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Hi, Contessa. Welcome to the Career Contessa podcast. You are a shortcut to be more fulfilled, healthy, and successful at work. I'm your host, Lauren McGoodwin. We're back today with another episode in our three and 30 series, where we bring you three tangible tips and 30 minutes that you can implement in your career right now. My co-host for this series is Marie Lemonik, a career coach and a regular on the podcast.

Hi everyone. Today we're diving into the perfect spooky season topic setting boundaries at work after coaching hundreds of extremely ambitious women. This is one of the most consistent struggles I've seen across nearly every person. If you are someone who prides herself on being a helper to all, but often at the detriment to yourself, we've got you covered today.

We're really focusing on how to set boundaries in a way that feels balanced and fair, not throwing all compassion out the window, but also not self abandoning in the process. Before we get into this meaty topic, Lauren, I was just saying before we hit record, it feels like it's been so long since I've seen you. How are you?

How's Halloween prep going? And the mom life? Give us all the updates. I feel like it feels like a long time also because we have like a holiday or a season. You know what I mean? It's like this line of demarcation of, like when we talked last time school was starting. Now it's. And of course, my whole life revolves around like these holidays has my, kind of markers because that's what my kids are at.

Halloween is such a real thing when you have toddlers, it's like, very different than, before they're really into our whole street gets really into it. My husband has already had to go to Costco, buy our blow up ghosts and some other things. You know, you always say you're never going to be the family that has those crazy blow ups in your front yard.

You will be, because your kids love them. So yeah, Halloween prep is in full force. I've got one kid's going to be a pumpkin. One kid's going to be a firefighter, and I'm just hoping that they don't change their minds. Now that we have the costumes between now and, not Thanksgiving, but, Halloween and stuff.

Yeah. Let me call out about not robbing the house with a big bowl of items. And yeah, I never say never. Like when you see them, just have some compassion for the parents because they probably don't want that either. But they have to do it. Okay. Like, there's, like, they're all over my street and everyone who has one.

The one thing we all have in common is we have children under the age of like four, you know? So there you go. How are we? Happy birthday, by the way. Thank you. Yeah. I had a birthday the end of September, and I've been in LA just messaging some friends for a bit, and it was so fun to celebrate here.

I used to live here like, ten years ago at this point, so it's nice to be back for a little bit. But I am going home to Texas next week, so the trip is ending soon. Well, I, I love a fall birthday on the summer birthday, but I feel like the fall birthday. People like my sons of Fall Burton. Like you guys have it right? And summer birthdays were sort of like the forgotten one. So, good for you for planning that. AKA your parents. Cool. All right, well, let's talk about boundaries, because I do think that this is something that people think a lot about, and I think it's a little abstract. And at the end of the day, everyone's like, just give me, like, the exact words I should use.

And I always love when you see people who will, like, do a meme on Instagram where they're like, how do you say no politely? They'll like give you this like funny sentence, but, I'll pass it to you so we can actually get into our tangible tips. Yes, I love all the corporate speak. The first tip is pretty or specific, and that is avoid using the word.

Maybe you want to pick a lane and communicate your reason clearly. Has there ever really been a time where maybe was a productive mode for getting to the end of a conversation, or a project in life and work? I feel like we lean on this word a lot, because we have a tendency to want to delay and know with a maybe.

Unfortunately, this doesn't eliminate the uncomfortable conversation, though, because you need to have it eventually, and it actually makes it more uncomfortable because you're putting off that uncomfortable conversation a little bit longer. I've been challenging myself to do this more, and while it's tough at first, I've noticed that I have less mental clutter because I'm not finding all the undecided items floating in my head.

So let's get to the tactical tips with this one, because I want to give you a few examples of how this can play out. The first is when you get asked to take on more work. If you truly need more time to consider the request, it's not just a delaying and no situation. This is how to say maybe in a way that's a little bit more productive.

