

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR ENERGY WITH BOUNDARIES

Tips and Exercises



INTRODUCTION: WHY PROTECTING YOUR ENERGY IS SO IMPORTANT

How do you feel about your life right this very moment? Do you enjoy it? Are you fulfilling your passion? Or is it dreary and tough to get out of bed every morning?

In a perfect world, you would jump out of bed happy and energized, ready to tackle the day with ease. Your family would go off to school or work happy, your clients or bosses would love everything you had to say, you would see the passive income checks from your side business come in continuously, and big paychecks and bonuses monthly.

Do you desire this perfect world? Complete perfection is not attainable, but that's not to say you can't aim for a healthy balance between your work life and your personal life. When your life is balanced well, then your energy increases, you feel revitalized, and stressful situations don't stop you in your tracks.

According to traditional Chinese medicine, every human body has an energy highway through which all energy flows. This flow of energy affects how we feel, how we think, and also affects our overall health. When there are no energy blockages, life is good, and we can have a nearly perfect day. When we experience energy blockages due to stress, injury, trauma, poor diet, or other poor living conditions, our overall physical and mental health suffers dramatically.

Setting boundaries within your life and business/career are the keys to maintaining your energy's balance. Your energy is also your spirit or your liveliness, and when you take on too much work, you become stressed, which dampens your enthusiasm, thus dampening your outlook on life.

Working non-stop will also lead to burnout and eventually resentment toward yourself, your bosses/colleagues, or your business and clients. We should understand the importance of having set work/business hours and leaving work in the office before spending time with our families.

Boundaries should be set so that you can obtain balance and freedom in your life.

STEP ONE: DECIDE WHAT YOU REALLY WANT

Close your eyes for a moment and think of your perfect world. If money was no object, where would you live? What kind of business would you have? What do your weekends look like? Do you travel for work? What activities does your family enjoy? What type of clothes or colors do you wear in this perfect world? Are you living in a house or condo? Do you have pets? What kind of car do you drive?

Your answers should be things that make you happy, really happy. Maybe you take some European vacations. Perhaps you dream of being on the New York Times Bestseller list. Maybe you're driving an expensive sports car. Or maybe material things aren't essential, and you're dreaming of sunsets on the beach while the kids splash in the waves. There are no right or wrong answers here. This exercise is yours alone, and your responses will

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be very different from your friends or family members. Daydreaming is a way for your unconscious to help you see what's truly important to you.

However, now that you know what's important, it's time to take action so you can turn these daydreams into reality. That's a pretty daunting task, and with the pressures of day to day life, it's easy to lose sight of those dreams, which is why our first exercise is to make a vision board to help you stay focused.

