

WHAT TO SAY TO SET YOUR BOUNDARIES

A Practical Manual with Scripts for
Work and Personal Life



Alex B. Linden

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This book is for informational and educational purposes only and reflects the personal experiences and perspectives of the author.

First edition.

Note to the Reader

I want to be clear about what this book is, and what it is not.

This is not a therapy book. I am not a psychologist, counsellor, or medical professional, and I am not offering clinical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The material in this book is not intended to replace professional mental health care, legal advice, or workplace mediation.

This book is a practical manual about **language**, specifically, about what to say in situations where boundaries are unclear, pressured, or repeatedly crossed. It focuses on communication, judgment, and proportion, not emotional processing or personal healing.

The scripts and guidance here are meant to reduce friction, limit harm, and make interactions more manageable. They cannot control how others behave, and they will not resolve every situation. In some cases, words are not enough, and this book is explicit about those limits.

If you are experiencing overwhelming distress, persistent anxiety, depression, thoughts of self-harm, or feel unsafe in your environment, I strongly encourage you to seek support from a qualified mental health professional, a trusted healthcare provider, or an appropriate support service in your area.

Seeking help is not a failure of boundaries or strength. It is a responsible choice.

Use this book selectively. Take what is useful, leave what is not. Adapt the language to your context and your judgment. The goal is not to say the perfect thing, but to communicate clearly, consistently, and with care for your own well-being.

This book is meant to support clearer decisions, not to replace care, expertise, or common sense.

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Introduction

Most people do not struggle with boundaries because they are conflict-averse, emotionally immature, or unable to recognize their own needs.

They struggle because, in the moment when a boundary is needed, they do not know what to say.

The internal clarity is often there. They know what they want. They know what feels wrong. They know they should say something.

What disappears is the language.

Instead of a clear sentence, what comes out is explanation, justification, or apology. Or nothing comes out at all, and the boundary goes unset. Later, sometimes much later, the right words appear. But the moment has passed.

This manual exists to close that gap.

It provides the language that is missing when boundaries need to be set under pressure. It does not teach you to become more assertive, more confident, or more comfortable with conflict. It treats boundary-setting as a communication skill that can be practiced and refined regardless of personality.

The scripts that follow are not formulas. They are starting points. They are designed to be adapted to your situation, your relationships, and your judgment.

What this book is

This is a practical manual. It focuses on what to say in specific situations where boundaries are needed.

It addresses workplace dynamics, family interactions, friendships, romantic relationships, and persistently difficult people. It provides language for declining requests, setting limits on behavior, managing intrusion, and disengaging when necessary.

The language is intentionally neutral. It is designed to communicate limits without escalating tension, to hold under pressure, and to be repeatable when tested.

This is not a psychology book. It does not analyze why people struggle with boundaries, why others violate them, or what childhood patterns contribute to the difficulty. Those questions may be interesting, but they are not necessary to set a functional boundary.

This is also not a self-help book. It does not promise transformation, empowerment, or emotional healing. It offers language that works better than silence or over-explanation. That is a narrower goal, and a more achievable one.

What this book is not

This manual will not teach you to win arguments or dominate conversations. It will not make boundary-setting comfortable. It will not guarantee that people will respect your boundaries once you set them.

Boundaries do not control other people's behavior. They clarify what you are willing to participate in, and what you are not. How the other person responds is beyond your control.

What you can control is whether you communicate the limit clearly, whether you repeat it when necessary, and whether you recognize when language alone is insufficient.

This book provides tools for that level of control. It does not provide tools for anything beyond it.

Who this book is for

This book is for people who know what boundaries they need, but struggle to articulate them in real time.

It is for people who find themselves explaining when they meant to decline, apologizing when they meant to hold firm, or saying yes when they intended to say no.

It is for people who operate competently in other areas of their lives, managing responsibilities, navigating complexity, handling difficult conversations, but find boundary language harder to access under pressure.

It is not for people who need help identifying what their boundaries should be. That decision comes first. This manual assumes you already know what limit you want to set. The question it answers is how to set it in a way that is clear, proportional, and sustainable.

How the book is structured

The early chapters address foundational concepts: what boundaries are, why they fail, and what principles guide effective boundary language.

The middle chapters provide scripts organized by context: workplace boundaries, family boundaries, friendship boundaries, romantic boundaries, and boundaries with difficult personalities.

The later chapters address execution: how to choose the right response for a given situation, how to practice without overthinking, and when language is no longer the appropriate tool.

Each chapter is short. The focus is on clarity and utility, not comprehensiveness.

You do not need to read the book in order. If you are dealing with a specific situation, you can go directly to the relevant chapter. The scripts are designed to stand alone.

You also do not need to memorize the scripts. They are examples of phrasing that works. You will adapt them to fit your situation and your voice.

What to expect as you use this book

Boundary-setting will not become easy with practice. It will become more manageable.

The first time you set a particular boundary, it may feel awkward or uncomfortable. The tenth time, it will feel routine. That shift happens through repetition, not through confidence-building or emotional processing.

You will also encounter situations where the scripts do not quite fit. That is expected. Boundaries are situational. They require judgment about power dynamics, risk, history, and severity. The framework for making those assessments is included in the later chapters.

Some boundaries will be respected. Others will be ignored or tested. Some relationships will adjust. Others will not survive the boundary. That variability is normal. It is not evidence that you are setting boundaries incorrectly.

The goal is not to preserve every relationship or to avoid all conflict. The goal is to communicate limits clearly enough that you can make informed decisions about what happens next.