First, you want to be extremely clear about what's blocking you from saying yes or no. Right now I'm in the middle of X, y, z thing this week of some context. Then give yourself a deadline to decide and clearly communicate it. I can let you know by end of day tomorrow if I have the bandwidth for A, B, C even if they don't give you that deadline, the person who's requesting it, you give it to yourself to add in the structure.

Then next, if you're like me and you want to be extremely conscientious to the requester in this scenario, you can even confirm the deadline works. Something like. I can let you know by the end of day tomorrow if I can take it on. Does that timing work for the larger project deadlines from your side? These may sound like really simple responses, but I promise this level of directness and clarity is becoming less and less common.

So simply setting expectations goes so far and will make you look really conscientious, but also like a top performer because you don't want to set the team back now. So you get asked to take on more work, and it's something that you do have an immediate yes or no to. And you simply need to just draw a line in the sand.

The first thing that you want to explain are the other factors at play that would be relevant and commit to a feasible deadline. If you're not given one. Next, if there is no decided expectation on the urgency of the request, it leaves too much room for confusion and can cause unnecessary anxiety. So that's why, again, you really want to put that deadline in place for yourself.

And bonus points if you want to commit to a slightly later than what you actually need timeline so you can give yourself a buffer and simply deliver a little early. So in this scenario, let's say it's a definite no. You can explain that you're working on an ABC project and that's your priority this week, but you're happy to reconvene later in the month if they still need support on it.

Whatever it may be also works if you are taking on more work. So even if you do have bandwidth for the ask, you want to be clear about when you can get it done so that everyone is on the same page. Something like, sure, I can totally support. I can get it to you by Thursday morning, and then maybe you know in your mind that you can really get it Wednesday, end of day, and you deliver a little early and then everyone's happy. Yeah, I my go to is instead of saying maybe I always am like, well, let me think about that, or can I get back to you? And I notice I do it, especially when I'm uncomfortable saying no because I feel like if I think about it and then I say no, it sounds better, like more thought, like a more thoughtful no, but truly, all it does is like, stay on my to do list and annoy me, you know what I mean?

I'm like, I just now I have to get back to this person, do it. The other thing I think with this too, is like, if your comfort level, let's say someone asks you to do something in a zoom call or in person and you're like, I'm not very comfortable saying this face to face. I'd rather write it, then come up with some language where it's like, let me like, let me look at my priorities and get back to you.

And then you can write your response. Like if writing your response feels better. For me, writing a note always feels better than doing it in person. And I do think it's sort of like a

muscle that you learn to get stronger with saying no. But, that's another thing just thinking about. Like your comfort zone of, say, starting to say this stuff, especially if you're sort of new or like younger in your career.

Like, I think when you are earlier in your career, you don't feel like you're allowed to say no to things, but I actually think it's really incredible when people not necessarily push back, but they're like, okay, so these were my top three priorities, which of these would you want me to switch out or. Okay. Is that one more impactful like things priorities move around. That's okay. But trying to like remind the other person of, like, what else you were working on because they probably have already forgotten. So I like, I like I mean, I love these tips, but I also just feel like, those are some other things that came to mind. And I was thinking like, yeah, you might maybe you're maybe you prefer doing it in writing, you know, which is okay.

I love that call out the these are my priorities. Which ones do you think I should take off? Is also just such a good tip for. Ask from your manager in particular. They're very respectful and not that you're trying to dodge additional work, but just that you want to be clear on what actually matters. Yeah. And just to give context to the other side, managers are not necessarily probably trying to bombard you.

It's like they've got their own things going on. And then sometimes they have these knee jerk reactions of asking you to do something. So it's never a bad idea to make them pause and reflect. They're so like, like don't see it as pushback. See it like, oh, this person's being really thoughtful and that's a good thing. And your manager will actually probably appreciate that because, it helps them also clarify about what they, what they need.

