

Anita Pizycki, Professional Development Coach
Professional Coaching Company

"Coaching Professionals and Entrepreneurs to Make More Money in Less Time"

7 Step Method For Nice People To Set Boundaries

Are you a nice person and exhausted from others dumping their needs on you?

Are you busy trying to do your best in life and get some of your own personal needs met?

Working hard at work, being a good partner, being a kind and caring parent, trying to get in some self-care such as getting to the gym or read a great book and the other 100's of things on your to-do list to meet your own goals. Most of this you do yourself because you are kind and don't want to burden others with your issues. So you are the type of person that doesn't ask much from others

Minding your own business, you suddenly get slammed. Someone with a lack of emotional boundaries (also referred to as "Emotional Vampires") thinks that you are their personal dumping ground. And this can happen anywhere:

-At work, a fellow partner makes snide remarks such as "it must be nice to leave early". You have been in the office since before the crack of dawn so you can make your son soccer game but the comment hits you hard and has you questioning your professionalism.

-At work, a client calls that is having a bad day and decides to tell you all about it. He feels better you feel drained. He is your client after all, and you want to help, of course, so you take on some of the responsibility of how to fix this for him. However, he is fee conscious and your not sure you can bill for the fix or even the call you just took.

-At home your mom calls (again) to tell you all the negative things she has observed today. She thinks she is just discussing facts, you feel like you were hit in the gut with a baseball bat (again). But you are the only one she says she can talk to. That's because she has pissed everyone else off in her life and now you are her sole emotional supporter.

-At a social event, a friend comes sees you and runs over to give you the 12th update on their bad relationship and asks you what to do about it. You have listened and given her advice the other 11 times but she hasn't taken any action. You start to think, she just likes the drama of her life and you start avoiding events she might be at.

-You are casually dating and meet Mr. Maybe who proceeds to proclaim his love for you in the second week and wants to know when you will be reciprocating this. You don't want to hurt him as he has many other good qualities, so you rationalize this neediness away and continue dating and feeling pressured.

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I have experienced all of the above and so have my coaching clients. And that's why one of the first things we always work on is getting them to set stronger boundaries. Why? Because "Givers have to set boundaries because takers never will."

If you are experiencing any of these:

- the feeling of being drained
- taken off personal focus
- lack of productivity
- feeling somehow you are inadequate
- feelings of anger, resentment or loss of hope

Then it may be time to start setting some stronger boundaries. For the nice person setting boundaries can be especially hard. Therefore I have created a 7 step method called STANDUP that my clients have found helpful.

- S Stop Taking Responsibility for Stuff that's Not Yours
- T Think: Is This In Line With My Values and Goals
- A Accept: Decide What Behaviors You Will Accept and Which Ones You Will Not
- N Non-Emotional Communication of New Boundaries and Consequences
- D Demand of Yourself to Be Prepared For Pushback and Violations
- U Use Your Voice to Call Others on Boundary Violations Right Away
- P Plan Ahead By Creating Rules for Yourself Where Possible

1. Stop Taking Responsibility for Stuff that's Not Yours

Other people crises do not have to become your crisis. Empathetic people feel for the other person and often take on the responsibility for what is happening to them without even knowing they are doing it. So when faced with someone who is dumping their problem on you stop and ask first ask this question: "What percentage of this is my responsibility? Start to be conscious of what is and is not your responsibility. And in your head, start repeating to yourself "not my circus, not my monkey"

2. Think: Is This In Line With My Values and Goals

Until you know what is important to you, you will let what is important to others overtake your time and energy. Have you ever been working on a hard deadline that has to be met (such as tax returns that are due tomorrow) and easily put off people to meet that deadline? Goals based on your values are like that. They become hard deadlines for yourself.

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For instance, if you are clear you value:

- Family, then it's easier to say no to working more overtime
- Productivity, then it is easier to say no to interruptions
- Self-Respect, then it is easier to stand up to bullies
- Ease, then its easier to remember to stop making it so hard

We all have many competing values so it is important to know your top 8-10. These will help you define the changes you need to make to honor those values.