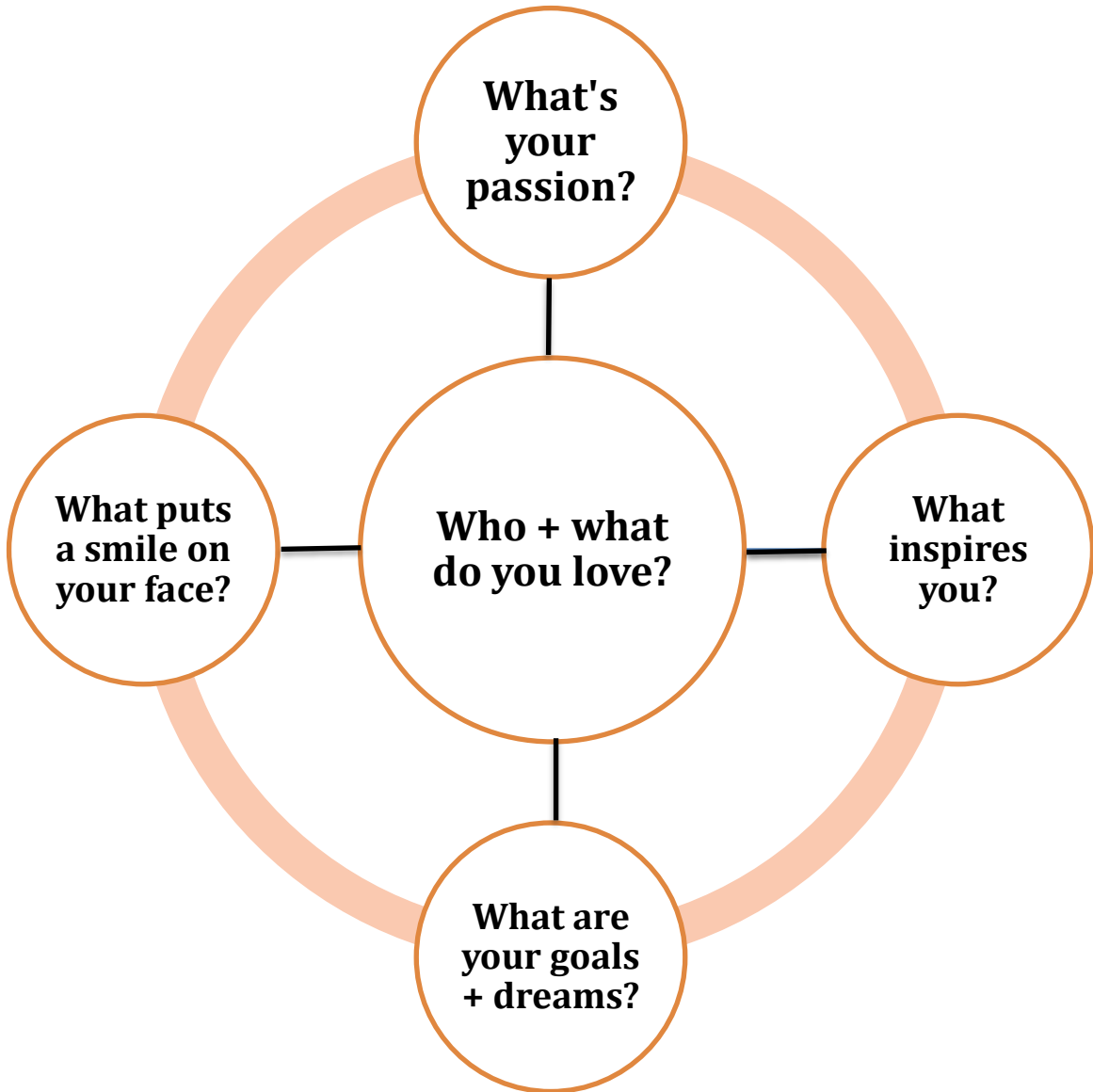
A vision board is a visual representation of everything that is important to you. Feel free to combine business photos with personal photos or keep each one separated by creating different boards. The choice is yours. By putting your hopes and dreams onto a board like this, you're able to focus and remember what it is you're working towards. How depressing to think you're working just to pay the bills. Get in the habit of working towards something fun, something that seems out of reach and special, so you enjoy it even more. You only have one life to live, so experience life instead of watching it pass you by.

To create a vision board, buy a simple piece of poster board, and find pictures from magazines or online to cut and paste on to the poster board. Look for pictures specifically for items on your daydream list or glance through the magazines and cut out the photos that speak to you. You may surprise yourself by choosing pictures of things or places that never crossed your mind before. Let your unconscious be your guide and paste the photos in an appealing design. You don't need to be a graphic artist for this project, nor does it have to look perfect.

When you're done pasting the photos, find a prominent place to hang your vision board where you will see it daily, such as in your office. If you prefer to create a digital vision board, set it as your screensaver or make a point of looking at it every day when you turn the computer on. Work won't seem so dreadful or bothersome if you know you're working toward a fun goal.

