

# Enough is Enough: *How to Gracefully Set Unbreakable Boundaries*

*We all know that woman is everyone's saviour... or everyone's doormat... depending on how you look at it.*

She's the one who is always there to listen to anyone with a problem. The one that you call at the last minute to babysit, the one who's always there to co-host the webinar, the one that will whip up two dozen cupcakes for every school bake sale.

Sometimes she's the one that stays in a situation that even she admits is no good for her, or the one that is waiting for that magical 'one day' when other people are going to realise everything she's done for them and finally start paying her back. Most often, she's the one that's gradually sinking under a tide of over commitment, time poverty, exhaustion, and simmering resentment.

*Maybe she's you.*

I think a lot of women go through at least one phase of trying to be everything to everyone at some point in their lives. Perhaps its being supermum, a die hard activist, or the career woman who runs herself ragged at work during the week and then beats herself up for not doing more on the weekends. As women, we sometimes use sacrifice as a way of showing love. But the problem comes when we start sacrificing ourselves and letting people take advantage of us.

If you read nothing past this page, then I really hope you'll at least take this away:

*There are no prizes in life for exhaustion and self-sacrifice. You're not going to be able to help anyone if you don't learn how to take care of yourself first. And it really, truly doesn't have to be this way.*

The answer lies in boundaries.

# Let's talk Boundaries

Boundaries are so important, and yet for so many of us women, talking about them feels uncomfortable. If you want to have strong boundaries, it feels like you either have to run people over and generally be very masculine, or if you want to care for people it feels like you have to be a pushover. But this is absolutely not the case!

*You don't have to choose between being a bitch and being a pushover – what you need to be is a Queen.*

## *Action Step*

Grab a pen and brainstorm a list of qualities you would associate with the "Archetypal Queen".

I'm not talking about the Queen of England. But that image we have of "Queen".

Re-read your list and notice how she can be feminine, soft, but very powerful.

I talk a lot about the Queen PowerType at our One of many events and in the BePowerful programme because I just love how she's this brilliant mix of authority and serenity. She's not out there beating people into submission, and she's not constantly fighting for control. Instead, she gracefully, naturally steps into a position where she is powerful and people are happy to respect her and follow her.

This is the archetype you want to focus on as you're setting your boundaries.

Remember, it's not about struggling or having to constantly push other people back to defend yourself. It's about being clear on your goals, respecting the importance of your gifts and resources, and being able to confidently and clearly state what's OK and what's not.

*Another thing you need to think about as you're setting your boundaries is your realm.*

Every Queen has a realm; what's yours going to be? Your realm is those people you care about and choose to impact or have some kind of personal connection with. This could be your clients, your family, your friends, a charity you support, your colleagues ... whomever you choose.

But the key is that you have to choose. You can't be responsible for the whole world, and you can't take everything to heart. You have a finite amount of time and energy, and it's incredibly important that you spend these resources carefully! So before you do anything else, ask yourself who's in your realm.

### *Action Step*

Grab a piece of paper and write a list of all of the people, or groups of people whom you care about.

These are the people you really want the best for.

Define your realm.



# Figuring Out Your Boundaries

Once you've got your realm sorted, you need to figure out what your boundaries are. This doesn't have to be an exhaustive list — you're going to have some new boundaries come up in your day-to-day interactions with people — but you need to have some sense of what you're OK with.

This will intersect strongly with your personality and your needs. For instance, an introvert will likely have a boundary of needing a specific amount of alone time, and would feel infringed upon if they were constantly required to be out and about. Someone else might have a boundary around the amount of chores they do around the house, while another might have a boundary about how they get feedback. And of course, everyone has boundaries around their basic rights and treatment as humans.

## Action Step

Take some time to think about some boundaries which are important to you right now.

You don't have to have them all, just a few to get started with!

If you're having trouble, think about things that make you angry. Anger is often a sign that someone is crossing one of your boundaries, so it makes a good indicator.



