing relationship or a new one.

That is why this book is called *Beyond Boundaries*. It is designed to teach you how to identify and grow from what- ever went wrong in the relationship, help you to determine if someone is worthy of your trust now, and show you how to manage the process of opening up in a gradual and safe way. Once you have set your boundaries, when the time is right, you can go beyond the boundaries that have kept you protected and on the other side to also find great relationships, depth, and freedom in your connections, which is the place where God meant you to be all along.

A Vision of Life Beyond Boundaries

Here are a few examples of how I have seen people move beyond boundaries:

In the workplace. Glenn and Rich, both friends of mine, were partners in an investment firm. Things got difficult between them, and the situation didn't draw out the best in the two. They blamed each other, lost trust, and eventually dissolved the partnership. I was saddened by this, not only because I liked both men, but also because I knew they were a great team. However, their self-imposed boundaries with each other gave them both time to reflect and grow. They practiced the principles in this book, and within a few years they were collaborating on a project together again.

In marriage. Teresa and Keith were in a twelve-year marriage that was a train wreck. Keith was verbally harsh and self-centered; Teresa was needy and afraid of conflict. When I started seeing them as a couple, it was clear that though they cared about each other and the marriage, they were alienated and felt hopeless about the future.

In the course of the counseling, Teresa had to set clear boundaries with Keith. When he became harsh and critical, Teresa usually complied and gave in just to keep the peace and at least have some connection with him. But she learned to tell him clearly, "I care about us, but this behavior hurts me and isn't acceptable. If you won't be kinder to me, I'll go to another room and may even ask you to leave the house until you choose to stop this." And Teresa had to do that for a while.

Gradually, Keith began to change inside. He softened up and connected to Teresa. Uncertain if the change was authentic, she did not immediately become vulnerable with him. But over time they developed a real closeness with each other and today are a seasoned and intimate couple who enjoy their life together.

In families. Lindsay's mom drove her crazy. Though Lindsay was married and a mother herself, her mom persisted in trying to control and mother Lindsay. When she visited Lindsay's home, her mom critiqued her parenting. Lindsay would spend hours with her mom, who was lonely and had few friends, only to hear her mom tell Lindsay she wasn't with her enough.

Finally, Lindsay had to set a boundary. She told her mom they couldn't see each other as much. Lindsay needed some time to develop better ways to cope with her mom on a healthier level. And though her mom never really understood why this was so, Lindsay was able to reenter the relationship with more energy, clarity, and even love for her mom.

In my own life. When I was in my grad school years, I had a friend, Dan, whom I didn't treat as a good friend. I spent time with him when I felt like it, but when it was inconvenient, I was unavailable. I would find some excuse to not go out to dinner or on a double date with our girlfriends. I'm not proud of this, but it is a reality, and I think I am a different person now. Anyway, it took a while and a lot of distance between us, but Dan and I became friends again, and the relationship is much more mutual and balanced than it was before.

My prayer is that the stories, insights, and skills presented in *Beyond Boundaries* will help you to move beyond your own withdrawals and move back into taking some relational risks, the purpose of which is intimacy. Although there are real risks and there will always be the possibility of hurt, it is possible to make the risks manageable, reasonable, and doable. You may have to settle, however, for less than the other person is willing and able to do. But if you do settle, the limiting factor won't be you.

You Need to Need

You have needs, and you cannot meet them all on your own. You need someone to listen, to give in practical ways, to advise, and to help you with decisions. This is normal life. Being vulnerable with someone places demands on that person. This is the weight of relationship. You bear the weight of those who are important to you, and they bear your, willingly and cheerfully. So take a look at the person with whom you are considering going beyond boundaries. Here are some questions to ask [and explore further throughout this book] as a way to kick the tires and see if all-of-you will be okay with all-of-the-other person.

Is the person willing to invest in the relationship?

Anyone you are considering opening up to must be aware that you are going to cost them something. The person must be invested in you or be willing to be invested in your relationship. Healthy intimate relationships involve a dedication to one's self to the betterment of the other. This does not mean however, that there is something wrong with someone who doesn't want to make the investment. There may be some perfectly legitimate reason why you are not on his or her radar. But, your most vulnerable self simply cannot take the risk if the other person is not invested in the connection. The point is this: *moving beyond boundaries requires a commitment from both people.*

Are they in a good place themselves?

The point here is that you need to see if the person is in a good spot to help you unpack life with them. She does not have to have a perfect life. She can even have big problems. But, she must have enough bandwidth and energy left over from meeting her own demands of reality to be present and engaged with you.

Does the person have good character?

Does the person you are interested in have the internal character that bodes well for a healthy relationship? Relational investment is one thing and character is another. I define character as the ability to meet life's demands. Part of that ability includes being able to make a good connection. Character isn't about being perfect. If it were, we'd be disqualified. But it is about having the stuff inside to take good care of the connections you have.

For example, I spoke with a woman on our radio show whose husband was an alcoholic. Among other things, he disappeared for long periods of time and was ruining the family finances. It got so bad that she had to ask him to leave the house. Her question was, "How do I know when to let him move back in?"

"What is he doing about the drinking?" I asked.

"He doesn't think he has a problem," she said. "He says I'm overreacting."

"If everything you are telling me is true, you aren't overreacting; you are being realistic.

"But if he really loves me, I can't stand to be cutting him off," she said.

"I know it's hard," I said, "and you need support from some people to stand firm. But look at it this way. Let's say you have a house rule that your kids don't go out to play with their friends until they do an hour of homework after school. That's a good rule. But today, your daughter wants to play with her friends and blows off the homework. She just doesn't want to do it. And you say she can't go out. She begs and pleads, and it's not like she wants to go do drugs. She wants to have some healthy, innocent fun time. What do you do?"

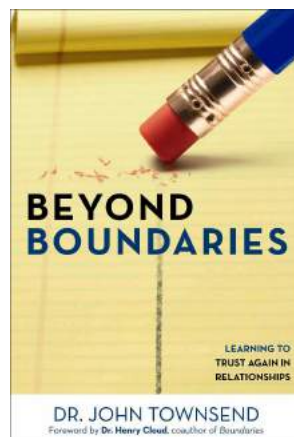
The caller was quiet for a moment and then said, "I get it." In other words, the caller was now articulating and admitting her own codependency, which was a large part of the issue.

