

SEASON 1 · EPISODE 6 · FROM PEER TO LEADER

Setting Boundaries Without Losing Respect

Asked what they want from a leader, employees put respect ahead of recognition, appreciation and growth. Being liked isn't on the list. Every boundary is two conversations — the one that decides whether you pick up the phone, and the one you say out loud.

SEE IT · SAY IT · LEAD

1 THE MESSAGE THAT ARRIVES AFTER HOURS

SEE IT — INSIDE YOU

The sentence that fires: "If I don't answer this, they'll think I don't care." It's protecting your picture of yourself as the manager who's always there.

SAY IT — TO YOURSELF

"They're not reading my heart. They're reading my send times."

SEE IT — ACROSS FROM YOU

Your send times are the real policy, and some of the team will match them. A stated boundary takes a hundred silent negotiations off everyone's plate.

SAY IT — OUT LOUD

"I don't respond to routine messages after [time]. I'll reply the next workday. If something is urgent and cannot wait, call me."

2 THE EXCEPTION YOU WANT TO GRANT

SEE IT — INSIDE YOU

The sentence that fires: "If I say no, I'm the bad guy." It's buying your way out of the room and calling it kindness.

SAY IT — TO YOURSELF

"They can build on a no. Not on a maybe."

SEE IT — ACROSS FROM YOU

The soft yes is worse than either answer. Name the specific constraint, invite the context you're missing, and leave a route to review the rule.

SAY IT — OUT LOUD

"I can't approve that request because [specific constraint]. If there's relevant context I'm missing, tell me. If the rule itself needs review, I'll take that through the right process."

3 THE BOUNDARY YOU ALREADY BROKE

SEE IT — INSIDE YOU

The sentence that fires: "Nobody noticed. Bringing it up now only makes it a thing." It's protecting how consistent you look, not how consistent you are.

SAY IT — TO YOURSELF

"The slip didn't cost the rule. The silence will."

SEE IT — ACROSS FROM YOU

Held four nights out of seven, a standard gets quietly reclassified as a preference — and preferences get tested. The silence costs more than the slip.

SAY IT — OUT LOUD

"I said requests go through the queue, and then I accepted three at my desk. That was inconsistent on my part. Starting Monday, I'll redirect every request to the queue. If the process is creating a problem, tell me so we can fix the process — not work around it."

TRY ONE THIS WEEK

1. Before you answer the next after-hours message, catch the sentence first — then state one response-time boundary in writing and live by it.
2. Say the no with its specific constraint instead of "let me see what I can do."
3. Name a boundary you already broke, restart it with a date, and ask where the process itself is failing.

Pick just one — small reps beat big plans. Want the five-day version? Grab a Challenge Sheet at theworkingleader.com/challenge-sheets.

LEAD

Your team doesn't lose respect because you said no. They lose it when the no is arbitrary, inconsistent, or depends on who's asking. Same standard, stated reason, real context — every time. **The first person you lead is you.**

You can do this!
— Matt

REMEMBER THIS

"No is a complete sentence."

— ANNE LAMOTT

Enough for a personal boundary. In management, add the concise reason so the no reads as a standard, not a mood.

GO DEEPER

Grab the free starter toolkit — checklists, scripts, and this week's challenge — at theworkingleader.com.

YOUR NOTES · THE SENTENCE YOU CAUGHT · THE ONE THING YOU'LL DO DIFFERENTLY