What you really need to remember as you're setting your boundaries is to set them at the level where your needs are met. You don't set a boundary below where your needs are met, or at the point where you put up with it and put up with it until you suddenly explode. You set it at the point where you're doing fine. But any further infringement would cause you to feel anger, disrespect or upset. So when you're thinking about the different areas of your life, ask yourself, "What is it that I need to be fine in this situation? What boundaries or rules do I need?"



# How to Enforce a Boundary

All right, so you've got your realm and your boundaries on paper. But what do you do when someone doesn't respect a boundary? This is the part that trips a lot of women up — it's easy to set boundaries in your head and then either blow up or back down when they're violated in real life. But you don't have to do either one of those things; you can reassert your boundaries firmly, neutrally, and in a way that more often than not means that everybody gets what they need out of the encounter.

What I'm going to share with you is a very collaborative approach to boundary setting. This style of boundary setting should be done with people in your realm only. (I'll share how to handle boundaries with people outside your realm later). With people in your realm, you want to make sure that your needs are met, but you also try to ensure that they are respected and OK, and their needs are met too. This doesn't mean that they automatically get what they want, but it does mean that you can try to work things out to where everyone's needs are met.

This isn't always possible, and you may have to set a boundary where someone else's needs aren't met to ensure this. But they can always go and have their needs met elsewhere — you aren't responsible for meeting everyone's needs!

But in general, it's a much more collaborative process than most people think about with boundaries; and it allows you to walk the line between being aggressive and passive. It allows you to be in your soft power.

## *So what does this look like in action?*

It's a simple process of:

1. Acknowledge the person
2. State the boundary
3. Consider whether the boundary is a deal-breaker
4. Collaborate on a way forward

Let's look at a couple of examples.

For instance imagine someone is demonstrating a behaviour you don't like and that is not OK with you. For instance, your partner is consistently staying late at the office without letting you know.

### *1. Acknowledge the person*

*"It's fine if you choose to do XYZ"*

This immediately makes the conversation non-confrontational, and you're not judging anyone.

You would say *"It's fine if you choose to stay at the office late without letting me know..."*

## 2. State the boundary

Follow up with a firm, neutral statement of your boundary.

*“It’s fine if you choose to do XYZ, but that behaviour really doesn’t work for me/fit my values”*

*You would say “It’s fine if you choose to stay at the office late, but not communicating your plans to me really doesn’t work for me.”*

## 3. Consider whether the behaviour is a dealbreaker

If it is, then you need to make that clear by saying *“If this continues, then (state the consequence).”*

In our example, if you would rather be single than in a relationship with someone who never tells you their plans, then you would say...

*“It’s fine if you choose to stay at the office late, but not communicating your plans to me really doesn’t work for me. It does not fit with my values of honesty and communication. I feel disrespected. If this continues, then the relationship has to end”.*

If the behaviour is annoying to you, but not necessarily a deal breaker, you would skip this step.

## 4. Collaborate on a way forward

Look for ways that both of you can get your needs met and try to negotiate a way forward that you're both OK with. So you might end your conversation with a statement like,

*“What can we do to make sure that this boundary is respected going forward?” or  
“What do you need to be able to respect this boundary in future?”*

*“Perhaps you can help me understand why you do this, so we can work out a way for us both to get what we need?”*





# How to Say No Gracefully

*The process for saying no to a request follows the same 3 steps as setting a boundary, so it's worth having a look here too.*

Let's say someone asks you to help at the school fair, but you are absolutely tapped out this year. You COULD - the day is free - but you would exhaust yourself if you did.

1. Acknowledge the person:

*"Thank you for asking me to help out at the fair."*

Notice this is respectful and grateful, and leaves the door open for if you want to provide for that person's need later.

2. State the boundary:

*"Thank you for asking me to help out, but that doesn't work for me right now/this year/this week."*

One very important note here: in the case of a request, do not start by saying you're sorry, and don't give excuses! It's so easy to automatically respond to a request with "Oh, I'm sorry, I've got a million things to do..." It's cleaner and kinder to simply state the boundary and move on.