So okay, our second tip is to use tools and systems to reinforce your boundaries, which I do think makes boundaries easier to enforce. One tip I got early on was like, you teach people how to treat you. And so I think when you, kind of set these things up from the get go, it's like, it's not because something bad happened and you're reacting to it.

This is a very proactive approach. And you guys know, proactive is probably my favorite word on this podcast. So, like again, if you're a regular listener, you know, I love the word proactive. But you also know that I love tools and systems. And we often think of setting and maintaining boundaries as a personal task that requires a lot of emotional effort.

The good news is that we can use systems to make boundaries feel more like norms that are easy to adopt, rather than something we need to awkwardly stand up for all the time. Because it would. It would be like emotionally draining to feel like you have to pump yourself up to think of the right thing to say for this big conversation, right?

This tip is a little teaser also for what's to come in our November episode, where we dive deep into strategies for actually enjoying your time off and being really able to take, time

away. But for this conversation, let's dive into my three favorite tools for boundary creation and enforcement. Because once you master these, you won't always have to stress out about constantly re communicating your boundaries.

It's sort of like this. Is this is going on in the background and working for you, which I always appreciate. So the first one is calendar blocking or clockwise. I've talked about clockwise a few times in the show, but for those of you who don't know, it's an integration that connects your calendar with your slack. Especially if you guys use slack.

I'm sure it works with like teams and other tools as well, but I work in a place where slack is our go to messaging tool. That helps to make it clear when you're available and when you're not. You can also input your working hours into it. So if you work on any type of, you know, distributed team, this or this is like, in my opinion, totally necessary because I feel like, well, what what's cool about it is while you're on slack, if you're in a meeting at 10 a.m., your slack will automatically show a little, like meeting, emoji.

So somebody knows, like you're not gonna be able to respond right away. You're in the middle doing something, but you didn't have to do anything to do that. But if you block your calendar with, like, focused time, it will automatically update that status as well. So it's really nice, especially if you're like, truly are trying to not just like have this like, immediate reaction every time a message comes in. So it's like that. The second thing I want to just mention is, like, there are times where I've had to turn clockwise off for whatever reason, and I've just noticed that it it's almost like I feel like my boundary buddy is gone.

And so then I have this like, I don't know, I kind of like, lose this peace of mind that people sort of know what's happening with me. Especially in a distributed or remote workplace. I do feel like it's really important to overcommunicate because people don't see what you're doing. So I think that's a really important skill set in the workplace is communication. But then I also feel like use the tools that help you be a better communicator. If you know, you're like, oh, I sometimes take longer to get back to slack messages, or I know that I, I'm going to go into some deep work for two hours and I'm going to turn off my slack like it's okay, but I almost think it's better to overcommunicate.

The other tip I love is like when I'm getting ready to go on, PTO, I will set a status that lets people know I'm getting ready to take PTO next week. If you don't use a messaging tool, I used to always put this in my account. Sorry, in my email signature. If you're in an email culture, that works too.

So just again, proactively communicating big things, or even if you're lucky enough to use a tool like Slack or Microsoft Teams, even the little things, because it does add up. I feel like, okay, my second tip is email blocks and just general time management. So this may sound harsh, but confusion with boundaries is often rooted in a lack of time management.

So once you develop a system that works for you and meets your the expectations for your given role, the boundaries automatically become so much clearer. So the main thing you want to keep in mind is you need to operate within the reality of your role. So for example, if you're on a sales team that has a stand up every Monday at 9 a.m., you can't decide to use that time to catch up on emails.

this may sound obvious, but just like we can go too far by setting no boundaries, we can also go too far by setting unrealistic boundaries. So, I'll give you another example. I with my calendar is I automatically block off my work hours so people know like I'm basically available from 9 to 5.

