

Tips for Maintaining Boundaries to Ensure Comfort and Personal Safety

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Many people have difficulty with understanding what should and should not be revealed to others. When you have any interaction with another individual, whether it is a checkout clerk or a classmate, there are certain things you are allowed to reveal and other information you are not supposed to divulge. The reason why such rules are in place is to maintain order in relationships among people. Such order can only be preserved if your own feelings are undisturbed (not upset), other people's feelings are undisturbed, and the exchanges among people constitute equal contributions from each of the parties involved and reflect the closeness of the relationship between the two individuals. The following are some tips for maintaining the comfort of yourself and others:

- When interacting with people you do not know well, generally try to stay away from talking about religion, politics, and sexual matters, unless you have met due to a common goal related to any of these topics, such as a church. All of the above are sensitive topics because people have very different views on these topics and tend to get personally attached to their views and choices related to these three topics. Therefore, if you say or do something that openly contradicts that person's views, that individual may become strongly offended and may not want to continue interacting with you.
- Do not talk about any private bodily functions at the dinner table, because visualizing these things while eating will gross most people out and thus make them lose their appetite. Generally, do not talk about the details of any health problems or any bodily functions to anyone except for your doctor, family or friends you have frequently interacted with.
- Do not ask someone personal questions until you have found out what the other person is comfortable talking about. Examples of personal questions include asking someone about whether he/she has been diagnosed with anything and with what, asking about someone's marital status, age, or sexual orientation. If you have met someone new and are unsure of how much information this person feels comfortable sharing, just ask him or her about it. Conversely, if the other person asks questions that you feel are too personal, you could tell the person that you do not feel like sharing this information about yourself. Similarly, if talking about a certain topic or subject makes you feel uncomfortable, you are free to say that to the other person and then switch the topic.
- Try to refrain from making negative personal remarks to other people. Examples of such remarks include "you are so stupid" and "you are too stubborn" - anything that directly describes the other individual is a personal remark. Making these kinds of comments to other people is risky because each person will interpret a comment like this differently. As a result, even an innocent comment may be taken as offensive by the individual. While people sometimes make such remarks jokingly, Evguenia suggests staying away from even trying it if you generally have difficulty understanding social context and reading non-verbal cues.
- When feeling angry or frustrated in public, cope with your emotions on the spot instead of holding them in as this could later result in an emotional outburst. The possible consequence of such an outburst can include loss of a job, friends and reputation. In order to manage your emotions, you could talk to someone, write down your feelings, or just take a break to compose yourself.

Additionally, if the reason for these emotions is a problem with a specific person, you need to approach that person after having calmed down and then clear up the issue with him or her.

A technique Evguenia uses to maintain personal boundaries while not invading the boundaries of others is to restrain herself from talking about anything that does not relate to the purpose of a situation. For example, at work, she will only talk about work-related things and refrain from mentioning anything about her personal life or any other topic. This has been helpful in keeping her from overstepping boundaries. In this case, it is better to be extra cautious than to let yourself slip up, because it can be very easy to damage one's social reputation. All social boundaries are important, particularly in any formal setting, such as on the job, or with anyone who is in higher authority than you, such as your professor or your extended family.

There are certain boundaries that, if crossed, are likely to put you and your belongings at an immediate risk or may significantly affect your chances of furthering your career. The following are some examples of such boundaries being crossed.

- Sharing your confidential information in potentially public spaces. Be careful as to where you give out your credit card information, your social insurance number, your income amount, etc. For example, on the Internet, it is most safe to only share your credit card information on websites where you can pay through PayPal or websites that are widely known and purchased at, such as CafePress.com or Amazon.com. If you buy items from a private retailer through Amazon.com or Ebay.com, make sure that the seller's rating is very high and that the reviews are genuine. Always look for what the worst reviews have said. Todd once fell for a scam where a woman on an Internet dating website offered to talk over webcam. However, she said that in order for him to be able to see her on webcam, he had to go on this website and sign up first, with the sign-up process including giving his credit card information. Since she told him that he could get the first 24 hours free, he signed up and then tried to cancel before the 24 hours were up in order to avoid getting charged, but he ended up being charged anyway.
- If you use a social media website, such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, it is important for you to know

what kind of information is appropriate to share with whom. For example, employers often look up job applicants online in order to get a better idea of whom they are hiring. Therefore, it is important to restrict how much of your profile is visible to the public. The pictures you put up can communicate different things to different people, as well as your wall posts, so it might be best to hide your pictures and your wall posts from anyone who is not on your friends list. Also, do not try to add people who are in higher authority than you, such as your teacher, professor or manager, since you have a strictly formal relationship with these people. Again, you do not know how others can interpret things you post on your profile and affect your relationship with them, which may affect your career in the future. If you have your address and/or phone number posted, make sure that everyone who sees this information is someone you can trust to not do anything to you that will invade your personal space, such as prank calling or stalking you. You may be able to determine whom you can and can't trust by observing whether the person's words logically match the person's actions, whether he or she listens to you and follows what you say (respects your feelings and thoughts) or at least tries to do so, and whether he or she appears to be hiding something important from you by changing the subject every time you talk about it. There are a lot of nuances to knowing whom to trust, so these are just some general guidelines.

- Sharing information about how much money you are carrying and about your valuables (i.e. expensive items such as iPods, laptops, cell phones, Kindles) in a public space. For example, if you announce at school that you have an expensive laptop in your locker, you are significantly increasing the chances of someone breaking into your locker and taking it. Examples of public spaces include school, workplace, public social destinations such as coffee shops, restaurants or clubs, or other people's homes. Revealing such information on an online social networking site can also indirectly lead to a greater likelihood of someone going after your possessions.
- Be careful about sharing confidential information such as your age, your cultural background, health status, disabilities, income, or marital status. Although these questions are technically illegal to ask, some interviewers find ways to extract this information from the interviewees in a very subtle way. As making this information available to the employer can easily result

in discrimination, you have to be very careful about not revealing anything under the above categories in job interviews.

In a work setting, do not divulge confidential or sensitive information about yourself or about the work you are doing (for example, personal information regarding clients). If you are working for a company, sharing confidential information is likely to be illegal and may result in you being either fired or sued. If you provide services independently be aware of privacy legislation and act accordingly or people will lose trust in you, which will damage your reputation and result in fewer opportunities for you.

To limit anxiety-provoking and risky situations, try to avoid putting yourself in any of the above scenarios. Think about how these or similar scenarios could happen in your life and brainstorm the possible ways to prevent them from happening. Hopefully these tips will help you to improve your own well-being as well as your relationships with others.

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