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Exercise: Create a vision board by finding photos that answer these questions



STEP TWO: BE HONEST ABOUT WHAT YOU DON'T WANT

Equally important to know what you want out of life is knowing what you DON'T want. Creating balance is all about being honest with yourself and taking on clients, projects, or tasks that will bring you joy, not bring about stress and anger. Think of the yin and yang idea from Chinese philosophy. They are often thought of as two competing forces when, in actuality, they work together in a complementary way to create balance. Consider the vision board in Step 1 as your yin; now you need to explore what you don't want, or your yang.

Think about your job/business in general and take a specific inventory of what you do/offer and what backend tasks you do every month. Do you work one on one with clients? Do you have a signature program created? Who is your ideal client? Do you create your reports manually? Do you work with in house and remote teams? Do you do your own bookkeeping? What other tasks do you complete every month?

Now go back and analyze which of these things brings you joy and which ones drain you of your energy. Remember, your answers will be different from others. You be selfish and focus on YOU right now.

After you have two lists – what you want and what you don't want – it's time to create a plan to bring them into balance with each other. Does your monthly bookkeeping take an entire day to reconcile? Consider outsourcing this task to a bookkeeper or accountant. Is social media driving you crazy? Hire a social media manager or virtual assistant. There is always a solution to every problem.

Do you want to be the next Oprah Winfrey and coach on a national level? Ramp up your marketing and networking skills and get your name out there. Remember to market yourself offline, too. Business/career networking opportunities are abundant in most areas; you just need to do some research about which groups would be most beneficial to you as well as know what skills and talents you have to offer to the group. Once you know what you want and don't want, your plan of action will become clear.

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Exercise: Make a list of things you don't want to do and create a plan of actions

What I DON'T Want	Plan of Action
<i>I don't want to do my own accounting.</i>	<i>Hire an accountant or bookkeeper.</i>

STEP THREE: SET BOUNDARIES WITH YOURSELF FIRST

One of the best and easiest ways to set boundaries in your life/job/business is to start with setting hours or time blocks.

For example, if you set your hours as 9am-5pm Monday through Friday and you're busy enough that you only have time for a lunch break, shut down your computer at 5:01 pm and start to decompress. No answering emails after dinner. No working on your book until midnight. Enjoy your dinner; enjoy your family or friends; enjoy a hobby. Turn off your work brain before you suffer from burnout.

Did you get a great brainstorm idea while preparing dinner? Keep a notebook handy or type notes into your phone. You can review those notes tomorrow during business hours.

Not able to keep standard business hours due to family obligations? No worries. Use the time block philosophy where you schedule specific tasks during certain hours of the day. For instance, if you're working early in the morning while the kids are still sleeping, use that time for writing your book or catching up on emails. Or get up half an hour early before other members in your family and use this time to journal, meditate or exercise. Save your quiet time while the kids are at school for client calls, exercise, or do chores. Time blocking can also work to schedule one task for specific days.

If weekends are sacred family time, tell your family that you're unplugging each weekend and have them hold you accountable. Your business or workplace will still exist without you being plugged in constantly.

Once you set up your work boundaries, it's time to tell your bosses, colleagues, and clients. No, you can't text me at 11 pm and expect an answer. No, I will not answer emails or help you strategize the next project over the weekend. Your boundaries – whatever they may be – will only work if you tell people what they are and you force them to adhere to them.

It's not enough to say you don't want to work 60 hours per week. You have to hold yourself accountable to that rule as well. Set reasonable boundaries on your own time and stick to it.

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Exercise: List the activities that *MUST* be included in your dream day; then fill in the hourly chart

Business	Personal	Family

Exercise: Create your dream day

Time Frame	Task(s)
6 – 7 am	
7 – 8 am	
8 – 9 am	
9 – 10 am	
10 – 11 am	
11 – 12noon	
12 – 1 pm	
1 – 2 pm	
2 – 3 pm	
3 – 4 pm	
4 – 5 pm	
5 – 6 pm	
6 – 7 pm	
7 – 8 pm	

STEP FOUR: WHERE ARE YOUR TIME WASTERS?

