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Maintaining the Fence: Establishing and Reclaiming Your Boundaries

Becky Haddad , ed.

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*Maintaining the Fence:
Establishing and Reclaiming Your Boundaries*

Boundaries? We Don't Need No Stinking Boundaries... Or Do We?

by: Gaea Hock

As we begin a new year, we are often encouraged (or pressured) to make a New Year's resolution. Each year I think about what resolution I will make and then I get distracted and never set one. This year, I am going to make one: setting boundaries.

When I started teaching, I was a single female living three hours from where I grew up. I spent most of my free time at school preparing lessons, making copies, working ballgames, chaperoning dances, and other random school duties. I didn't mind the hours I spent at the school, but I didn't have others relying on me at home.

Times have changed! I now have a husband and two kids. I am not able to be as engaged on campus as I was B.C. (before children). Instead I look forward to the time I am home with my family. I am grateful to work in a very supportive department with colleagues who help remind me of the importance of boundaries. We all have children and spouses



Jasper attending a Zoom meeting.

who need us to be present and available when situations arise. We are able to help each other when necessary and remind each other what is really important. My colleagues hold me accountable for all aspects of my life.

As we begin another year, living through a global pandemic, I am certain many of us had to take a step back from the "normal" and evaluate our work-life balance. I know the pandemic encouraged (or forced) me to assess my priorities and refocus on what was most important to me. The need to establish and maintain boundaries to protect our mental and physical health became very apparent as the months passed. For me, I appreciate the term "work-life harmony." There are days in which I have to take my children to work with me or hold them during a Zoom meeting. I stopped feeling guilty about missing out on work opportunities and instead focused on enjoying the extra time I had with my children.

As we look forward to when we can return to "normal" we should also consider what boundaries we will continue to uphold and which we will establish. The authors in this issue articulate why we should establish and communicate our boundaries. They share their own personal experiences in the classroom and how they have established boundaries to help them succeed. I hope the articles contained in this issue will help you evaluate your own boundaries,



Corabel being entertained by my colleague, Dr. Brandie Disberger.

determine which need to be repaired or built, and how you will communicate them to others. As it turns out, we do need boundaries to help us live a full and rewarding life.



Dr. Gaea Hock is a wife, mother, professor, and agriculturalist teaching at her alma mater, Kansas State University. She resides in rural Dickinson County, KS with her husband and two children.

Maintaining the Fence: Establishing and Reclaiming Your Boundaries

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Front and Back Cover Photos Courtesy of Becky Haddad