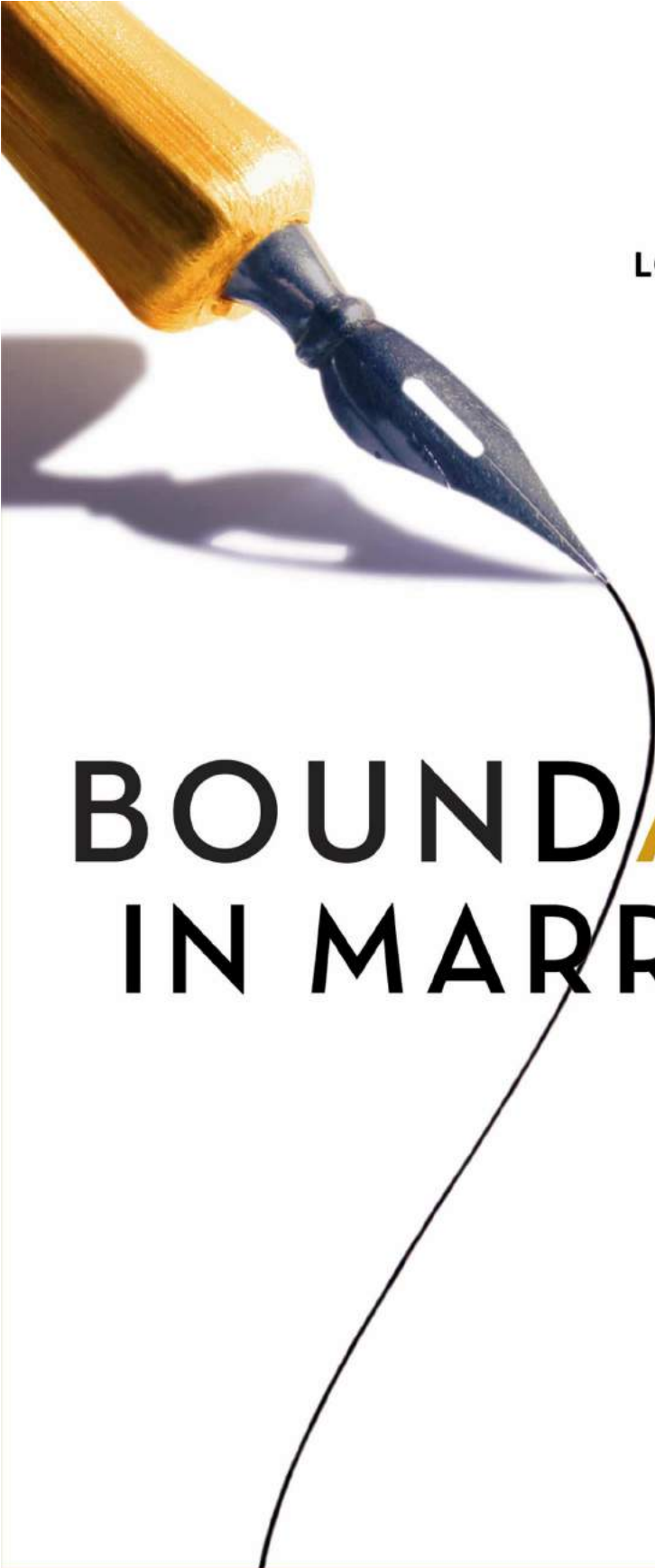
One of the signs of character is that a person does what it takes to restore a relationship. If a person with character is at fault, he apologizes, changes, stops drinking too much, asks forgiveness, gets pastoral help, gets in a growth group, gets in therapy, makes himself accountable to a financial planner, goes to a twelve-step group, or says to you, "Tell me what I need to do so I won't hurt you so much."

Missing, loneliness, and love are good things. They show a capacity for attachment, which helps. But they are not enough. Character says he has to do more than want you; he has to change to be a better person. Love is not enough. Nor are attentiveness, romantic feelings, a charming personality, great competencies and skills, or promises to change. You need substance underneath the topping. Don't settle. Character always wins over time.

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UNDERSTANDING
THE CHOICES
THAT MAKE OR BREAK
LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

BOUNDARIES IN MARRIAGE

DR. HENRY CLOUD & DR. JOHN TOWNSEND

A Tale of Two Couples

Excerpted from the Introduction of Boundaries in Marriage

Recently, I (Dr. Townsend) had two separate dinners with two married couples who are friends of mine. These two couples are in their later years, and each of the couples has been married for more than four decades. They are in what we call the “Golden Years,” the period of marriage in which all the love and work over the years culminate, we hope, in a deep and satisfying connection. However, I was struck by the huge difference between the two couples.

With Harold and Sarah, I enjoyed a buffet dinner where you get a ticket for various parts of the meal and you have to leave the table with your ticket and go get your item. The dinner was winding down; we were ready for dessert. Harold reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out his dessert ticket. Tossing it in front of Sarah, he said casually, “Sarah. Dessert.” Not “Please, Sarah, will you get my dessert for me?” And certainly not “Can I get your dessert, honey?” Harold was assuming Sarah would obediently comply with his two-word command.

I didn’t know what to say, so I sat there and watched. Sarah was clearly embarrassed by Harold’s public display of control. She sat there for a couple of seconds, apparently deciding what to do. Then she seemed to gather up her courage and quietly but forcefully said, “Why don’t you get your own dessert?”

Harold looked surprised. Evidently he wasn’t used to her refusing to obey his commands. However, he recovered, made a weak joke about uppity women, and left the table to redeem his ticket. While he was gone, Sarah said to me, “Sorry, I just couldn’t let it go this time, with my friends here.” I felt so sad for Sarah, realizing that her reaction to her husband tonight was the exception rather than the rule. I also realized that, on a deeper level, while Harold and Sarah were legally connected, they were emotionally disconnected. Their hearts were not knit together.

Frank and Julia were different. I was traveling, and they were hosting me. We went to their home after dinner. After a while, it was time for me to return to my hotel, and I needed a ride. Julia, a counselor like me, was primarily responsible for my trip and had been chauffeuring me to various speaking engagements and meetings. So clearly she was the person to take me back.

However, Frank looked at his wife and said, “You look tired, honey. I’ll take John back to his hotel.” I could see the conflict in Julia’s face between her duty to me and her need for rest. Finally, she said, “Okay, thanks.” And Frank drove me to the hotel.

The next day, at the conference, I talked to Julia. I remarked on Frank’s kindness in offering the ride and on her struggle with taking the offer. She said, “It wasn’t always that way. In our twenties, he wouldn’t have offered, and I wouldn’t have taken the offer. But we worked on this issue a lot during those days. I had to put my foot down on some issues, and we almost divorced. It was a difficult period, but it has paid off. We can’t imagine not being each other’s soul mates.” During my time with them, I had observed that Frank’s and Julia’s hearts were knit together, that they were emotionally connected.

Though both couples had many years of marriage experience, each couple’s love and

relationship had taken very different turns. Harold and Sarah were unable to love deeply and relate to each other, because Harold controlled Sarah and Sarah allowed him to control her. They had what are called major boundary conflicts, in which one person crosses the lines of responsibility and respect with another. When one person is in control of another, love cannot grow deeply and fully, as there is no freedom.

Frank and Julia could have very likely ended up the same way. From what I could tell, they started off similarly in their early married years. Frank dominated, and Julia complied. However, she confronted the problem, she set limits and established consequences, and their marriage grew. Clearly, both couples were reaping the results of how they had conducted themselves in the earlier seasons of marriage. The first couple harvested a sad result; the other, a joyous one.

Your Life Begins Today

If you are reading this book, most likely marriage is important to you. You may be happy in your marriage and want it to keep growing. You may be struggling and dealing with major or minor problems. You may be single and want to prepare for marriage. You may be divorced and want to prevent the pain you went through if you remarry.

Most of us have no greater desire and prayer than a lifetime of love and commitment to one person with whom we can share life. Marriage is one of God's greatest gifts to humanity. It is the mystery of living as one flesh with another human being (Ephesians 5:31-32).

