

SETTING HEALTHY WORK BOUNDARIES

By Rick Boxx

Stress at work – have you ever experienced it? We certainly cannot expect to go through every workday stress-free. We have production schedules, presentation deadlines, budgets, as well as the demands and expectations of our job descriptions. Workplace pressures are unavoidable. However, studies have shown excessive stress on the job can be unhealthy in many ways.

With a bit of effort, executives and leaders can strive to create and maintain environments that help to reduce stress and build healthier work atmospheres.

The esteemed Harvard Business Review regularly publishes management tips on a variety of topics. One listing concerned the setting of healthy standards of work for one's team. The Review highlighted three recommendations for how leaders can help their team operate within healthy boundaries, ones that will promote both their mental and emotional well-being, as well as enhance their productivity.

Each of these, interestingly, has biblical counterparts, principles from the Bible about how to form strong and healthy interpersonal relationships, including in the workplace. Here are the *Harvard Business Review* recommendations as well as biblical teachings that align with them:

First: As the leader, set a good example. Productivity is important, but a good leader understands the importance of a healthy work/personal life balance. For instance, consider the impact that sending late-night emails to staff, or never taking a lunch break, can have. It is common – and understandable – for subordinates to emulate their leaders in their practices and actions.

The apostle Paul, writing to followers of Jesus Christ in the ancient city of Philippi, said, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9). As leaders, we are being observed. We should conduct ourselves in ways that we feel confident about others imitating what we do and how we do it.

Second: Plan extra time each week. Many of us are overly optimistic, setting schedules and time frames that do not consider the possibility of unexpected problems and delays. We should encourage staff to set aside time to work on lingering projects each week.

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In His teaching, Jesus expressed it this way: “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish’” (Luke 14:28-30).

Finally: **Increase workload transparency.** Check in with staff about their workload. Listen and respond in ways that can reduce unnecessary stress. This will help in avoiding crises that could result if and when they feel overwhelmed. Using an agricultural example, Proverbs 27:23 advises, “Be sure to know the condition of your flocks; give careful attention to your herds.”

Our teams need healthy work boundaries, including time for rest and restoration. As Hebrews 4:10 points out, “For anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from His.”

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe a healthy working environment?
2. What is the impact of a leader’s speech and actions? Is it fair to expect leaders to be held accountable for serving as appropriate examples for workplace practices and behavior? Why or why not?
3. In your experience, when projects are being planned and scheduled, is ample time usually allotted for unexpected problems, delays, and other obstacles? Explain your answer.
4. Can you think of a time when someone you reported to took the time to ask how you were doing, showing genuine concern for your personal well-being? If you hold leadership responsibilities, how good are you at demonstrating such care for others?

NOTE:

*If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 16:9,21, 19:20; Mark 12:31; Luke 6:31; 2 Timothy 2:2*