But if you're slacking me or emailing me after that, you can see on my calendar it's blocked off for like childcare. Or you could. You don't even have to have a child to do this. You can just block it off for life. I cannot tell you how big of a difference I was made in my life, especially if you work in different time zones and people are doing stuff like that. I mean, I really like when people schedule their messages to go at a time that's decent, but not everyone's going to do that. And so like, I like it because that I don't feel this, you know, knee jerk reaction to have to respond to everything that comes in. So again, really, life changing. Okay. And then I would I have to mention my favorite tool, which if you follow me on LinkedIn, you absolutely know.

But Atlassian has a tool called loom. It's been the biggest game changer for me for reclaiming, especially meeting time. I know that not every company respects the magic of less meetings, but Atlassian is very big on if it's something that can be done async or if it's something that doesn't really need like working together. So like, you know how sometimes you'll have a meeting and you're just giving an update.

It's like not everybody needed to convene in the meeting to do that, right? We're just listening to whatever you have to say. Then there are meetings where it's like we're actively problem solving and working through this thing. That should definitely be in person. So loom is a video messaging tool. So what I use loom for is to replace, like async updates, like just letting my boss know, like, here's what I did this week.

Here's how far I got along on the on this project, yada yada. So I do it for that. She can respond back to it. She can leave little comments. We don't have to schedule a time. You know, I you can record it in the middle of the night if you want to and schedule it to go out the next morning.

I also use it a lot for tutorials or giving feedback on things. Sometimes for me, written feedback takes longer than verbal feedback and it has like a screen share option option. So for example, I work with an employee who will ask me for feedback on stuff she's working on. I'll like pull it up and I'll like tell her the feedback and what's also cool.

She can pause and listen to it and, you know, it's all being reported. So if you haven't used loom, trust me, it will change your life. Just the fact that it replaces the need to schedule meetings, show up in a certain time, whether it's convenient for you or the other person or not. Then it records it, then it, you know, you can respond in the messages, you can ask questions like, I just love everything about this tool.

Like I said, it's not to replace in-person meetings, but we do have we all have unnecessary meetings every week where you're like, I don't really need to be face to face with this person right now. I could record this and send it to them. So, those are some of my favorite tools. You are the tool queen. So I was really excited for you to dive into this one in particular.

And I know we have even more tool tips coming in later episodes this year, but that made me inspired to want to do more of a slam. Yeah, also a last tool I didn't mention, but like I if you are not sure how to say no to a request, put it into ChatGPT and tell ChatGPT how do I decline doing this?

And you can tell ChatGPT you're like real, raw, honest answers. And then they come up with a professional response. So like these are your cheat codes. You guys. This is like so much easier than the old days. The modern world is really so easy. That's so real. Our last tip is really to anticipate pushback when it comes to boundaries, rather than fearing it. It's simply part of the process. And if you can go into creating and enforcing your boundaries with that mindset, then it will be helpful because you won't be so nervous about it. You may learn that boundaries you want to enforce in the past don't make as much sense in the present moment, too. So boundaries can also evolve with you, and it really has to be something that you're constantly looking at and evaluating based on the level that you're at. I always say when you become a people manager, then your boundaries are going to need to shift because you have to set timing for your whole team, and maybe you're going to get pushback from people that are reporting into you. It feels a little bit different than pushback you used to get from clients, and maybe you are used to enforcing those boundaries, but not so much when it's team members that you need to support.

So all of these things are going to evolve. But the one thing that's not going to change is the pushback. People are always going to test your boundaries, not necessarily in a conscious, evil way, but just in a they're trying to get their work done way too. So don't let that pushback feel like it's anything that you're doing wrong.

And Lauren, I want to get your final thoughts on this one, too, before we move off to rapid fire, because I really feel like this topic in general is so powerful coded, which is Lauren's book if no one is familiar. So I'm excited to get your final thoughts. Yeah, you know, I heard once that about putting boundaries in place or something you do for you, like you put the boundary in place, but you can't control how the other person responds that boundary.