Marriage is first and foremost about love. It is bound together by the care, need, companionship, and values of two people, which can overcome hurt, immaturity, and selfishness to form something better than what each person alone can produce. Love is at the heart of marriage, as it is at the heart of God himself (1 John 4:16).

Yet, love is not enough. The marriage relationship needs other ingredients to grow and thrive. Those ingredients are *freedom* and *responsibility*. When two people are free to disagree, they are free to love. When they are not free, they live in fear, and love dies: "Perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). And when two people together take responsibility to do what is best for the marriage, love can grow. When they do not, one takes on too much responsibility and resents it; the other does not take on enough and becomes self-centered or controlling. Freedom and responsibility problems in a marriage will cause love to struggle. Like a plant without good soil, the marriage relationship will struggle in an unfriendly environment.

Boundaries in Marriage is fundamentally about love. It is about promoting it, growing it, developing it, and repairing it. We want to help you develop love through providing a better environment for it: one of freedom and responsibility. This is where boundaries, or personal property lines, come in. They promote love by protecting individuals.

We wrote *Boundaries* several years ago because we saw that many people's personal and spiritual conflicts had to do with a lack of structure and boundaries. They couldn't say no to controlling or irresponsible people, and so they were always controlled by others' demands on them. However, many people have asked us since then, "Why don't you write a book on setting limits in one's marriage, so that we can solve problems before they start?" We thought that was a good idea, and this book is the result. As you will see, character is key here. When people grow in character, they grow in the ability to set and receive boundaries

in their marriages, and they mature. When they resist hearing the word *no*, they remain immature.

Many people believe that as we humans grow up physically, we automatically grow up emotionally as well, but that's simply not true. Age is a necessary but insufficient requirement for growing up. There are immature old people, and there are appropriately mature young people. Harold and Sarah are still dealing immaturely with old, old boundary issues. Frank and Julia have resolved them and have gone to much deeper stages of love and maturity. The point we are trying to make here is that today is the day to work on your own boundaries in marriage. What you take initiative to deal with today will affect the rest of your married life. And what you ignore or are afraid to address will do the same. You're headed toward either a Harold and Sarah marriage, or a Frank and Julia one, and you are doing that right now.

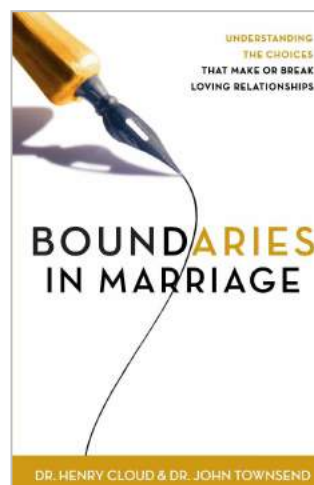
You may both be open to the concept of setting and receiving truth and boundaries with each other. This openness will make the process much easier, as you will be on the same page with regard to both values and personal growth. Or you may have a spouse who is against boundaries. This close-mindedness can be dealt with also.

Clarifying a Misconception

We need to make clear, however, that *Boundaries in Marriage* is not about fixing, changing, or punishing your mate. If you aren't in control of yourself, the solution is not learning to control someone else. The solution is learning self-control, one of the nine fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). So don't look at this book as a way to make someone else grow up. It is more about taking ownership of your own life so that you are protected and you can love and protect your spouse without enabling or rescuing him or her.

So welcome to *Boundaries in Marriage!* We hope this is a helpful resource for you, whatever condition your marriage is in. We pray that as you learn to make the word *no* a good word in your marriage, responsibility and freedom will then help love take deep roots in both of your hearts. God bless you.

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HOW HEALTHY
CHOICES
GROW HEALTHY
CHILDREN

BOUNDARIES WITH KIDS

DR. HENRY CLOUD & DR. JOHN TOWNSEND

Kids Need Parents with Boundaries

Excerpted from Chapter 3 of Boundaries with Kids

I (Dr. Townsend) first heard the words “problem child” when I was in grade school. I overheard two teachers talking about Wayne, a classmate of mine. “I had heard Wayne was a problem child even before he came to my classroom,” one teacher said to her colleague. Because I knew Wayne, the phrase made sense to me.

Although I liked him, he had always seemed out of control. He was disruptive, pushy, intrusive, and sassy with teachers. I didn’t think much about why he was that way until I visited his home one Saturday.

Wayne’s parents were nice, but they provided very little structure for their son. For example, he and I got too loud while bouncing basketballs in the living room. We did it a long time before anyone said anything. Then his mom came in and said with a pleading smile, “Wayne, dear, I hate to interrupt your fun, but would it be too much trouble to play somewhere else?”

He smarted off to her, and we continued.

After a while, his dad entered the room and blew up at us: “Hey, you guys, how many times do I have to keep telling you to knock it off?”

So we left and continued the dribbling upstairs in Wayne’s bedroom, where all those downstairs were driven even more insane. Wayne had the run of the house.

“Problem kids” don’t evolve in a vacuum. Every problem child generally has a problem context, and kids with healthy limits don’t grow them out of thin air. Although by nature we resist limits from birth, we have a lot of help either developing boundaries or not developing them.

As both Christians and psychologists, we live in two different environments. The religious world sometimes blames problems on the child, saying that it’s all in Suzie’s sinful nature. The counseling world sometimes blames the parents, placing all out- of-control behaviors on “what happened to Suzie as a child.” In each case, there’s a clear good guy and there’s a clear bad guy.

Neither of these views is completely accurate. Actually, the news is worse than that! *Who we are today is essentially the result of two forces: our environment and our responses to it.* Our parenting, significant relationships, and circumstances powerfully shape our character and attitudes. But how we react to our significant relationships and circumstances—whether defensively or responsibly—also influences what kind of person we become.

You may have a child with boundary difficulties, or you may simply want to help your child become a responsible, honest person. Either way, this book is not intended to make you feel guilty. Rather, we want to set out the first and most important ingredient of helping children learn boundaries: a parent with boundaries.

Your Child Is Reacting to Your Parenting

Let's not ignore the reality that my friend Wayne had problems. And let's not ignore that the problems were Wayne's and that he needed to work on them. But there is another principle at work here: *You need to interpret a child's behavior as a response to your own as well as in terms of his motives, needs, personality, and circumstances.* This requires a shift in focus, as we normally look at a person's actions in terms of his motives, needs, personality, and circumstances, not our own.

Take Wayne, for example. My friend was disrespectful, unresponsive to authority, and out of control. One might attempt to understand Wayne's behavior in several ways. He is impulsive, self-centered, or immature. These might all be true, but they don't address his parents.

Wayne was responding to his parents' style of relating. He was going as far as they would allow. He knew his mother was impotent and fearful of conflict, so he took advantage of her weakness. He knew that his dad would rant and rave and that he could do what he wanted until Dad blew up. He understood that, even then, he could slide by his father's edict on a technicality and go misbehave somewhere else, as Dad most likely wouldn't follow up with a consequence, preferring instead to go back to his newspaper, feeling justified that he had set that boy straight.