Lessons from the Giving Tree

by: Becky Haddad

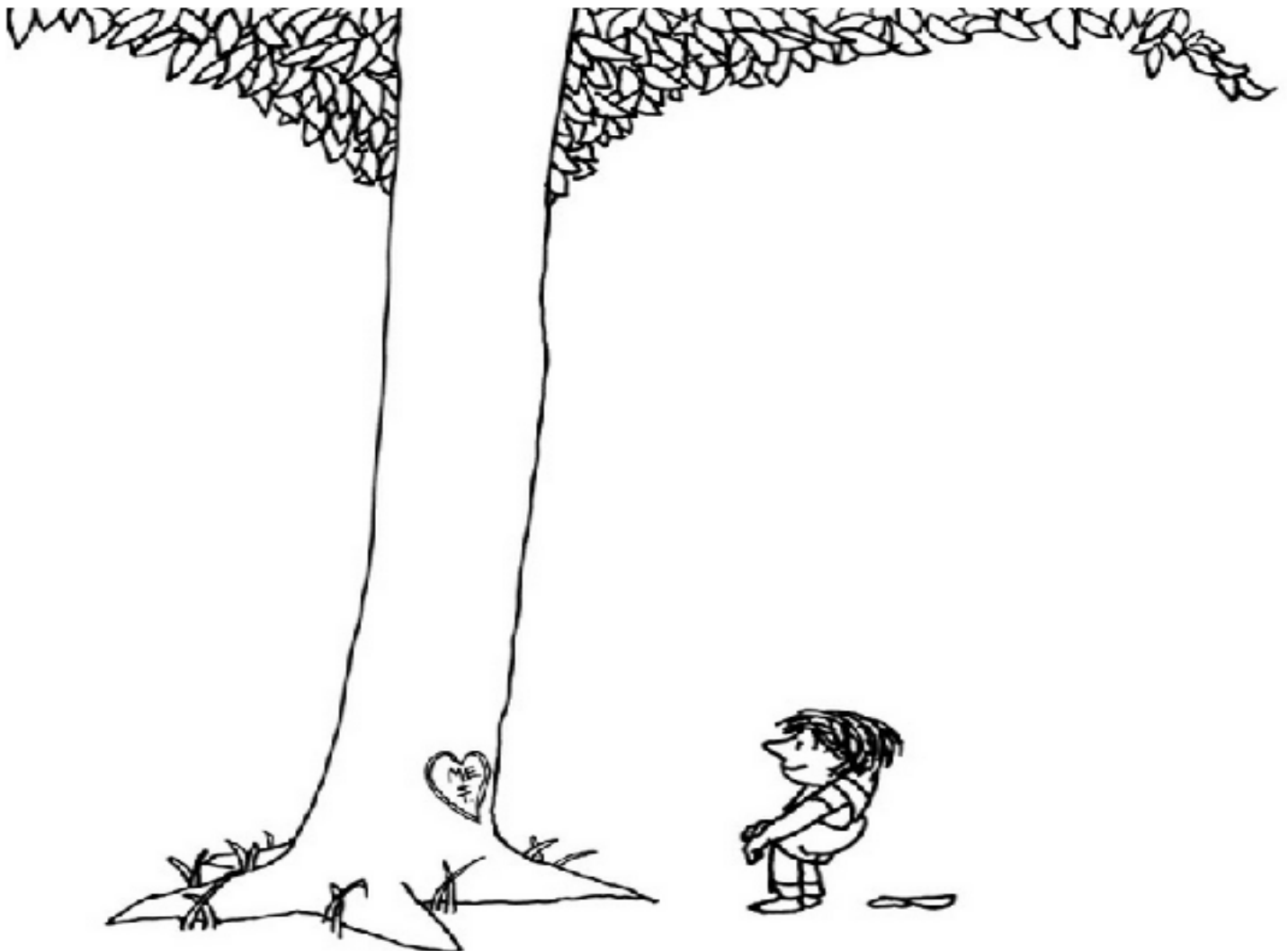
“

And the tree was happy...but not really.”

We probably know the story--in fact, *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein is one of my husband's favorite books from his childhood. Shel Silverstein was one of my favorite childhood authors too. I recently came across an insert for this book that focused on the tree setting boundaries. The tree said, “no,” and told the boy to find his own way. Of course, *The Giving Tree* fans will tell you that isn't the message of the story. Shel Silverstein didn't really do interviews, but the general

consensus is the book is about the boy's selfishness, and the tree's selfless giving. Throughout the book, the boy was selfish. And for most of the book, the tree was happy. Until she wasn't.

How often do we see *The Giving Tree* play out in our own lives? We're happy to give, until we're not. We give our students our time, our talent, sometimes even our families, and we find joy in these things. One of the most beautiful things about a teaching career is how much of ourselves we have the opportunity to share with



our students. Barnes and Noble offered ten lessons from *The Giving Tree*, and among my favorite are these three:

- Focus more on what you need than what you want
- Just be there
- Let love rule

Throughout the story, the boy focuses on what he wants: money, a house, a boat, a quiet place to rest. And for most of the story, the tree gives what she has, even if she doesn't have what the boy wants. In doing so, she loses what she needs--her leaves for photosynthesis, her limbs to provide shade, and even the trunk that sets her apart as a tree. In return, the boy doesn't really get what he needs. A temporary want is fulfilled, but the deeper need remains unsatisfied until the tree is almost gone. Neither in this story truly focuses on what they need, but what they want: The tree wants to make the boy happy, but loses herself in the process. The boy wants material things, and ends up nearly losing the tree.

But that isn't the only lesson in this story. The tree was there for the boy. There couldn't be a more fitting analogy for a teacher and their students. We want to be there for our students. We might even consider it inappropriate to expect something in return. We are overjoyed when that one student sends a note of thanks or stops by our room years later. And often, that little moment is what powers us through until the next. It doesn't make it less wonderful when a student comes back. In many ways, that is what the relationship is supposed to be.