Many of my clients also value "Compassion" and want to be seen and remembered as a compassionate person. However, these same people ask me "How can I be compassionate and still not end up dead". I remind them that they have to take a big-picture view of compassion. That they will not be judged over their lifetime on each individual request. And remind them that they will also not always be judged fairly by those that dump. So they need to stand back and look at each request. First, acknowledge that they have been very compassionate over their lifetime. And then see how this request fits in based on where they are at the moment based on their list of values, goal, and needs.

3. Accept: Decide What Behaviors You Will Accept and Which Ones You Will Not

This will depend on each person and the circumstance. And remember that it's important to win the war, not just one battle, so you also have to know when and where you will bend the rules.

Look at the drain on your energy that this particular event is creating and make a decision on what behavior from others you will and won't accept.

For the client that calls and dumps on you: Next time they call as soon as they go into their story. Stop them right there (yes interrupt them) and tell them that while you appreciate the severity of the issue you first need to know what they need from you on this issue before they continue. And also remind them of your hourly rate and check with them to make sure they are ok being charged for this call. Let them tell you and hear it. If they just need a sounding board say great and listen without taking on the responsibility. If they need a solution from you say I would love to help you but you need to pull back some of the emotion so I can focus on the facts to be able to help you.

For the mom that calls to dump her negative view of the world on you: The next time they call when it's not a good time for you, don't pick it up. When it is a good time, call them back and start the conversation with Hi Mom, sorry saw you called but I couldn't pick up. I really appreciate that you need to talk to me about things but I'm really busy until 6 pm. I want to give you my full attention so how about I call you at 6 pm Monday and Thursday nights. Also, I understand that you are stressed about how the world works but I can't fix it. I have my own stresses and letting you know I will stay on the phone as long as the conversation is upbeat and healthy for

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me. If you head into the negative talk I am going to be saying goodbye. I love you, mom. Now, what did you want to tell me?

For the friend that keeps dumping their relationship drama on you: Next time she calls or approaches you at a party. Say hi and see where the conversation is going? If she brings up the same issue again say "I am so sorry you are going through this. Have you read that book I recommended about dealing with difficult relationships?" If they say no. Say, well you keep coming to me for advice and then when I give it you don't follow it. I can't help you if your not willing to take action and help yourself and I because I am a good friend I am no longer going to enable you to not take action here. If you would like to talk about what your next steps are going to be to solve this I would love to talk about your relationship, if not I am going to ask you to move to another topic.

For Mr. Needy Maybe: During the next conversation in which they push you into a corner needing to know your feelings or when you will be having feelings? Tell them that this relationship is too new for you to really know him yet and if this is required then for you the relationship is over. Trust your intuition here, if you are feeling too pressured right in the beginning and it bothers you, then be clear that you will walk away right now. No matter what other good qualities this person has, this will not get better. He will be hurt either way. If you leave now or you leave in 2 months when you really can't stand it.

For the partner who throws snide comments (the bully): When he throws the next one be prepared. Smile and say. Yes, it is nice to be leaving early as I planned it this way when I came in at 6 am. Are you aware that when you make comments like that you are questioning my work ethic? Is that what you are trying to do? Then stop talking and be silent for as long as it takes for him to respond. If you get a No, I'm just kidding or pulling your leg type of response, then reply with "well it not funny to me and I ask that you don't do it again" Most bullies when called on their behavior will stop. If not, do it again next time he makes a comment. Again requesting non-emotionally that he stop this behavior and walk away. Do not feel bad, he doesn't.

You have to come up with a clear consequence for their ignoring your request. And you must be prepared to take that action you told them you would if they continue their bad behavior.

Again, there may be a circumstance where you will bend the rules such as your mom was in an accident and need to call you right now. Deal with each interaction and unless it is a true emergency then hold your ground first.