As a rule, children don't know what they are doing. They have little idea how to handle life so that it works right. That's why God gave them parents—to love them, give them structure, and guide them into maturity. So, just as a puppy needs obedience training, kids need help from the outside. Basically, children will mature to the level the parent structures them, and no higher. The parent's limitations in being able to be responsible and teach responsibility influence how well children learn responsibility. Children don't have it in them to grow themselves up. They respond and adapt to how they are parented.

The first and most fundamental mental picture children have of the way the universe operates is at home. The home is where they form their concepts of reality, love, responsibility, choices, and freedom. So if you relate to your children in a way that mirrors God's laws, they will make a successful transition to the outside world. But if you protect your children from the pain of irresponsibility, you set them up for many struggles in adulthood.

One of the most helpful questions parents can ask themselves when faced with a child's problem is not, "Why won't he stop hitting his brother?" but "What was my part in creating this problem?" This may be painful, as it will require your looking at the plank in your eye rather than the speck of sawdust in your child's (see Matthew 7:1–5). But the benefit of this approach is that it takes you out of the futility of trying to control your child and into the possibility that you can control your stance with your child.

Your Three Avenues of Influence

There are three ways you can influence your kids to develop boundaries.

1. Teaching

You teach your children to tie their shoes, ride a bike, and clean their rooms. You send them to school to learn a million facts and skills. You can also teach them boundaries—the ability to hear and say no appropriately.

The concepts and principles of boundaries are explicit and clear. They aren't vague, esoteric ideas; instead, they are grounded in reality, God's laws, and everyday life. As a result, you can directly teach boundaries, and your children can learn them. You can help your children put words to their experiences, apply your teaching to new situations, and clarify and modify the teachings as they grow and develop.

For example, don't be afraid to use the word *boundary* with your child; it's a useful one. When she defiantly refuses to stop screaming in anger at you, wait until a calm time later. Then say, "Jill, we have a boundary in this house that screaming is not okay. You can be angry, and talk about your anger at me, but screaming bothers people. If you cross the boundary of screaming, the consequence will be losing playtime after school for that day."

Even further, teach your children boundary principles, not simply practical applications. Young children can learn the statement, "You are responsible for your behavior." This means that they must accept the responsibility for things such as cleaning their room, getting good grades, displaying proper table manners, and controlling tantrums. They will not be able to blame the lack of accomplishment on anyone else. Boundary concepts like these can quickly become part of a family's everyday life, and children will see the applications in other areas. One four-year-old boy has said to his sibling, "Don't take that toy; that's my boundary." Diligently teach these ideas to your children at their age-appropriate level (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Here are some broad guidelines for understanding the different boundaries that apply to different age levels in children.

Birth to twelve months. During the first year of life infants are bonding with their mother and father and establishing basic trust, so boundaries at this age should be very minimal. Infants do not have enough love or structure within them to tolerate a great deal of frustration. During this time of learning, the mother needs to protect and nurture and meet the baby's needs for comfort and love.

One to three years. Children at this age can learn to respond to the word *no* and can understand the consequences of their disobedience. This can apply to dangerous situations, tantrums, violence, and more. They may not be able to understand your logic, but they can generally understand that obeying your no brings good things and ignoring your no brings discomfort.

Three to five years. During this period, children are more able to understand the reasons for taking responsibility and what consequences are about. They can talk with you about it. Learning how to treat friends kindly, responding to authority, disagreeing while being respectful, and doing household chores are all a part of defining boundaries at this stage. Consequences such as time-outs and loss of toys, TV, or fun activities are effective at this age.

Six to eleven years. This stage involves a great deal of industriousness as well as an increasing investment in the world outside the family: school, activities, church, and friends. Boundary issues will revolve around balancing time at home and with friends, homework and school tasks, goal orientation, and budgeting time and money. Consequences can involve restrictions on friendships, freedoms, and home privileges.

Twelve to eighteen years. Adolescence is the final step before adulthood. It involves tasks such as solidifying one's identity as distinct from the parents' identity, career leanings, sexual maturation, love choices, and values. It is also the period in which you should begin "de-parenting"—moving from a position of control to one of influence with your child.

When your children are teenagers, help them with issues such as relationships, values, scheduling, and long-term goals. Provide them with as many natural consequences as possible (no money, or supporting the consequences the school metes out, for example).

One thing to remember about this stage: The teen who is acting like a three-year-old should not have the freedoms earned by a mature teen. Freedom comes from handling responsibility well; it is not a gift bequeathed by chronological age.

2. Modeling

Modeling is different from teaching. Children observe and learn from how you operate with boundaries in your own world. They watch how you treat them, your spouse, and your work. And they emulate you, for good or for bad. They look up to and want to be like these larger, more powerful individuals. By putting on Dad's loafers or Mom's lipstick, they are trying on adult roles to see what fits. In this sense, boundaries are "caught" more than they are "taught."

Modeling goes on all the time, not just when you are in a "parenting" mode. It occurs basically any time you are in eyesight or earshot of the child. Many a mother is dismayed when she finds her children doing what she does, not what she says: "I taught them right from wrong!" she'll exclaim. And she may have, but often her child figured out early in the game how his mother's (or father's) beliefs fit in with her actions.

Universal house rules of conduct are a good example of this. Many rules of privilege and responsibility, such as bedtimes and TV watching, are different for kids and adults; however, some rules should apply to all members of the family. One illustration is the rule, "No one interrupts another person who is talking." Parents often feel that what they have to say is more important than a child's ramblings about what happened at school.

However, if the understanding exists in the family that any member can confront another on a universal rule, the child sees respect for others modeled. When little Jeremy can say, "Mom, you interrupted me," and Mom can respond non-defensively with, "You're right, son. Sorry about that," the child is learning that respect, ownership, apologizing, and responding to house rules are things that grown-ups do.

These are not only good, healthy, or mature aspects of being an adult, but norms of reality. And children are desperately looking for norms on which to hang their hats. That's why, if Mom were instead to say, "Jeremy, you don't understand. What I needed to say had to be said because it was very, very important," Jeremy would be just as likely to become defensive and rationalize his behavior when confronted on infractions. *A child's need to belong is more central than his need to be good.* If obeying house boundaries helps him belong, so be it. If rebelling against them brings him attention and belonging, so be it again. What you model is the key.

3. Helping Your Child to Internalize

To internalize something is to make it part of yourself. It is more than learning a fact, and

different from watching a fact fleshed out. It is making that fact an experienced reality. There are two ways to “know” something: intellectually and experientially. You can memorize a definition of romantic love, an intellectual “knowing.” Falling in love, however, is a much different matter, an experienced “knowing.”

My wife, Barbi, and I recently began working on financial responsibility with our sons Ricky, seven, and Benny, five. We allotted a small amount of money to them on a weekly basis, based on certain chores they were to do. Part of their income goes to tithing, part to savings, and part is for spending money.

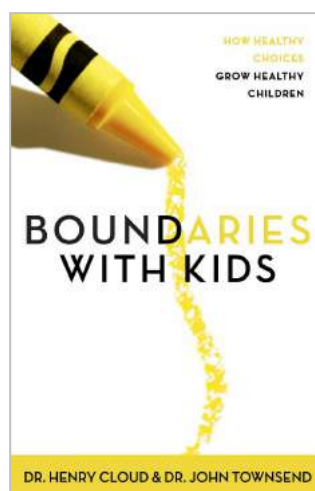
When the process started, the boys thought money grew on trees. They liked having it, but had no sense of fiscal responsibility. To them, it was great having money, and there would always be more. Barbi and I lectured them several times on saving up for what they wanted and not spending it all at once. It went in one ear and out the other. It was not their fault; they’d simply had no experience with wanting something and being broke.