Even as a stump, the tree loved the boy. And the tree could have continued to be there

for others had she saved some of herself. But she wasn't concerned about others. She was concerned about the boy. "She loved the boy, even more than she loved herself." For most of us though, we don't have just one "boy" in our lives. "Loving" doesn't have to mean completely losing yourself, but no one else can define what love will look like from you. And that, my friends, is why it is so important to communicate how you're able to share your love. That, in essence, is the definition of a boundary.

What can be a tale of self-sacrifice and selfishness or generosity and love, likely depends heavily on your own experience with boundaries. I recently heard a speaker in my class say, "Being generous means you have something to give." It is my sincere hope that you find these pages full of stories and advice that connect you to the generosity found in setting, maintaining, and owning the professional fence that is your boundaries. I desire nothing more for you than to communicate your boundaries in ways that allow you to give of yourself generously without running out. I hope you can reclaim your boundaries in fulfilling ways that lead to your ability to provide personal and professional shade to others. Dear tree, it's okay to say "no" so you can own your "yes."



Becky Haddad is a wife, mom of two, learner, and teacher educator currently serving as a Lecturer at the University of Minnesota.

A Letter to the Profession

by: Haley Traini

Dear Reader, I'm writing this letter as a former high school agriculture teacher, now agriculture and leadership education researcher who recently began researching the ways agriculture teachers interact with boundaries in their work. I'm here to share my experiences, research findings, and perspectives, not because I am an expert, but because it's something I have the privilege to think about regularly for my work. Through this work, my colleagues and I have made

an important discovery. Are you ready for it? Here it goes... Our profession has a boundary problem. *(Pause for effect)* Before we unpack this, I want to share how I think about boundaries and my own struggles with boundaries in my work so you can see where I'm coming from. I see boundaries as limits defining you in a relationship with someone or something. Boundaries identify when your job starts and when it stops. Examples of boundaries in the workplace include statements such as, "I will not bring work home with me," "I will not check email on the weekends," or "I have the right to think about a request for 24 hours before I give a response." Boundaries protect your time, energy, emotions, and well-being. In other words, boundaries are good! Unfortunately, reclaiming boundaries can be challenging.

In fact, I've had a recent run-in with boundaries myself... This summer, I took a two-week vacation. It was a failure. During these two weeks, I managed to participate in 13 hours of Zoom meetings, send 78 emails, start two new research projects, and plan a one-day teacher training workshop. Did I get a lot accomplished during these two weeks? You bet. Do I regret working during my vacation? Absolutely. I had a two-week opportunity to spend all day with my baby, relax, go for walks, read books, or catch up on TV shows. Instead, I worked. And I'll never get that time back. So why did I choose to work when I had a valid reason to step away? Because I struggle with boundaries. I have a difficult time saying "no," especially when the "yes" is work that brings joy and purpose to my life. Can you resonate? My recent run-in with boundaries didn't come as a surprise. As I reflect on my time in secondary education, boundaries were practically nonexistent. I took work home with me, spent several hours at school on Sundays preparing for the next week's lessons, answered student texts and emails at all hours, sacrificed a social life, hobbies, and healthy habits for work, and constantly said "yes" to things I didn't want to say "yes" to. My lack of boundaries was



innocent at first and, as a new teacher, I thought of it as normal. In many ways it was normal. Everyone else was working at the same grueling pace and the messages I received (both explicitly and implicitly) from leaders in the profession told me they didn't have a problem with my lack of boundaries. If what we as Ag teachers did was in the name of student success or student opportunity, it was worth it and it was our job to provide it. Boundaries, be darned. As I transitioned from secondary to postsecondary education, I used my struggles as a high school agriculture teacher to propel my research. I wanted to know: *Was I the only one who struggled? Was I the only one who felt like the only way to be a "successful" Ag teacher was to win awards and be recognized at the state and national level? Was I the only one who felt like saying "no" was not an option? Did I have to invest my entire identity into my job if I wanted to be "good?"*