4. Non-Emotional Communication of New Boundaries and Consequences

The first rule in dealing with these people without emotional boundaries is to not be emotional yourself. If what they said has made you emotional take yourself to a quiet place and pull yourself together. If you have to, make a non-emotional excuse to hang up or leave the space where the interaction is occurring.

-Sorry I have another call coming in that I have to take

-Sorry I have to get to a meeting or dentist appointment (something with a deadline)

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-Sorry hold that thought, I really have to go talk to Bob over there as he has been looking for me.

When you return the call or see that person again.

Using the examples up in #3 state clearly what you will and won't accept as behavior.

Tell them the consequence of what will happen (what you will do) if they violate your clear request.

Don't promise or commit to anything they want. Hold your ground. If necessary, end the call or visit nicely and give them time to process the whole thing. You have acted differently than ever before. Some of them are going to try to drag you into a conversation with comments such as:

"What wrong with you, this was never an issue before"

"You take things too seriously"

"Well I thought you were my friend"

" Well is that any way to treat your mother"

You are changing your behavior and not allowing them to continue their bad behavior. They are not going to like it at all. Answer all they say with a kind reply and remove yourself from the conversation as quickly as possible. Do not feel bad, they don't for dumping on you.

5. Demand of Yourself to Be Prepared For Pushback and Violations

Nice people tend to avoid conflict at all costs. This where you have to know that you are not respecting yourself when you don't stand up for yourself. This is also where you need to be strong to re-train people to interact with you according to your rules. Isn't it better to deal with the issue and the person and keep them in your life in a way you both benefit from the relationship, then go around avoiding them and they don't know why? As for dating, cutting them out is sometimes necessary so both of you can move on to find someone who is a better match for both of you. You are actually helping the other person move on as even keeping them in the friend zone will keep them waiting for you. This is not good for them or you.

So expect them to come at you again. When they do repeat your request and the consequences unemotionally. Again be prepared to hang up nicely or walk away to give them time to process and get used to the idea.

Generally, after a few times, they will get that you are serious and this is important to you. And they will start to modify their behavior to keep you in their world.

In a personal relationship:

If they don't change their behavior, you may have to tell them you are taking a break from them for a while. Tell them clearly how they are draining you and that you love/like/respect them, but you need some time to recover from this drain. Tell them for how long and under what circumstances they can reconnect with you are or when you will reach out to reconnect with them.

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In a working relationship:

If they don't change their behavior you may have to take the following actions:

With clients, one solution is to increase the billing rate for difficult clients. If they want to keep dumping on you and are willing to pay for the service you will be at least paid for the energy you are expending. Emotional support goes above and beyond your general service package. I have done this personally and so have my clients. It works every time. They either pay for the value of what you are giving them, cease the dumping as it's costly or they take their business somewhere else. In the long run, clients that drain your energy are also usually the ones that complain about the bill. They are class C or D clients and you will do you and your staff a favor to let them go if you can't modify their behavior.

With partners (or staff), first make your request of the offender. Warn them if they don't change their behavior you will take your complaint to a partners meeting or HR department for it to be handled through a more official channel. Give them sufficient time to change their behavior and if after several conversations and warnings take action and use the more official channels. Again do this when you can be non-emotional and only share the facts of what is happening. Bullying is harassment and as we see in the news these days, should never be allowed as the bully tends not to change on their own.

6. Use Your Voice to Call Others on Boundary Violations Right Away

This is critical. People don't like to change behaviors that are serving them so you must be firm on what you do. Again do it non-emotionally, repeating your original request and the consequences. Only continue the interaction if they comply. If not, say sorry but I can't continue this discussion right now and walk away/hang up.

If you are always non-emotional and talk calmly, they can not call you “crazy” “fragile” or “over-sensitive” and they will have to take you seriously.

7. Plan Ahead By Creating Rules for Yourself Where Possible

Outlook has rules for dealing with incoming email so you don't have to be bothered by certain email you don't need to see right now. For the same reason, you should have rules for yourself. They help immensely when dealing with dumpers. Setting general rules for yourself will help you identify and stay out of these draining situations earlier. Once you have done the above for a while you will be able to set some of these general rules for yourself.