One day the boys used all their spending money on a toy they wanted. A couple of days later, a comic book they had wanted for a long time went on sale, and they went to their spending pouches. The pouches had not replenished themselves overnight. They were empty. So they went to Mom and Dad for help. We said, “No gifts, no loans. Earn it at the usual weekly rate.” They then asked if they could do extra chores. We said no.

Then they cried. We empathized with the loss of the on-sale opportunity, but the pouches stayed empty. A few hours later, Benny said, “I’m going to wait a long, long, long time next time.” And he did, and they did. The next payday, they squirreled the spending portion away, talking about how much they were going to save and how little they were going to spend. They had begun to internalize the reality that if you spend it now, you won’t have it later.

This difference may dismay you, but if you embrace it, your parenting will flourish: *If your boundary training consists only of words, you are wasting your breath.* But if you “do” boundaries with your kids, they internalize the experiences, remember them, digest them, and make them part of how they see reality.

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WHEN TO SAY YES
HOW TO SAY NO

BOUNDARIES WITH TEENS

DR. JOHN TOWNSEND
Coauthor of the Bestselling *Boundaries*

Who Threw the Switch?

Excerpted from the Introduction of Boundaries with Teens

I had known Trevor since he was six, because our families ran in the same circles. As a preteen, he was a normal kid, not perfect, but not out of control either. He was respectful of adults and fun to be around. Then, when he was thirteen or fourteen, my wife, Barbi, our kids, and I ran into him and his mom, Beth, at a movie theater one night, and we adults started talking. It wasn't long before all of the kids started getting restless, particularly Trevor. He and his mom had a conversation that went something like this:

"Mom, I wanna go." "Just a minute, honey." "I said I wanna go!" Beth looked a little embarrassed and said, "Trevor, we're almost done talking, okay?" "HEY! I—SAID—I—WANT—TO—GO!" People standing around in the theater began looking over at our little group. His mom looked mortified. His face was a little flushed, but he didn't look at all self-conscious. He had only one thing on his mind — getting his mom moving.

She quickly said her good-byes, and the two of them left.

This encounter sticks in my mind because of the huge contrast between the Trevor who used to be and the Trevor who now was. It was as if a switch had been thrown. Whatever respect he'd once had for his mom, and likely others, had been greatly diminished.

Perhaps you can relate to Beth's experience as a parent. You may have an adolescent who, as a preteen, was more compliant and easier to connect with. Or perhaps you saw seeds of trouble in your child's preteen years, only to watch those seeds sprout when adolescence hit. Or maybe your child doesn't seem that much different, just bigger and stronger. In any case, it all points to the reality that *parenting teens is not like parenting at any other age, because children change dramatically during their teenage years.*

The Challenges Parents of Teens Face

Parents face many different issues and struggles in their efforts to parent their teens effectively, as demonstrated in this list of typical adolescent behaviors:

- has a disrespectful attitude toward parents, family, and others challenges requests or rules
- is self-absorbed and unable to see things from anyone else's perspective
- is lazy and careless about responsibilities
- has a negative attitude toward life, school, or people
- is emotionally withdrawn and distant from you
- has a tendency to pick friends of whom you disapprove
- erupts in anger that sometimes seems to come out of nowhere lacks motivation for school and fails to maintain grades neglects home chores and responsibilities has mood shifts that seem to have neither rhyme nor reason
- is mean to siblings or friends
- lacks interest in spiritual matters
- detaches from family events and wants to be with friends only lies and is deceptive about activities
- is physically aggressive and violent

- is truant from school or runs away
- abuses substances — alcohol, drugs, pornography, and so on
- engages in sexual activity

This list could go on, of course. It's no wonder that when faced with one or several of these problems, many parents become discouraged, overwhelmed, or confused about what to do. You don't have to be one of them. If you are reading this book because your teen exhibits any of the above behaviors, be encouraged. These problems have solutions. You don't have to resign yourself to simply coping and surviving for the next few years. Life with your teen can be much better than that. You can take some steps that can make major differences in the troublesome attitudes and behavior of your adolescent.

I have seen many teens become more responsible, happier, and better prepared for adult life after their parents began to apply the principles and techniques discussed in this book. Many of these teens not only made positive changes in their lives, but they also reconnected with their parents at levels that the parents had thought they would never experience again. These principles work—if you work them.

Teens Need Boundaries

The problems listed earlier all have a common foundation: *the battle between the teen's desire for total freedom and the parents' desire for total control*. All teens want the freedom to do what they want when they want. They need to learn that freedom is earned and that they can gain freedom by demonstrating responsibility. Adolescence is the time in life when kids are supposed to learn this lesson.

By the same token, parents need to be able to recognize when they are being over-controlling and when they are being healthy and appropriate about saying “no.” They need to be able to make this distinction in order to do their job: helping teens learn responsibility and self-control so that they use freedom appropriately and live well in the real world. To do this, parents must help teens learn boundaries.

I cannot overstate the importance of your role here. In the midst of your teen's demands, tantrums, threats, and acting out, your task is to sift through the craziness and lovingly set firm, appropriate limits. When your teen behaves responsibly, you can loosen the reins a little and grant more freedom. You are the clear voice of sanity in your child's world. Your teen needs your voice and your help in learning how to set boundaries.

What are boundaries? Simply put, boundaries are one's personal property line. They are how you define yourself, say who you are and who you are not, set limits, and establish consequences if people are attempting to control you. When you say “no” to someone's bad behavior, you are setting a boundary. Boundaries are good for you and good for the other person, for boundaries help people clarify what they are and are not responsible for in life.

Because of all the developmental changes teens are going through, they often don't have good control over their behavior, a clear sense of responsibility for their actions, or much self-discipline and structure. Instead, they often show disrespect of authority (as in Trevor's case), impulsiveness, irresponsibility, misbehavior, and erratic behavior. They are, as the Bible describes it, “like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”

Teens need to develop good boundaries in order to make it successfully through this season of life. Healthy boundaries give them the structure, self-control, and sense of ownership they need to figure out all their “who am I?” questions and to deal with the physiological and developmental changes they are experiencing.

Boundaries function somewhat like the trunk of a tree. The trunk holds the leaves, fruit, and roots together. However, all trees with strong trunks started out as weak saplings. They needed to be tied to a stake because they couldn't yet handle their own weight. They needed to lean on and be supported by something outside themselves. Then, in time, the trees matured and took over that job for themselves.

The process of developing boundaries is similar. Teens can't create their own "trunks." They don't have the necessary tools to become responsible, thoughtful, and empathetic with others. Like a tree sapling, they need help from outside themselves. Parents are the stake for their teens. They are the temporary external structure teens need in their last launch into real life. When parents tell teens the truth, set limits, establish curfews, confront misbehavior, and do a host of other things, they are providing a structure and helping teens to develop a structure. If all goes well, teens will ultimately and safely discard their parents' structure and, using their own structure, be able to meet the demands of adult life and responsibility.