The findings of my research revealed that many other Ag teachers across the country asked themselves these same questions and were encountering similar challenges. While sharing these

results aren't the purpose of this letter, I can tell you that boundaries come up time and time again. Ok, back to the discovery: Our profession has a boundary problem. Agriculture teachers we've spoken to across the country encounter boundary challenges on a daily basis. They expressed feeling overworked, smothered, annoyed, resentful, disrespected, underappreciated, guilty, and shameful when their boundaries were crossed. They felt these emotions most poignantly in three ways, 1) when perceived expectations are imposed upon them, 2) when their personal time is impeded due to various work-related obligations and, 3) when various individuals (e.g., parents, students, administrators) expect unreciprocated commitment. Here are a few things participants shared when we asked about times when they felt their boundaries were crossed:

- "When ASB comes to me and expects to use the shop for this or that or for me to drop what I'm doing to help them"
- "When I can't attend a family dinner because I have a school meeting"

- "When I have to take my daughter to another babysitter or grandparents after picking her up from babysitter so I can attend meetings/

Ag teachers have connected the need for creating boundaries to their likelihood of staying in the profession.

Boundaries can be (re)learned, (re)established, and (re)claimed.

contests/school functions"

- "When I can't focus on teaching because of a to-do list"
- "When I went out of my way and barely get a thank you"

These examples are not simply statements about run-ins with boundaries. They are tied to intense emotions and result in negative well-being. The Ag teachers in our research interacted with blurred boundaries or a lack of defined limits or bounds in their work. In other words, Ag teachers didn't know when their job started and when it stopped. And, like my experience, reclaiming boundaries was discussed not as a simple choice, but one filled with angst. This is because the history, norms, culture, and various players in the game expect you to have no boundaries at all. What's perhaps the most insightful finding of our research and conversation with Ag teachers is that they are connecting boundary creation and reclamation to longevity in the profession. I'll repeat that.

Learning this pushed me and a colleague (who happens to be the theme editor of this issue) to start conversations across the country about how we can reclaim boundaries as Ag teachers amidst a system that celebrates a lack of boundaries. We started these conversations because

there is good news! Ag teachers (and all professionals) can take active steps to identify instances of their boundaries being crossed, then implement strategies to mitigate those boundary encounters. While you will hear all about this in the other articles of this issue, here are a few strategies that help me work through boundary encounters:

- 1) **The Tomorrow Test:** If you receive a request (e.g. sit on the school technology committee, start a chapter Instagram), ask yourself, “If this event or activity were to occur tomorrow (or in a week from now), would I say ‘yes?’” If the answer is “no,” decline the request. This test avoids the pitfall of thinking you’ll be less busy in the future than you are right now.
- 2) **A Book with Many Chapters:** Conceptualize your career as a book with many chapters. What are those chapters? As a new teacher, chapters one and two might be focused on classroom instruction. Later chapters might be about starting new programs in your school or leading change at the state level. The goal is to use this to guide your decision making. Do you need to be making big changes to your FFA program during your first few years or when your kiddos are young? Probably not. Outline your career chapters and use them

to guide your decision-making.

- 3) **Opportunity Cost:** Opportunity cost is the loss of potential gain from other alternatives when one alternative is chosen. In other words, if you choose X, what are you giving up had you chosen Y? If you choose to schedule another FFA meeting on a weeknight, your opportunity costs might be dinner with your family, a fitness class at the gym, or a night of self-care. Are you OK with giving up those alternatives? If the answer is “no,” perhaps a weeknight meeting should be reconsidered.

While these strategies may appear simple, they aren’t always easy to employ. And if you ask me, “no” may be one of the most difficult words to say. But I can tell you from personal experience and from the research that reclaiming boundaries is imperative if we (as individuals and a profession), want to stick around for the long haul.



Haley Traini is a wife, mother, community volunteer, teacher, researcher, and Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural Education and Agricultural Sciences at Oregon State University.

Balance in the Busyness

by:Roobie Richards

Dear 2019-me, Do you remember starting that vision board? The word you chose to focus on was “balance.” Man, mama, you were on a mission. 2020 was going to be your year to finally strike that elusive ag teacher balance. As 2020 quickly approached you took on the mission to find balance in all the busyness. There were so many moments that led up to the need to focus on “balance.”

Remember when your husband shared that exciting news of his best friend getting married? He was so excited when he told you it would be in Brazil. Your heart sank from excitement to nervousness when he told you the dates. The weekend of the county fair. Please any weekend but that weekend. Do you remember how confused and disappointed he looked when you couldn't respond enthusiastically? You felt pulled, hard, in so many directions but you promised to make it work. You needed to make it work.