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Rules for yourself might look like this:

- Stop jumping for others. Eg. Don't pick up the phone when you are focused or tired
- Stop the free-for-all caller. Eg. Set up times with personal contacts when you will pick up the phone. Such as after 6 pm.
- Create blocks of time to reply to emails. Eg. Let people know you will reply to emails at 11 am and 4 pm each day if it an emergency then please call you on your cell.

And if you're like me and my clients you are nice and empathetic, so it helps to know that by setting strong boundaries you are actually helping that other person. You are no longer enabling them to have bad behavior which may be affecting their other relationships.

Bonus: Because it's difficult to change behaviors and feel like "you're not being nice or compassionate" which goes against your grain, it's important to get out of your head and on paper. I have created a form to help walk you through each of the 7 steps using your own situation and placed it below.

My request to you:

- How did they work for you?
- What didn't work for you?
- Do you need help completing or implementing the steps?

Sometimes nice people need more support to stand up for themselves. Email me at anita@professionalcoachingcompany.com if you need a sounding board or some courage to actually stand up to that person who is dumping their needs on you. I am here for you. My goal is to make sure nice people get to get their needs met too.

Form: 7 Step Method for Nice People to Set Boundaries

Who is dumping on me?

What are they dumping/doing that bothers me?

How does this make me feel?

How is this affecting my energy level?

How is this affecting my productivity?

How is this affecting my overall happiness?

How long has this been going on?

Is this person concerned about how they are making me feel?

What is going to happen if I don't put a stop to it?

How important is it that I put a stop to it now?

1. Stop Taking Responsibility for Stuff that's Not Yours

What percentage of this is my responsibility to fix for this person? _____

If I have given advice before did they follow it? _____

Does it appear like drama in their lives and really don't want to fix this? _____

Am I enabling them by not changing my behavior? _____

Is this my monkey? _____ If not am I ready to give it back? _____

If yes, repeat in your head as often as necessary "not my circus, not my monkey"

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2) Think: Is This In Line With My Values and Goals:

Do I know my top 8-10 values? _____

Which value is this person stepping on? _____

Which value am I not honoring when I allow this? _____

If one of my values is "Compassion" can I acknowledge that over my lifetime I have been very compassionate and that stopping this persons behavior as compassionately as possible leaves me in line with my values?

3. Accept: Decide What Behaviors You Will Accept and Which Ones You Will Not:

Behavior I will accept:

Behavior I won't accept:

Consequences I will hold them to if they continue unacceptable behavior?

If those don't work what will I do?

What do I need to make sure I follow through on this? (such as have someone hold me accountable ?)

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4. Non-Emotional Communication of New Boundaries and Consequences

What helps me pull myself together emotionally? (deep breathing, walk outside, call a friend)

Does this person do this to everyone? _____

So is this personal or just who they are? _____

What to say if they say:

"What wrong with you, this was never an issue before" _____

"You take things too seriously" _____

"Well I thought you were my _____?" _____

"Well is that any way to treat your _____?" _____

Other comment you might expect and your reply _____

5. Demand of Yourself to Be Prepared For Pushback and Violations

Am I prepared for pushback and violations _____

If not, what do I need to do to be prepared? _____

6. Use Your Voice to Call Others on Boundary Violations Right Away

Am I prepared to call them on violations right away? _____

If not, what do I need to do to be prepared? _____

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7. Plan Ahead By Creating Rules for Yourself Where Possible

What are my new general boundary rules that keep for focused and energized?

Here are some areas for you to consider:

Around the phone: (eg. I never answer the phone when I am tired or focused)

Around emails: (eg. I train people that I answer emails only at 11am and 4pm)

Around texts and social media: (eg: I train certain people that only answer personal texts/PM's after work)

At work: (eg. I have a single boss/partner that helps me evaluate competing work deadlines)

At home: (eg. I help with homework and school forms only between end of school and 9pm-no exclusions)

Other: (on the weekends my main focus is to rest and rejuvenate doing what I want to do)

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