And that is the purpose of this book, to show you how to help your adolescent shoulder responsibility for her actions, attitudes, and speech so that she learns the gift of self-control and ownership over her life. The whole process starts with you, the parent. So in this book you will learn a deceptively simple skill that all parents of teens need: knowing *when to say Yes, and how to say No*, that is how to implement and enforce healthy, loving boundaries with your adolescent.

After reading this you may think, *I don't really have good boundaries either. How can I dispense what I don't possess?* That is a common and important concern. A teen without boundaries needs a parent with boundaries. You'll find help for how to do this in the first part of this book, which teaches and equips you to develop your own personal limits so that you can transmit what you know and who you are to your teen.

Is It Too Late?

Many parents of teens, aware that they are in the last stage of parenting, wonder if there is still time to help their kid learn responsibility and self-control. "Maybe I should just hang on and try to get through it," they say. That is often a sign of weariness and giving up prematurely. In most cases, however, I would say that *healthy boundaries can make a significant difference*.

Remember the story of Beth and Trevor? Beth refused to give up, and because of this the story has a good ending. Beth called me a few days later, saying, "I'm sure you hate to have people ask you for advice about this sort of thing, but I would like some about Trevor."

"Well," I said, "I would probably begin by realizing that whatever you're doing now to deal with Trevor's attitude isn't working."

"That's no problem for me," said Beth. "I've tried everything anyway."

"Are you sure?" I queried. "My hunch is that the 'everything' you have tried either isn't everything, or it hasn't been done the right way, or you haven't tried long enough. Trevor doesn't seem to experience any concern about taking responsibility for his actions. In fact, you are the one talking to me about Trevor, not Trevor. So you are more concerned than he is."

Beth replied, "I don't think Trevor even remembers what he did."

"In that case," I said, "I recommend that you start doing some things that will help Trevor be more concerned about his attitudes and actions." Then I explained to her the key principles that are in this book. And over time, as Beth began to apply them, Trevor's behaviors and speech began to change for the better. He still isn't a perfect teen — whatever that is! — but his manner and actions are much healthier and more responsible.

So don't give up. At this stage in life, your teen needs an involved parent who has good boundaries.

I say this for several reasons. First, even though teens are systematically detaching from their parents and moving into the world, at some level, *they are still dependent on their parents*. They cannot function in the world on their own. Whether they recognize it, teens still need some important things from parents, such as:

- Grace, unconditional love, and compassion when the teen is hurt, failing, or bewildered
- Guidance concerning school, college, and career
- Wisdom for how to navigate relationship problems
- Help in romantic entanglements

Teens also need the safety, structure, and warmth of a loving home that offers them protection when needed.

I have talked to many young adults who have told me, "When I was a teenager, I acted like my parents had nothing to say to me. I couldn't afford to act differently. But inside, it mattered a lot what they said."

Second, *teens do not have total freedom and permission*. Part of that freedom belongs to the parents. Teens are certainly in the last stage of childhood and should be becoming more and more autonomous. But they don't yet have the rights and privileges of an adult. For example, they still need parental permission to go to certain movies and to sign off on school outings. This is good news because *a teen's need for parental permission can be leveraged to motivate her to learn responsibility*. That is why withholding privileges can be very effective. Some parents need to take back some privileges. We will discuss this important aspect later.

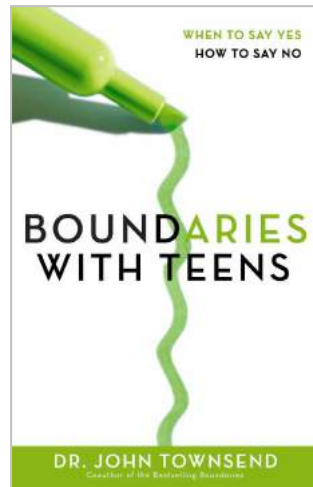
Third, *the time it takes to fix matters isn't necessarily the same amount of time it took for things to go wrong*. Some parents think, *I had no boundaries for fifteen years, and now I have three years left. I don't have another fifteen to do it right, so why try?* This assumes a one-to-one correspondence of ineffective-to-effective parenting.

Actually, it's not like that at all, because it's not that simple. People can take less time to change than you might think. There are other factors involved, such as the appropriateness, consistency, and intensity of your actions; the involvement of others; and the readiness of the child's internal world.

People in their seventies and eighties sometimes wake up to how they are being selfish or irresponsible. You can't predict how telling the truth and establishing healthy boundaries will affect a teen, nor can you predict when the change will occur. I have seen parents with

a seventeen- year-old who would be moving out in a few weeks still make significant inroads with a rebellious and destructive attitude. Don't let your fears and discouragement limit a process of growth that God designed for your child. Sometimes the right intervention, given at the right time, with the right people, can make all the difference in the world.

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HOW HEALTHY
CHOICES
GROW HEALTHY
RELATIONSHIPS

BOUNDARIES IN DATING

DR. HENRY CLOUD & DR. JOHN TOWNSEND

Don't Fall in Love with Someone You Wouldn't Be Friends With

Excerpted from Chapter 7 of Boundaries in Dating

It seems like you and Dennis are becoming an item," I (Dr. Cloud) said to Stephanie. We had tried to get together to catch up for a while, and each time she had been doing something with Dennis.

"No," she replied. "I just like hanging out with him. We enjoy a lot of the same things, and have some wonderful talks. But he's just a friend."

"Why isn't he more?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Whatever that 'thing' is that attracts you to someone—I just don't have it with Dennis. But I do like him a lot and like being his friend."

"I can appreciate that," I said. "Not everyone is meant to fall in love. Do you have the 'thing' you describe happening somewhere?"

"Yeah, I do." I could tell as she said yes that not all was well with whomever the "thing" was with. "His name is Ryan, and I have been dating him about three months. I have the 'thing' with him; that is, I am really attracted to him in the more-than-friends kind of way. But there are some issues."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know how to describe it. I am so drawn to him in a physical, romantic kind of way. Not that we are sleeping together, but a lot of physicality in the relationship. And I have a lot of 'falling in love feelings.' But there is not a lot more than that when I really look at it. We really don't talk a lot about serious things. It is just this dynamic and longing to be with him that I can't really explain.

"Then there are some things about him that I really would not normally choose. He is not that deep spiritually, and he seems kind of driven in some other ways. And sometimes he really does not communicate. But I know that I am falling for him in some way that I can't describe," she said. "I feel some sort of aliveness when I am with him. There is a deep part of me that he gets to, even though we have kind of a shallow relationship. Doesn't make sense, huh?"

"Sounds like to me that you feel you are 'in love' with Ryan, but have a lot more of a real relationship with Dennis," I observed. "In fact, it sounds like to me that you need to find someone that you have both of those things with. The deep connection and ability to share things that matter, communicate, and have fun like with Dennis, and also the spark and chemistry that you have with Ryan."

"Yeah. That would be nice. But, I have never found them together in the same one." She sounded almost weary as she described her dilemma.