### 3. Is it a dealbreaker?

Most requests are unlikely to be dealbreakers, but I can imagine some requests that might have consequences. For instance a toddler asking for the 100th time to watch Peppa Pig (oh yes this is a personal one). In that case, the format is the same as above. *"I have said no. If you ask me again, there will be no more pigs today OR tomorrow."* ;-)

### 4. Collaborate on a way forward.

Back to our fete example. Perhaps you would say *"Now let me see if I can think of anyone else whomight be able to help you."*

# Reclaiming Boundaries *You've Let Slide Before*

Sounds pretty simple, right? But what if you're in a situation where you have a boundary, but you either haven't articulated it before or you haven't been enforcing it?

For instance, maybe your Mum is one of those who always calls you up at the worst possible time and insists that you come over right then. Or maybe you've got a neighbour who always asks you to babysit at really inconvenient times, and you've said yes up until now just to keep the peace.

In this situation, you obviously can't use the same type of conversation, because when you get to the bit about how you're not OK with the request or behaviour, they're going to think, 'But you were OK with it last time and all the times before that!'

This conversation is much better when you do it proactively than in the moment when the boundary is tested again, so if you know that you've been letting some boundaries slip before and need to fix that, then you need to find a time where you can talk to the other person involved neutrally.

*Once again there's a really simple system you can follow that we call "Reclaiming Your Space".*



## Reclaiming Your Space

1. Acknowledge the past
2. Set the boundary
3. Collaborate on a way forward.

Let's look in detail.

### 1. Start out by acknowledging the past.

You need to be very up front about your part in what's gone on. The point here isn't to attack anyone or to lay blame; it's to get your boundary respected.

For example, you might say,

*"Mum, in the past I've always come round when you called, no matter what was happening for me at the time..."*

or

*"Jane, I've always said yes when you asked me to babysit before..."*

### 2. Then set the boundary.

You need to be very clear that there's going to be a change in the dynamics of the situation, so tell the person that you're no longer willing or able to fulfill their request or put up with their behaviour. Again, you don't need to give reasons or excuses; the way you spend your time and energy is nobody's business but yours. You just need to state the boundary.

You can do this by simply saying,

*“I’m no longer willing/able to do that.”*

### 3. Collaborate on a way forward.

Then try to figure out a way that they can get their needs met by someone else, and you can keep your boundaries strong. This usually looks something like,

*“Let’s talk about what you need and how we can make sure that you’re getting those needs met, and how I can make sure that my needs are met too”.*

# Setting Boundaries with *those Outside of your Realm*

But what about when someone is outside of your realm? We encounter people outside our realm asking us for time, energy, money, and all kinds of things all the time, and it can be hard to say no at first. As women we often find it tempting to try to take care of everything and everyone, but this actually does people a disservice — not to mention completely wearing you out!

You've got to stick to your realm and keep your energy focused there so that it can actually benefit. If you spread your resources around outside your realm, you won't have enough left over to care for those things that really matter to you. If you try to help everybody, you won't be much help to anybody!

So whenever someone who's outside your realm asks you for something, you just say "No, thank you." And walk away! No need for guilt, no need to feel like you're letting someone down — you're caring for yourself and your realm.

## *Pitfalls*

### *Feeling like you're letting people down.*

This is so common, especially when you're first getting used to enforcing your boundaries. It can feel really hard to say no to people, especially those who have depended on you before. But remember, you're 100% responsible for getting your needs met — just like every other adult. And there's just no way that you can care for people if you're always tapped out.

### *Trading short term awkwardness for long term resentment.*

How often have you said yes to something that you really, really didn't want to do just because it was less awkward in the moment than saying no? I'm right there with you, but I've learned that it's much better to have a little bit of awkwardness than a lot of resentment, which is what happens when you agree to do things you don't want to do.