Remember the NAAE Convention? 2020 was right around the corner. You were so excited to connect and collaborate with ag teachers across the nation in Anaheim. Do you remember circling and planning out all the sessions you wanted to attend? You were so struck by the people searching for the same thing you were: wellness, balance, and boundaries. You went to as many

of those sessions as you could. And to your own validation, they were packed full of agriculture teachers who, just like you, were craving and seeking that all elusive balance.

The new year meant time to put your focus word into action: “balance.” The 2019-you turned into 2020-you. Do you remember February? A crazy time when everything seemed to be due. Do you remember who stopped by your classroom to visit? Mr. L., your high school agriculture teacher. He came to tell you he was leaving the state, but was going to be sure to complete a parliamentary procedure workbook for your classes. He wanted to grab lunch before he took off but you felt that, certainly, lunch would not be enough. You and your fellow ag teachers scoured the calendar for dates to throw a farewell gathering. Do you remember the feeling when both available dates were the same day as CDE

field days? A date was chosen. You were so excited to be able to honor your agriculture teacher and then that joy turned to near tears. Do you remember his call full of concern that there was too much going on in your lives to throw him a farewell? You insisted it was important. Why was sharing your thanks not recognized by him as equally important (if not more) than CDEs? You were so grateful people came and you had the opportunity to share your thanks, along with many others, for his impact in your life.

Do you remember what you saw and heard that evening? Students from across his career, even the personally busy parts, spoke in recognition of the impact he made. Even in the busy parts of his career he had done his absolute best. Those busy seasons may have looked different than yours, but he still made a difference. Do you remember thinking that maybe it's okay to give yourself permission to have



those seasons? And recognize they might look different?

Oh, 2019-me, you definitely didn't see March coming, did you? You had no idea how different things would look as you struggled to navigate through this global pandemic. You learned about pull, trying to keep it all together, and doing three more jobs on top of the one you had been doing. You were so physically, mentally, and emotionally drained. Physically you were present, but emotionally and mentally? Not as much as you wanted to be. Remember overhearing your son tell his little sister he couldn't play because he was busy? Your mama heart just about broke. He's only three. You smiled, but the guilt that followed was crushing. Where did he learn "I'm busy?" How many times had he heard, "I can't" or "I'm busy right now" for that to be his response? The guilt hit so hard. You knew something had to give, or maybe grow. You took a hard look at your boundaries. The fence you built to maintain "balance" wasn't doing its job. It was time to look for the holes and make some repairs.

Do you remember how you wished other teachers knew what you were feeling? How you wanted to wrap them up and let them know they were not the only ones feeling that way? You wanted to let them know how important they were. You wanted to share that you are struggling with balance too, and how that didn't make them or you a bad teacher. You saw them leave over the years and wanted to make more time to grab coffee--to let them know they were making a difference, and that they still could, even in the busy seasons of our lives. Do you remember how finding balance felt so impossible as you watched them go?

Do you remember the reminders you gave yourself? Grasping as many opportunities to learn as possible and holding on tight to your fellow agriculture teachers like family. Those who have been there for you in the busy seasons to remind you that you're still making a difference? It is not easy, the guilt hurts, but we can learn and get better.

Don't forget what you've found this year. You've found strategies for balance. You learned it was okay to go home and that you didn't have to work late every day. You invested in yourself. You bought a planner and scheduled time for your family. You made time for things you like--reading, going for walks, and dancing--things that reset you. You made time to be present with yourself and your family, and it was hard! Especially with distance learning, when the virtual world easily invaded your real one. You ignored notifications from Canvas and email and learned to be where your feet were. You created boundaries. And you kept learning about them, because you knew they were important to model for your students and peers. You saw how boundaries gave others power to value their time and their family.

You found these boundaries let you be more giving in your intentions as well as understanding in your interactions with others. You

have been extended grace as the mom who just came back from maternity leave. You saw colleagues drive their teaching partners' students to competitions so they could care for their elderly parents. You encouraged the young teacher to go home early once in a while. You have witnessed so many giving so much, and found purpose in validating the ways they worked to fill their own cup. You recognized that different seasons mean different balance.