A Common Problem

Many singles we've known share Stephanie's problem. Perhaps you do too. You may be attracted to one kind of person, but find that you are better friends with another type, and actually have more of a relationship with the "friend" than the one you are attracted to. In a lot of cases, like Stephanie's, you simply find that the person you are attracted to is not able to connect with all areas of your life. But in other cases it is much more than that. Sometimes you are attracted to someone who is not good for you at all.

You may have all sorts of longings and chemistry with someone who is not only lacking some abilities, but also has some pretty destructive things about her character. She may be self-centered, deceptive in some way, critical, controlling, or ignoring of your needs. You would never choose that kind of person as a friend, because you would have very little in common, and would not want to have to deal with all of her problems. Still, you find yourself desperately attracted to or falling for someone who is just that way. And then, further on in the relationship, the deeper problems will surface and you will find that the relationship has no lasting substance. Nevertheless, even then, you find it difficult to get out of the relationship because you have such a strong attraction to that person.

The Split

One day we were doing a radio show on dating, and a woman called in with the above problem. She said that there were two kinds of men in the world. One was the attractive type that had no character, and the other was the kind with good character and spiritual depth but no attractiveness. "What should I do?" she asked.

"Have you ever thought that there might not really be two types in the world like you have described?" we asked. "But that this might have something to do with you? Maybe you are attracted to shallow or destructive guys for a reason. And maybe you block those feelings of attraction for the good ones?"

"No. It is not that at all. There really are only two types of men in the world. There are the good-looking, strong, attractive ones, and then there are the good guys who are not that exciting. I have seen it over and over," she argued and went on more adamantly than before.

"So you are telling us that there is not one attractive man that has depth and spiritual qualities about him in the whole world? And that none of those who do have good depth and character are attractive in any way, shape, or form?" we clarified, just to help her see how foolish she sounded.

"That is exactly right," she said. "I have been dating for a long time and that is exactly what is out there."

"Well, in that case, I guess we will have to see if you are right. Okay, Southern California," we said to our listeners. "We would like all of you singles to drive to our studio right now and get in two lines. If you are attractive in any way, get in one line, and if you have any depth to your character, spiritual life, or personality, get in the other. Then, maybe what we could do is pair you off and get you to help each other out. The ugly, deep ones could disciple the beautiful people, and the beautiful people could give some tips on style,

charisma, and other things to the monks and nuns. Then maybe the two groups could become more one, and we could get some relationships going here.”

It turned out to be an amazing show. We were there for four hours taking calls about this problem. Fortunately, not everyone was as blind to their own responsibility in the issue as the first caller. They could see that there was more to the dynamic than some sort of external explanation like she came up with of there being two types of men in the world.

And we had a very stimulating time looking at the things that cause this kind of problem, because it is a very resolvable one, and one that we see people grow out of all the time. We love it when we see a person who has struggled in this area come in and say, “I finally found someone who has all that I have looked for.” What a rewarding thing for spiritual and personal growth that is.

Here is what we tell singles who have this problem:

1. If you are attracted to someone who does not possess the character and friendship qualities that you need in a long-term relationship, do not think that you are going to change him or her. Someone has to go deeper because he or she wants to. Get rid of false hope.
2. See this as a problem. If you see a pattern, do not continue to think that the problem is all external to you, that you just “have not found the right one.” We hear so many excuses by people who do not want to see that they have a pattern that they need to examine regarding the way that they see people, or the people they attract, or the ones that they are attracted to.
3. Are you confusing longing for “being in love”? Many times people long for a certain kind of fantasy person and confuse this deep longing as being in love. Remember, love satisfies. It does not leave you romantically pining.
4. Are you confusing infatuation with love? Infatuation is a projection of needs and idealized fantasies onto a person that have little to do with who that person really is. Many times people come up with a kind of person who symbolizes a lot of things that they need or idealize and feel that they are falling in love with someone when in reality it is a fantasy that will not last. Remember the phrase “in fat you ate.” Infatuation is very similar to high-fat fast food. No lasting nutritional value!
5. Then make sure that you talk to someone else about these issues. Denial is more difficult to maintain if you are talking to someone and confessing what is true. Find an accountability system to hold you to the boundary of not letting yourself go too far into an unsound relationship.

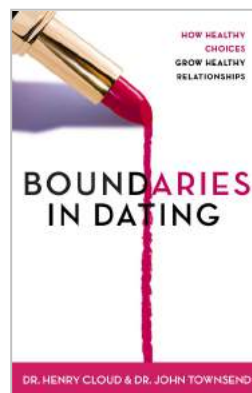
Above all, do everything possible to make yourself aware of the reality of the person you are drawn to and the relationship that you have. Ask yourself:


- Do you feel like all of your parts are being related to?
- Can you share all of your values?
- Is the spiritual commitment the same?

- Are there character traits that you find yourself ignoring, denying, or excusing?
- In short, would you pick this person as a friend?

Consider if you would like spending time with if there were no romance at all. That is the one true measure of a friend, a person with whom you like to spend time, having no regard to how you are spending it. “Hanging out” is fulfilling in and of itself. And that, long-term, requires character, and in the deepest of friendships, shared values as well. You would want your best friends to be honest, faithful, deep, spiritual, responsible, connecting, growing, loving, and the like. Keep your boundaries. Make sure that those qualities are also present in the person you are falling in love with too!

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WHY SOME PEOPLE
GET RESULTS AND
OTHERS DON'T

BOUNDARIES FOR LEADERS

RESULTS, RELATIONSHIPS,
AND BEING **RIDICULOUSLY** IN CHARGE

DR. HENRY CLOUD

COAUTHOR OF *BOUNDARIES*, OVER 2 MILLION COPIES SOLD

Ridiculously In Charge

Excerpted from Chapter 2 of Boundaries for Leaders

Recently I was discussing similar people issues with another CEO. I asked him why he thought those problems were there. He talked about some reasons, most of which had to do with the various players involved, and also the constellations of a few teams. But then I asked him a simple question.

“And why is that?” I asked.

“What do you mean? I think it is the reasons I just said.”

“I know the reasons you said, but why do those reasons exist?” I continued.

“I don’t get it. . . . What do you mean?” he asked further.

“Who is the leader? Who is in charge of the culture? Who is in charge of the ways that it is working, the fact that all of that exists?” I pushed.

He just looked at me, and nodded. “I am,” he said.

“So what kind of culture would you like?” I asked. “What kind of culture would drive the business forward if you had it?”

When he thought about that, he looked upward, lost in thought for a moment. Then he got out of the “problem-speak” mode, and I could see a shift in his energy as a new vision of a different culture sprang to life in his eyes. He began to describe a company culture that was positive, highly energetic, accountable, innovative, and performance oriented. He came alive when he talked about it.

“So why don’t you build that kind of culture?” I asked.

For a nanosecond it seemed like he was about to reflexively blurt out a reason why it could not happen, but then he paused and said something I will never forget: “You know, when you think about it . . . I am ridiculously in charge.”

At that point, I knew he got it. He realized that he would have exactly the culture that he creates and would not have the one he did not allow to exist. Whatever culture he got, he was either building it or allowing it. He was “ridiculously in charge,” that is, “totally in charge,” and at that moment, he owned it. It was his. It was truly up to him. As a leader, he was going to get what he built, or what he allowed.