A note on tone

The tone of this manual is intentionally restrained.

It does not celebrate boundary-setting as an act of empowerment. It does not frame boundary struggles as evidence of deeper wounds that need healing. It does not promise that setting boundaries will improve your life in dramatic ways.

It treats boundaries as practical communications that reduce friction, prevent misunderstanding, and protect your capacity to function in relationships that matter.

That framing may feel understated. It is designed to be. Boundaries are not dramatic moments. They are small, repeatable decisions.

The more ordinary boundary-setting becomes, the easier it is to do.

How to begin

If you are facing a boundary situation right now, start with the chapter that addresses your context. Read the scripts. Choose one that is close to what you need. Adjust the wording if necessary. Deliver it.

If you are not facing an immediate situation, read the early chapters first. They provide context for why the scripts are structured the way they are, and how to choose language that matches the situation.

Either approach works. The book is designed to be used, not studied.

The chapters that follow will give you language you did not have before. They will not remove the discomfort of setting boundaries, but they will reduce the confusion about what to say.

That is what this manual is for.

Chapter 1: Why Boundaries Fail in Real Life

Most people don't struggle with boundaries because they don't know what a boundary is. They struggle because, in the moment when a boundary is needed, words disappear.

You know the feeling. Someone asks for something you don't want to give. A colleague oversteps. A family member pushes, again.

You feel it immediately in your body - tension, irritation, a quiet sense of "this isn't right."

And then, instead of a clear sentence, what comes out is something else.

You explain.

You soften.

You justify.

You say yes when you mean no.

Or you say nothing at all, and carry the resentment with you.

Later, often much later, the right words suddenly appear. You replay the conversation in your head and think: That's what I should have said. But the moment is gone. The pattern remains.

This book exists because that experience is not a personal failure.

It is a communication problem, and a very common one.

The problem is not weakness. Boundary advice often assumes that people fail because they are too nice, too afraid, or too insecure. That explanation sounds simple, but it rarely matches real life. Many people who struggle with boundaries are competent, articulate, and emotionally intelligent. They handle complex conversations at work. They support others. They carry responsibility. They are often the ones people rely on.

What they are not given is a usable language for moments of pressure.

In real situations, boundaries don't fail because someone lacks character. They fail because the situation is layered:

There is hierarchy.

There is history.

There is emotion.

There is the fear of consequences - social, professional, relational.

And there is often very little time.

When those factors collide, people default to whatever language feels safest in the moment. That language is usually politeness, explanation, or silence. Not because it works, but because it feels familiar.

Knowing what you want is not the same as knowing what to say. A common misconception about boundaries is that once you are clear internally, the rest should be easy. In practice, it rarely is. You can be very clear about what you want or don't want - and still struggle to express it out loud.

This happens because internal clarity does not automatically translate into external phrasing.

Internal clarity is private. Boundary communication is public.

The moment you speak, you are no longer dealing only with your own needs. You are also dealing with how your words land, how they are interpreted, and what they might trigger in the other person. Most people are trying to manage all of that at once, in real time, without a script.

That is a high cognitive load, especially in situations where the relationship matters.

Why advice sounds good but fails in practice

You've probably heard some version of this advice before:

"Just say no." "Be firm." "Don't overexplain." "Stand your ground."

None of this is wrong. It's just incomplete.

Telling someone to "be firm" without giving them language is like telling someone to "be calm" in the middle of an emergency. It may be well-intended, but it doesn't help when the pressure is already there.

In real conversations, firmness without wording often turns into abruptness, defensiveness, or apology spirals. People either come across harsher than they intended -or they retreat entirely.

What's missing is not courage. What's missing is phrasing.

Boundaries happen in motion, not in theory

Another reason boundaries fail is timing. Boundaries are rarely set in calm, planned conversations. They appear in motion: at the end of a long workday, in a meeting you didn't expect to turn difficult, during a family dinner, in a message you weren't prepared to receive.

There is often no pause button. No time to think through the perfect response.

In those moments, people reach for language they already know. That language may come from habits learned early in life, from professional culture, or from the unspoken rules of a group. It may be polite. It may be indirect. It may be self-sacrificing. It is rarely designed to protect a boundary.

Why this book focuses on words, not personality This manual does not ask you to change who you are. It does not require you to become more assertive, more confident, or more comfortable with conflict. Those things may develop over time, but they are not prerequisites.

Instead, this book treats boundaries as a communication skill, something that can be practiced, refined, and adapted.

Words matter because they shape the interaction before emotions escalate. Words buy time. Words signal limits without confrontation.

When the wording is right, the conversation often becomes easier than expected. Not because the other person suddenly changes, but because the situation is contained.

What this book will and will not do

This book will not teach you to win arguments. It will not teach you to dominate conversations. It will not promise that people will always respect your boundaries once you set them.

What it will do is give you language you can actually use - at work, at home, and in everyday situations where boundaries quietly erode.

You will find scripts, not as formulas, but as starting points. You will learn how to choose words that are neutral, steady, and clear enough to hold their ground without escalating the situation.

You will also learn when words are enough - and when they are not.

A final note before we continue

If you have struggled with boundaries, it is likely because you were never taught a usable boundary language. Most people weren't.

This is not about becoming someone else. It is about having access to better tools.

The chapters that follow are practical by design. They focus on situations, phrasing, and tone - not ideals.

You don't need to memorize anything. You don't need to deliver perfect lines.

You only need words that work better than silence, over-explanation, or regret.