Distractions are a part of life, and they come in various ways or forms. For example: if your goal is to work fewer hours while maintaining your full-time income, then let's identify your distractions and time wasters.

First and foremost, if you work from home, do you have an office and does it have a door? An office door can act as a barrier to distractions, and subconsciously tells your brain that it's time to be productive. No office or door? Try moving your work station. Instead of reclining on the sofa with your laptop, move to the dining table and sit upright in the chair. Experiment with working at the coffee shop on days you don't have client calls. Oddly enough, even if multiple conversations are going on at the coffee shop, it can act as white noise, which can help with your concentration.

Enforce your business hours with your family and friends. No more phone calls from your best friend when you're supposed to be working. Tell mom you have limited time for lunch — no hair appointments during work hours. You set business hours for your clients to follow; now it's time that you follow them, too.

Turn off your computer notifications and shut down computer windows you don't need for work. If you're focused on writing your book, you don't need to know what your Facebook followers are doing every two seconds. Likewise, shut down email and Skype. Enforce those boundaries you set with your clients and check email messages only at certain times during the day.

Your smartphone is likely a distraction, so try keeping it out of arm's reach to avoid checking notifications all the time. Better yet, turn the ringer off while you work for your scheduled block of time. If you're worried about missing an emergency call from the kids' school, keep the ringer on but set it across the room or in a hallway and use the caller id before answering.

Are household chores your nemesis? They are a necessary evil but should not take up your work hours unless you have them time blocked in your day. However, save the big, time-consuming chores for the evenings or weekends; business hour chores should be easy and quick, like emptying the dishwasher, wiping down the counters, or doing a load of laundry.

Decluttering your workspace will also work wonders for your psyche and productivity. Clutter is a visual distraction and can sap your energy immediately upon entering a room. If your office space is a throw-all room, take time on a weekend to find a place for everything and enforce this boundary with your family and with yourself. Don't just drop a bunch of papers on the desk; file them immediately, toss in the garbage, or shred them if they contain personal information.

The key here is to set yourself up for success with a dedicated workspace and an atmosphere that makes you happy and calm. Maybe that's playing your favorite music in the background, burning a scented candle or meditating for 15 minutes before starting your work. Experiment to find your optimal work atmosphere.

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Exercise: Track those distractions

Daily Tasks	Time Spent	Resolution
<i>Ex. Email</i>	<i>1 hour</i>	<i>Use Boomerang to schedule; hire an assistant to manage</i>
<i>Ex. Laundry</i>		<i>Save for the weekend or evenings</i>

STEP FIVE: LEARN TO SAY NO

“No” is a word toddlers learn at a very early age and continue to use as they grow during the teen years but somewhere along the way we turn into adults and all of a sudden we’re people pleasers who lose track of our personal boundaries and can’t say no for fear of disappointing someone or being reprimanded. In a corporate world, it’s harder to say no because your paycheck depends on you performing specific tasks. But when you have your own business, you’ll discover that not every client is a good fit and not every project is one you’ll love. Give yourself permission to say NO to those clients and projects that don’t light you up.

Developing a good instinct for knowing who will be a good client and who won’t take some time and experience. Smart clients will want to interview you to hear about your experience and to get a feel for your business style. During this time, you should also ask questions to understand what they need, what their personality is like, and if these are tasks or goals, you can actually help them accomplish.

Be careful about accepting clients because you need to get started or you need the money, or you just lost another client. There are myriad reasons to take new clients but learn to listen to your gut instinct for guidance. If you get off the phone and are excited at the prospect of working with this person, that’s a good sign that you should take them on. But if you get off the phone feeling gloomy or wondering if this is the right fit, follow that instinct and say no to them. As the old saying goes, “When one door closes, another one opens.” The same is true with clients. When you lose a client or when someone doesn’t hire you, more room is open for someone else to come along who is a better fit.