But you can control sort of what you do for yourself. So one of the things I love about boundary is when done correctly, which in my opinion is like you're proactive about them and you're consistent, like clear is kind, you know, being clear about your boundary and being consistent about your boundaries. That is kind of setting expectations so people know what they can expect from you is going to have a better outcome.

And as I mentioned earlier, I really think setting boundaries is a muscle that you you just we all have it. It's do you work it out? Does it get stronger? Do you use it? The other thing I heard once from a time management expert, which I always loved, is when you fill your day with things that are at like one and two level importance, because you don't say no to anything or you because you don't have any boundaries.

And so you're just like all over the place. It it means that your schedule has no time for when a level ten of importance thing comes up. Right. And I think a lot about that because I think we all have this like productivity is a badge of, you know, honor the busyness badge of honor sort of thing. But there's productive and then there's like working smarter, not just harder.

And I really feel like it's important to be thoughtful about, like, I've talked about this on the podcast is like how to be invaluable at work, not indispensable. And invaluable is sort of like you create value wherever you go. You're able to work on impactful things. It's good for your career. It's good for the business. Indispensable is like, oh, we can't afford to have that person leave that role because no one else can do it but her.

Like she knows everything. And like it's a little different than setting boundaries. But I feel like when you don't set boundaries, you start to slide into that indispensable side of things. So, yeah, I think it's absolutely a power move to be thoughtful about what boundaries you need to set. What are they why communicate them and and own on that as part of your overall like career development and toolkit?

I want to the first one is something you just said, which is boundaries enabling you to become invaluable, which enables you to grow in the direction you want of your career. Because if you go the indispensable way, even though it sounds nice, right, like I'm indispensable, then because they can't afford to lose you, you can't get promoted. Yep. Yeah. Well. And that's yeah, such a fine point on why boundaries are so important. I love that distinction. Chamber and rapid fire. I missed it so much. Yeah. Let's do it. Okay, I couldn't resist. I feel like this topic in particular, there's just so many good red button issues for boundaries at work. So we're going to go into some rapid fire.

If you have not heard us do this before, this is kind of like OG three and 30 where we just throw out some topics and both have immediate reactions. Yay or nay on it for you. Support



it. So the first one is public calendar blocks. And I would say if I had to pick a lane on this one, I would be nay, I feel like Lauren, you're gonna know.

Yeah, this one. But I think there's a middle ground to be found. I've just seen so many horror stories of ridiculous calendar blocks that shouldn't be public, even from high up leaders. If you're going to be transparent, just don't be true transparent about what you're doing. Like, if you're blocking for general life stuff, don't put that you're going shopping in the middle of a work day.

I've quite literally seen that on people's calendars by far, so just be self-aware. It's probably a culture thing because at Hulu it's like, was it part of the culture? To be fair, that was like a long time ago. I feel like at career contests, like back when we had a bigger team, it was definitely part of the culture.

Maybe not like a block, but we were just like more than what? We were really small. I would say at Atlassian, calendar blocks are absolutely a thing, but in the more general sense. So like people will say, doctor, they won't like tell you what, what doctor they're going to I the only thing that's tricky about this is like sometimes you use your work calendar as like your personal calendar.

And so what do you need? The details in there. But yeah, I would say in general I love a calendar block. I love it to be somewhat transparent. So for me, I do. I have a lot of like kid stuff and so I don't want to, you know, not parent out loud like it is a part of who I am. So I agree, I think just being thoughtful, about it and like one of the big calendar blocks I see a lot is DNS, which is just do not schedule and it just means like someone has something going on. So I think I think you pick your comfort level of how transparent you want to be, like the person who said that they were going shopping.

It's like in a way I'm like, yeah, that probably like wasn't the best idea. But also I'm like, I, I, I'm pro transparency. Like I get needing to shop in the middle of the day. If that's the only time you can do this thing too. So, yeah, I, I'm pro I love okay, I'm the open calendar block, but I also like, I don't care like as long as you get your work done, I don't care if you went to Pilates at noon, like I do not care, you know, so.