Dear 2019-me: You've seen people in different situations, different experiences, and with different boundaries. You're learning to work and maintain your own boundaries as the seasons change. You can do it.

Love,
- 2020-you



Roobie Richards (She/Hers/Her/Ella) is a wife, mama of two, and daughter who is passionate about agriculture, education, and community. She is currently a High School Agriculture Teacher at Mira Monte High School in Bakersfield, California.

The Agricultural Education Magazine

The Boundaries That Weren't

By Bibiana Giff

Writing brings me joy, but I'll admit this is the most difficult piece I have ever written. Opening up about boundaries and balance (or lack thereof) brings about a vulnerability that is difficult to share. I hope that sharing my experiences with vulnerability may provide some insight to others making a healthy change, even minor, to improve the longevity in a profession we each are so passionate about. The past twelve years teaching agriculture have allowed me to inspire students to reach their full potential, create lasting friendships with colleagues across the country, and be a part of an industry responsible for feeding and clothing the world. But this time has not been without struggle. Those who know me will tell you I am a bit of a perfectionist and a workaholic. Before I had kids, it was easy to say "yes" to my students, administration, and community. I often worked in my classroom until 9:00 PM or even as late as midnight if my husband was out of town for work. If I came home from work before 6:30 PM it was considered an early night for me. At times I have been pushed to my breaking point, not having an answer for my husband whose most frequent text message to me was, "when do you figure on being home?" or finding myself sitting on the bathroom floor in tears wondering how I was going to "do it all." For years the word 'boundaries'

wasn't even in my vocabulary. This resulted in operating under high stress, irritability to family and students, sleep deprivation, weight gain, late payments on bills, eliminating hobbies that made me happy, and increased household responsibilities placed on my husband. Becoming more 'efficient' at getting tasks done only resulted in me adding more to my plate, feeding my addiction to work.

I was stuck in a very unhealthy cycle, which became even more of a struggle after I became a parent...and not only a parent of one, but a mom of twins.

Ten weeks before my due date I went into labor at the State FFA Convention. Even worse, I didn't realize it and brushed the pains off as just being a busy day at convention. During the weeks of bedrest that followed I came to realize that my 'normal state' of stress was realistically a 12+ on a 10-point scale. The worst part was not even realizing the chronic stress I was in until I wasn't in that state anymore. I ignored my stress level because it became familiar, and almost comfortable.

I was embarrassed that it took a medical emergency and forced relaxation for me to figure that out. I was overstressing myself at work, and it was compromising the health of my unborn twins. Something had to change, but change doesn't come as easily as the realization that it's needed.

While on bedrest at the Ronald McDonald House (a wonderful

charity, by the way) the program where I taught was being cut due to financial hardships in the district. I felt helpless in my inability to defend the program I devoted myself to for five years. However, I knew the health of my babies was my priority. After six weeks of bedrest my twins were born, still a bit early and needing a month of NICU time. During that time, I interviewed via Skype and was hired at my current position. Within a few short weeks of being released from the NICU my family and I relocated to a new community, and I immediately started a new job while my husband became a work-from-home dad to our newborn twins. I quickly reverted back to "no-boundaries-Bibiana" without even knowing it. A year into the job my administrator had a conversation with me that I will never forget. He began by commenting on how patient my husband must be. "I am worried about you. You are always working. You have a family at home and won't get that time back. You're doing a great job, but I want you to keep doing great things for many years. I'm



worried you will burn yourself out.” While I was relieved that my hard work was recognized, especially by someone I highly respected, I heard the impactful reminder to put family first.

My teaching partner continues to remind me of that as well. I recommend everyone have an accountability partner. She has helped me set and maintain boundaries. We set and stick to a calendar and set student contact times. I now have a do not disturb time enabled on my phone so that family time isn't interrupted. This is also conveyed to our FFA officer team who knows that if it can wait until tomorrow or be handled through email they need to respect the boundaries.

I fear I am not alone in feeling the pressure and unspoken expectation that my program says 'yes' to all community requests. I felt guilty being the person to say "no." We used to have an FFA event, practice, or meeting nearly every day after school. Students were burned out, parents were frustrated at the short notice, and advisors were exhausted. We decided to implement a two-week rule. Any event needed to be brought to the chapter at least two weeks prior, and members/parents are given two weeks notice for such events. We have also decreased the number of activities we do, keeping those that align with the program goals. This has allowed us to only have one late evening after school weekly.