Boundaries: What you Create and What you Allow

What are boundaries? They are made up of two essential things: what you create and what you allow. A “boundary” is a property line. It defines where your property begins and ends. If you think about your home, on your property, you can define what is going to happen there, and what is not. You are “ridiculously in charge” of the vision, the people you invite in, what the goals and purposes are going to be, what behavior is going to be allowed and what isn’t. You build and allow the culture. It is all yours. You set the agenda, and you make the rules. And what you find there, you own. It is your creation or your allowances that have made it be. Simply stated, the leaders’ boundaries define and shape what is going to be and what isn’t.

In the end, as a leader, you are always going to get a combination of two things: what you create and what you allow.

I was leading an offsite for a health care company recently about a range of leadership issues, and the director of HR asked a key question. “So, how can you know if the problem is about the leader, or the follower?” He went on to talk about “problem employees,” who don’t perform or who are difficult. “There is such a thing as a ‘follower’ who isn’t getting it, right?” he said.

“Sure,” I said. “But on whose watch? In whose culture? Who built the team that allows that? Who is over that employee that is a ‘problem’? And who is over the employee that allows employees like that to be that way? And if that employee is confused about the strategy or direction, who is it that sets that strategy and direction for their team or the organization? In the language of apple, ‘Who is the DRI, the directly responsible individual?’”

Who owns it?

It is a central principle of boundaries: ownership. Ultimately, leaders own it. They are the ones who define and create the boundaries that drive the behavior that forms the identity of teams and culture and sets the standards of performance. Leaders define the direction and are responsible for making it happen. And they are responsible for the accountability systems that ensure that it does happen. It always comes back to leadership and the boundaries they allow to exist on their property. Leaders define the boundaries, and successful leaders define them well in several key areas:

- The vision, the focus, the attention, and the activities that create forward movement are defined by leaders.
- The emotional climate of the organization and its culture is created and sustained by leaders.
- The unity and connectedness of the organization and the teams are built or fragmented by leaders.
- The thinking and beliefs of the organization are sown and grown by leaders.
- The amount and kinds of control and empowerment that people have are given and required by leaders.
- The performance and development of their teams and direct reports are stewarded by leaders.
- The leadership of oneself, which entails establishing one’s own boundaries and stewardship of the organization, is required by leaders.

Leaders, through a handful of essential boundaries, make sure certain things happen, prevent other things from happening, and keep it all moving forward. In the chapters that follow, I will show you how leaders establish intentional boundaries that create organizations where people’s brains actually can work and bring about results. We will also see an important “negative” function of the leader’s boundaries—that is, what a leader has to “not allow.” What the leader has to say no to and how to prevent those things from existing in the organization. Leaders are a positive force for good and a negative force against bad. You know what they are for and what they are against.

Positively, they establish intentional structures, values, norms, practices, and disciplines that build what they desire. as we shall see, they figure out what should be attended to that will actually turn their vision into reality, and they keep their people, teams, and organizations focused on those things and away from distractions. They build the

emotional climate that will motivate, empower, and unify their people. They act as guardians of the belief systems that distinguish the culture, making sure that it is optimistic and energizing. They help their people define what they have control over that will drive results and empower them to take action. They build healthy, well-aligned teams with values and behaviors to drive results.

Negatively, they set limits on confusion and distraction. They prohibit practices and behaviors that sow the seeds of a negative emotional climate in any way, realizing that toxic behavior and emotions impede high performance. They disallow silos, compartmentalization, individual agendas, fragmentation, isolation, or divisions among their people. In their push for empowerment and for people taking control and responsibility, they do not tolerate negativity, helplessness, powerlessness, or victimhood. They do not allow teams to develop dysfunctional patterns that keep them from moving forward, and they immunize their teams against failure. And they make sure that nothing exists in their culture that works against the vision and the drive for results, or against people being developed into all that they can be.

Focus and Energy

But this positive and negative boundary-setting does not happen by itself. It takes energy and focus. As one founder of a very successful enterprise described it to me:

When I started my organization, no one told me that half of my energy would be spent actually building and leading it and the other half, or even more, would be spent protecting and defending it against all of the things other people wanted it to be. It takes a ferocious amount of spinal fortitude to not end up making a crappy mix of your vision and endless bits and scraps from others who didn't have the cojones to start something themselves.

Well said. You don't want a "crappy mix" of your vision plus bits and scraps from others that don't quite fit. In fact, you don't have to settle for a random mix at all. Once you come to appreciate that you are truly "ridiculously in charge," you can establish and realize the vision that you have for your company, your team, your department, your project, or whatever else you lead. Whether you are the CEO or lead a small work team, you are ridiculously in charge if you are the leader. And you can certainly protect it and defend it against that which would infect it, derail it, or bring it down. You will get what you create and what you allow. Your boundaries will define and make that happen as you step up and set them.

You may be beginning to lead something new, or you may be focusing on turning something around and making it better. A leader's clear boundaries are often what an organization is waiting for, and when it happens, it can create the most valuable company in the world. When a leader steps up and leads, and sets boundaries that provide clarity that cuts through the noise, it is a new day.

For example, when Steve Jobs returned to apple as CEO, the company was in trouble. After diagnosing the problem as a lack of focus and by pruning 70 percent of apple's models and products, Jobs brought the company a much-needed moment of clarity through setting a positive boundary.

After a few weeks, Jobs finally had enough. "Stop!" he shouted at one big product strategy session. "This is crazy." He grabbed a Magic Marker, padded to a whiteboard, and drew a

horizontal and vertical line to make a four-squared chart. “Here’s what we need,” he continued. Atop the two columns he wrote “Consumer” and “Pro”; he labeled the two rows “Desktop” and “Portable.” Their job, he said, was to make four great products, one for each quadrant. “The room was in dumb silence,” Schiller recalled.*

* Walter Isaacson, Steve Jobs (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

In my view, the silence came from the profound clarity that such a positive boundary creates. From that point on, when it came to making computers, Apple employees knew what they were supposed to be working on as well as what they were not supposed to be working on. Jobs helped them “attend” to what was important, and “inhibited” everything else. He said that he was as proud of what Apple “didn’t make” as he was of what they did make.

The very clear boundary Jobs set defined the purpose and the focus of all of Apple’s efforts going forward. Through the act of setting such a boundary, Jobs gave his people the freedom to focus. They were no longer pulled in a thousand different directions—quite the opposite from the conditions Chris’s actions had stimulated at his company. Besides giving direction, good leadership boundaries also establish the norms and behaviors that drive success. They build unity and energy. They focus that energy and attention on what is important. They build optimism and empower people to do what they truly have the power to do to drive results. They set the conditions and standards for great teams and culture, as we shall see.

On the flip side, good leadership boundaries diminish bad behavior and forge an immune system that automatically identifies, isolates, and stamps out toxins, infections, or other viral patterns that would make the organization sick or lead it away from its values, mission, purpose, and results. Strong leaders set up the kind of culture and structures that will deal with negative behavior quickly and effectively so that it never takes root. If you truly build a high-performance culture, for example, it will not allow weak performance or nonperformance to take hold. Instead the culture responds by either fixing it or removing the source. All of that flows out of the boundaries established by the leader.

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