(By the way, ever wonder why it's so hard to say no? It's because as women we have a primal "tend and befriend" instinct which is triggered by adrenaline - a stress hormone. It dates back hundreds of thousands of years to our primal ancestors. In that situation, women would have to band together to survive, or, being the smaller,

physically weaker sex, would need the protection of the males. So being liked was crucially linked to survival. So perhaps agreeing to do things is an ancient survival mechanism. Of course it's not applicable now ... but still powerful!)

### *Working outside your realm.*

It can be hard to stick to your realm, especially when you're confronted with people or situations that you want to help, whether that's a colleague on her third round of rehab or a person collecting for charity in the street. But working outside your realm does a disservice to those in your realm and wears you out so that you can't make any serious contribution in your realm or outside it.

### *Not making a dealbreaker a dealbreaker.*

Being wishy washy about your boundaries, especially your dealbreakers, is incredibly draining, because you're constantly having to question, break down, and reassert your needs. So think carefully about what your deal breakers are and stick to them!



# Your Turn

1. Sketch out your realm. Who's in it? Who isn't? Where do you draw that line?
2. List out your non-negotiable boundaries. What are those dealbreakers for you? Write them down and put them somewhere that you can easily see them in your day-to-day life. If there's one that tends to get trampled, put that one at the top with a script of how you'll handle it.
3. What specific steps are you going to take going forward to protect your resources? Whether you're thinking about time, energy, money, or simply mental bandwidth, it's important to make sure that you're keeping your 'reservoirs' topped up.
4. Think of a time when someone hasn't respected a boundary that you have made clear. How did that happen? What did it feel like? Knowing what you know now, what would you say in that situation?

A lot of strong feelings can come up with these exercises, especially if you've had people seriously violate important boundaries, or even if you've just had people infringing on your little boundaries for years without saying anything. If you're feeling really strong emotions, take some time to sit in that and really feel it. Then move on from it — you may want to try a releasing exercise like my Limitation Release Meditation.

# Remember

*How to enforce  
a boundary:*

1. Acknowledge:

*“Thank you for asking...” or  
“It’s fine if you choose...”*

2. Set the boundary:

*“But that doesn’t work for me right  
now” Or “That behaviour doesn’t  
work for me”.*

3. Dealbreaker?

*If yes, then “If this continues,  
the relationship is going to end”.*  
Remember, you don't have to  
justify yourself!

4. If it's not a dealbreaker,  
then work it out in collaboration

*How to reclaim  
your space:*

1. Acknowledge the past:

*“In the past I have...”*

2. Set the boundary:

*“Now I’m no longer able to...”*

3. Work out a way forward.

*When someone’s  
outside your realm:*

*“No, thank you.”*

And that's it!





## Dr Joanna Martin

Founder, One of Many

Doctor. Entrepreneur. Author.  
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Loud Sister. Toddler Wrangler. Seeker.

Dr Jo Martin is a speaker, author and medical doctor who uniquely blends her scientific approach with ancient wisdom. She has been educating difference makers since 2003 and has presented to over 65000 people on 4 different continents.

Jo is herself a highly effective woman. Having graduated as a medical doctor with honours, she went on to attend the Actors Centre Australia, where alumni include Hugh Jackman and Nicole Kidman. Before long she found acting was just the opening into her true calling as a coach, author and speaker.

From successful solo-preneurship, it wasn't long before she was travelling the world delivering transformational seminars to rooms of up to 3000 and a time... and nearly burned out. She had to find a different way of doing things. Something more sustainable. She did. Interestingly sustainable meant even more successful. Which is cool, but perhaps not surprising.

When she launched her second business, Shift Speaker Training, in 2008 she took it from a standing start to 7 figures in 12 months. One of many™ is the culmination of a life's work dedicated to helping women handle the day-to-day so they can pursue the life's work they feel called to do. She's also a diplomatic wife, a sometimes-too-tired mother, and a caring friend. She's got a very cool head, but a very big heart.

*"I'm many things. And I'm just one of many women.  
Like you.  
And together we can change the world."*