

Setting Boundaries in a Professional Manner

By

Peggy L. McNamara

Every once-in-a-while you run across someone who does not seem to understand time restraints or proper business etiquette. In other words, you may find yourself working on a project with a co-worker who consistently talks and bombards the meetings with her personality. She will do her darndest to not let anyone else get a word in and before you know it, the allotted time is over and nothing has gotten accomplished.

Or, you may be in an office situation where your desk is next to a person who doesn't understand that you don't want to know everything about his personal life and the way he spends his free time. The more he shares, the less respect you have for him and it is impacting your professional relationship. The examples could be endless but the key question is, "How do you work with these people and still be effective in your area and be a good team player?"

While these kind of people can be frustrating to work with, here are a few tips to help you set the professional boundaries that are needed:

* Be upfront with your time constraints. When an individual does not stop talking to you, whether it is in the hallway, on the phone or in your office, it is important that you somehow get the message across that you need to move on to other things. If you are meeting face-to-face, your body language will do a lot to speed things along. You can get up from your desk and act as if you are escorting that person to the door; you can dig in your purse and get your keys out, place them on the desk and leave your purse on your lap as if you are getting ready to leave (of course, only use this if you are actually leaving in a few moments.)

If you want to be a bit more bold about it, let the person know, as he is joining you, that you only have so many minutes for him. Give him a time allotment and stick with it. If you know that's not reasonable with him, let him know, immediately, that you don't have time for the conversation and suggest a block of time that would be appropriate. When you do get together, be sure and re-specify how much time you have for him and keep close tabs on the clock. You have to follow through on this. No exceptions.

* Handle the person who likes all the attention. When you are in a meeting and there is one person, we'll say it is a she, who is bombarding the conversation, agenda and any matter that arises, it is important that someone handle it. If you are leading the meeting, the first step is to be aware of it; keep an eye on the body language of those around you.

As she continues to inject her opinion, politely begin to ask other people to specifically remark on the topic. If she keeps going, ask her to allow other people some time. If she still doesn't get it, talk to her after the meeting to help her realize how what she is doing is not productive or helping anyone. This works best in a small group setting.

If you are leading a larger meeting, just don't call on that person any longer or give her any of your eye contact; as you look at her, whether you realize it or not, you are giving her permission to speak.

When you are attending a meeting, and not leading it, do your part to help the leader along with the above suggestions. Another option would be to talk to the leader afterwards with feedback. Understand, it is probably going to be up to the person leading the meeting to notice this and make it better for all, and yet, sometimes a team effort is needed.

* Communicate with your co-worker. I appreciate people that are self-actualized and know what works for them and what doesn't. When your co-worker consistently shares more information than you would like, find a way to let him know that while you enjoy working with him, you'd prefer he leave his stories at home. Easier said than done, I know and yet, if you have tried the tactics of walking away when he begins his daily ritual of story telling, not laughing at him, with him or with other people when he's done and given no indication that you invite what he's telling you, what other choice do you have?

Of course, as in all things, you have to determine whether the above suggestions are appropriate for you or not. The most important aspect of utilizing these tips is going to be your tone-of-voice; that is going to have a greater impact on the outcome than just about anything else. The key is to put these into practice in the most professional way you know how; show respect, consideration and willingness to help.

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Peggy L. McNamara
Author of "My Tender Soul - A Story of Survival"
Publishes monthly e-zine, "Perpetual Life Management"
President/Minnesota Chapter/ Nat'l Speakers Assoc 651-438-2656 - direct
651-438-2694 - fax
888-269-7771
<http://www.peggymcnamara.com>

Peggy L. McNamara works with organizations that want to Stimulate Some Action* and with association executives who want inspiring, practical value from their events.

Caroline Spurgeon
Assistant to Peggy L. McNamara
p 651-438-2656
p 888-269-7771
f 651-438-2694
<<http://www.peggymcnamara.com>>