But I know that's probably one sided. No, I think that's a great. And it's definitely a culture thing too. I agree with that assessment for sure. The next one is asking about people's weekends at work. And Laura and I'll let you start with this one. Well, this is funny because our team meetings always include, basically the way our team meetings work is like we always start with an icebreaker that we sort of have, like a page where we read through, you know, everyone's like work on things.

And at the bottom is like, you can share things that are going on in your personal life, so you don't have to share about your weekend. Like it's not a specific tell me what you did this weekend. Often people will be like, and this is what I did this weekend. I will say in general, as a manager, I would not ask someone like, what did you do this weekend if you like wanted to tell me what you did in your free time.

And that happened to way into that then. Yeah. But like I, I would make it more of like an optional thing, like the way we do it is in and then like, if people want to share, they want to share. So what what are your thoughts? Yeah. I think the distinction is probably like how your weekend was versus like what you did this week.

Yeah. Yeah. This is another one where I think I've just seen too much work. Chaos. I was laughing putting these together because it sounds so innocent, but I have, personal story with this one too, where we used to have team meetings similar where it was like a smaller group, and, we would talk about our personal life, like things would come up in it. And I had someone go around and ask, like, how was everyone's Valentine's Day? Like, oh, what did you guys do? What did you guys doing? Yeah, that's like super awkward all the partners and my partner and I had just broken up and I had to be good. So you said did it? Yeah, exactly. I can't even remember, actually, if I answer it directly or just skirted it, but I remember being like, I can't believe I'm getting asked about this right now, and this is all happening.

So I feel like it can go sideways. And I don't have this on the list, but I feel like it closely dovetails like following direct reports on social media. Yeah, yeah, I don't I don't want to do that either. Yeah. I I was once at, like a team happy hour and someone was like, can we go around the table and say how old we are?

And Ashby was like, I have to go to the bathroom. I was like, I am not going to be part of this. I want nothing to do this. I was like, I don't think you can ask that. I don't know, but probably not. You know? Okay. I think was our last one. Right. That last one is declining social work events.

So optional social work events. I'm obviously I'm saying this with all them. There is some middle ground if your schedule doesn't allow for it, if you have kids, if they're all at night. I definitely appreciate that. But I am a big proponent of trying to make some social outings when it comes to work, because I've just seen time and time again that the social connections really do help when it comes to growth and having the more casual environment.

It's isn't even necessarily that you're going to have a conversation at one of those that leads to something meaningful, but just people getting to know your face and getting to know your personality outside of a meeting is so worth it for growth. I absolutely agree, I think it's

quality over quantity. Like you don't need to go to every single, you know, happy hour, the snap, but pick your battles of the ones that you're like, I'm going to get the sitter or I'm going to, you know, rearrange my schedule to do this thing.

I'm not saying it's going to always be convenient, but I absolutely think it's very valuable for your overall career growth, grit development. You know, there's tons of research that shows when you have like, personal relationships. With people like you work better, like it's, you know, like all that good stuff. So, I think there's too much that comes from, like, quote, team bonding when we're actually talking, like in a social setting versus in a work setting.

I totally agree. I feel like we squeezed a lot into this one, but boundaries is just such a hot topic, and we really appreciate you listening to another episode of three. And as always, we'll be back in November with a deep dive on how to actually take and enjoy your PTO. Cannot believe we'll be in the holiday season so soon!

If you have questions you'd like to see answered in that November episode, you can always DM me directly on Instagram. I'll put my handle in the show notes. And as always. Don't hesitate to reach out with any feedback directly to Marny on Instagram or to myself on LinkedIn. We really, want to make sure these episodes are helpful to you and you guys are enjoying them.

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So, we can be back here each week with amazing guests, including people like Marnie."