The same applies for taking on new projects outside of your regular work or business scopes. When approached with an offer, think about the end result, you hope to achieve if you accept the project and how much time you can afford to spend on the preparation. Also, remember that stepping outside of your comfort zone is a good thing and that may cause a little hesitation or make you feel anxious, but those are different feelings than your gut telling you to walk away. Trying something new and stepping out of that comfort zone should also feel invigorating/exciting and may lead to new opportunities, career growth, or possibly more clients.

“No” is a powerful word in our personal lives as well. How many times have we volunteered for something only to dread it? Even with family members, we have a tendency to not want to disappoint so we agree to do things, rearrange our schedules, and then complain when it’s not as exciting or fun as we expected. You are allowed to say no, and you don’t have to give an explanation. Enforce those boundaries in your business and personal lives, and people will learn to respect those boundaries.

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Exercise: Review past frustrations and create a plan of action

Past Frustrations	What to Change
<i>Ex. Clients who are not dedicated</i>	<i>How can you decline to work with them?</i>
<i>Unreliable suppliers</i>	<i>Review current contract and add new rules & penalties at the same time find a new supplier for backup</i>
<i>Not enough time to focus on daily tasks – too many meetings</i>	<i>Talk to your supervisor and see which meetings you can skip or delegate to your assistant or another team member</i>

STEP SIX: JOURNAL YOUR FINDINGS

Journaling is a fantastic way to document your hopes and dreams so you can create tangible goals. Whatever you track and analyze can always be improved.

Make it a habit to write out your thoughts and feelings every day. Include your energy levels, what you did well, and what needs work. If you notice a pattern of low energy levels, for example, try shifting your work hours to a time when you feel more energized. Be proud of the things that go well; pat yourself on the back and review if there's a way to create a process for this task, so you improve the chances of it going well again.

Analyze what needs help in your job/business/personal life and brainstorm ways to improve those tasks. This journal will be a fluid and ever-changing document to track those changes that work and those that don't. Much like your vision board, this journal will be different from other people because you have different needs and goals.

Journaling will also help you stick to your boundaries. It can help you notice if there's a pattern to when or how frequently you break a boundary; maybe that boundary needs to shift or change.

Need a fresh new product or program? Start journaling your ideas and flesh out some details. Keep all this information in one place and work on expanding the idea until you have a clear path to its completion. Then hire the people necessary to bring this idea to life.

Have you heard of mind mapping? Mind mapping is a similar process to journaling because you're documenting and mapping out different steps and directions you want to take your career/business, but this is more 'big picture' where your journal documents your day to day feelings. No matter which process you use, start with your big picture goal and then break that down into smaller, more doable tasks. You may find that you have different monthly goals, each one building upon the last, which lead you to your ultimate goal.

Once you reach that ultimate goal, it's time to re-examine your career/business and figure out a way to leverage it even more. Refer back to old journals and laugh at the things that you feared. If you're growing as a person and learning from your mistakes, chances are these old fears will seem minuscule compared to what you have since accomplished.

Journaling also shows you clarity about your life and your passions, and, ultimately, your career/business. It's one thing to say you're passionate about your business and go through the motions to grow it, but when you write the truth in your journal, you may find your passions lie elsewhere. And that's alright! Explore these old journal entries, reflect on how you've grown as a person, and take that knowledge with you into the future.

Dream big! Nothing is impossible.

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Exercise: Create your own journal

Dreams	• <i>add your thoughts here</i>
Goals	• <i>add your thoughts here</i>
Tasks	• <i>add your thoughts here</i>
Feelings	• <i>add your thoughts here</i>
Projects	• <i>add your thoughts here</i>
What Works	• <i>add your thoughts here</i>
What Needs Improvement	• <i>add your thoughts here</i>
Other	• <i>add your thoughts here</i>

