

# HOW TO SET HARD BOUNDARIES AND MANAGE YOUR WORKLOAD LIKE AN EXECUTIVE

[pathtoperformance.org/4-step-approach-to-set-boundaries-manage-your-workload-now/](https://pathtoperformance.org/4-step-approach-to-set-boundaries-manage-your-workload-now/)



“Take a strategic approach to setting boundaries and managing your workload.”

Within a week of posting this sentence, it had 300 views on LinkedIn – double what most posts get in 2 weeks.

What would happen if I posted this Call to Action now? After all, a lot has happened since 2015. Is this topic still relevant? Are people still looking for help with this?

Absolutely! For all kinds of reasons, people still find it hard to say “no” – especially when you should be thankful to have a job in the post COVID-19 chaos, right?

This was the state of things in May 2015:

- Inboxes are overflowing and flooded with new requests.
- Resources are stretched more than ever before.
- Outsourcing is a constant and increasingly realistic fear.

Has anything changed? If you ask me, these 3 things have only gotten worse! If anything, people need help in this area more than ever.

By the way, if you're good at your job and valued by your superiors, I'm pretty sure you're being asked to do more...with less.

But keep in mind, if there's a lot on your plate, there's more on theirs' (here's a secret – they're thinking of what's on their plate, not yours').

According to Executive Recruiters Ogders Berndtson, 94% of executives reported that they made themselves available to answer emails day and night (probably higher now than in 2015!).

Nevertheless, executives must also be able to set hard boundaries and strategically manage their workload – no way they would have reached this level, otherwise!

Add personal commitments and misguided beliefs like 'busy = important' and this issue has reached a boiling point. The 2020 Corona Crisis has only made it worse.

Apropos busyness, if you *really* want to master this skill, you need to be aware of its high cost:



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/IZyCWO55FLM>

## CRITICAL SITUATION

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You're a defensive midfielder and captain of your soccer team. Your coach and teammates look to you for guidance on *and* off the field.

This season you've been asked to play at a position that feels somewhat unnatural. You now have to cover a much larger area on the pitch. Although you welcomed the challenge at first, you see now that you were unprepared for it.

To make matters worse you've often been frustrated by the lack of support from your teammates. "Where is everybody and what the hell are they doing!?"

You've wondered why the coach hasn't stepped in and made some needed changes at critical moments.

You've also been playing at less than full speed with a nagging knee injury. However, you continue to play through the pain.

Despite the pain killers and post-match ice treatments, it's growing worse with each match. Nevertheless, the coach keeps asking more of you and the expectations of everyone continue to skyrocket.



Next week you've got a big game coming up and the match result will affect your playoff chances. In other words, it's a "must-win".

*What do you do?*

## 4-STEP SOLUTION

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Back to real life...

To help you strategically meet this or other critical situations you're experiencing right now, here's a strategic 4-step approach for a potential solution:

### **Step 1: Look at the Big Picture**

Before you can change anything you first need to understand the situation and reasons why you're being asked to do so much (e.g. merger).

To put the situation in a broader context, ask yourself these 2 questions:

Question 1: Is my increased workload temporary or is it on-going and systemic?

If it's short-term, decide if it's discomfort you can live with (if so, find a way to deal with it until it passes – the recognition that it's not forever helps).

It can also be a chance for you to step up and shine – a leadership vacuum always presents opportunity.

Question 2: Are people taking advantage of me or are they turning to me because they trust me and value my work?

Change the narrative from: “My boss is always taking advantage of me” to “My boss has a lot of confidence in my ability to get things done...and do them well.”

Putting things into perspective and changing the story will help you for the next steps.

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## **Step 2: Ask for Support**

If you're having trouble managing your workload, ask your team members and superiors for help.

Here are 2 benefits that can result from asking your boss to help you prioritize your work:

Benefit 1: It helps you clearly communicate the situation.

Benefit 2: It creates transparency which can lead to alternative, even better solutions.

Remember, they don't know all that's on your plate and probably don't have the time to find out.

If you were a soccer coach, would you go around before the match and ask all the players how they were doing, feeling, etc.?

*Probably not. You'd expect them to come and tell you if they had a sore ankle or were feeling sick.*

If they didn't, the overall team results could be catastrophic.

Asking for support will help you take the next step.

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## **Step 3: Communicate the Big Picture**

Take the time to clearly communicate the full reality of your situation, i.e. the Big Picture.

Explain how taking on more will affect other deadlines and priorities.

You can also offer to find others who could support instead of you (another opportunity to step up and shine).

Can you spot the difference between A and B?

A) “I can't handle any more – sorry, my plate is full.”

B) “If I take on this new project, I won't be able to hold my other deadlines that we set together. Would you like to shift our priorities or is there someone else who could help us out on this?”

There's a big difference between just pushing back (A) and making your supervisor aware of everything that's on your plate and the consequences of reshuffling (B).

**TOP TIP: The key is to stay involved in the solution. Suggesting other team members for the work shows you are a team player and focused on the good of the whole team or group.**

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#### **Step 4: Think before Accepting**

Before accepting something new, ask yourself these 3 questions:

1. Do I have the time and energy capacity for this?
2. How will it affect my other tasks and priorities?
3. Am I the best person for this or is there someone else we can enlist?

If you do accept, make sure the timelines are realistic and you have the time and resources you need!

**TOP TIP: Do not accept and then ask for a time extension later. This would not reflect well on you. Have the courage to say at the beginning how much time you need.**

#### **CONCLUSION**

This 4-step approach will help you develop the mindset to strategically set hard boundaries *and* manage your workload.

Here are the 4 steps and 4 actions you can take right now:

- **Get clarity on the situation – is it temporary or permanent?**
- **Ask for the support you need – even if it's just advice or brainstorming.**
- **Communicate the Big Picture to your supervisor and collaborators, involving them if needed.**
- **Before saying “yes”, ask yourself if you *really* have the capacity...if you don't, have the courage to say “no”.**