During the school day (before

virtual instruction) students crowded to our classrooms for lunch. While I enjoy students' desire to hang out in my classroom it became overwhelming if I had things to get done. Admittedly, I hid from my students, working during the lunch hour with my classroom lights off and blinds drawn. My teaching partner and I decided that students could eat lunch in my classroom on Tuesday and Thursday, and in hers on Monday and Wednesday. This boundary helped me be more productive and more pleasant to be around!

I was most apprehensive in establishing boundaries with the FFA Alumni. Being a person who doesn't want to let anyone down, I really struggled with this. Their meetings begin an hour before the chapter FFA meeting, which allows advisors to attend both without adding another night of meetings away from home. We set reasonable boundaries with the Alumni, letting them know we could come to the first half hour of their meeting, provide FFA chapter updates, and answer any questions they may have before excusing ourselves to be a part of our chapter meeting. Being open and upfront with the FFA Alumni was a pleasant relief; the board understood and respected our position and agreed with our realistic expectations.

It has been tough being the mom my kids deserve, and the wife my husband fell in love with while I feel pressure to be perfect

at my job. I won't tell you that setting boundaries has been easy, but I will tell you it is worth it. Saying "no" to some things has allowed me to say "yes" to others. I'll never get back the missed family dinners, bedtime stories, or the babies "firsts", but being the person I want to be means being happy in both my personal and professional life. It is possible to be a successful teacher, advisor, wife, and mom. Talking with others--like really opening up--helps us all realize we are not alone and that it is not only okay to establish boundaries, it is crucial.



Bibiana Giff is a wife, twin wrangler, mentor, teacher, and Agriculture Science Instructor/ FFA Advisor at Baker Technical Institute at Baker High School.

An Early Introduction

by: Amber Rice and Quint Molina

The Catalyst

I remember the call clearly. “Hi Amber, I just wanted to let you know that I won’t be returning to the classroom next year.” My heart sank. She was an exceptional teacher, supervising practitioner, agricultural education advocate, colleague in the profession, and personal friend. “Why are you leaving?” I hesitantly asked, knowing the reason might be personal. She didn’t hesitate in her reply, “I want to start a family and I can’t realistically do that and remain an ag teacher.” As our conversation came to a close, I let out a deep sigh and picked up the phone to make another call to Quint. This was the third one we lost that month. It is no secret that the agricultural education profession, like the majority of education disciplines, is experiencing attrition at a rapid rate. In 2019 alone, 605 school-based agriculture teachers left the classroom nationwide (Foster et al., 2020). In Arizona, there are always more positions to fill than teachers available, despite a fresh crop of preservice teachers each academic year. Novice and experienced teachers alike face overwhelming demands within our profession. They must juggle all aspects of the three-component model; please administrators, co-teachers, parents, students, and their community; and retain a personal life. The rhetoric of “be everything to everyone at all

times,” is prevalent in agricultural education culture. It can easily become overwhelming. Quint and I see the need for a shift in our culture, as we have our stories too.

“While I was provided with an excellent work/life balance example by my mentor teacher I failed horribly at following that example once I started managing my own program. I was working 80+ hours a week and had completely set aside my personal life. I had no interest in maintaining relationships and hobbies and had convinced myself that I would return to those behaviors once my program was up and running. The reality is that this work/life imbalance lasted three full years and cost me multiple friendships and personal relationships. I still struggle daily with maintaining a balance and I often tell our preservice teachers that we are learning this together.”

-Quint

“I worked 80+ hours a week as a new ag teacher and never questioned it. I wish someone had taught me about boundary setting during my preservice program. I had a strong ag program, but at what cost? I struggled to maintain personal relationships because I constantly put work ahead of all other areas of my life. This is a habit that I am still trying to break. At 35, it is still difficult to change my mentality of what an agriculture teacher should be.”

-Amber

The Need

The pressure extends to not only currently practicing teachers, but also vulnerable preservice teacher populations. The habits they develop, beginning during teacher preparation, are habits they will carry for the rest of their careers. We heard recent graduates of our program express fear of not having a life once they became a teacher. Increased evidence of mental health issues in undergraduate students, such as depression and anxiety, have become overwhelming in the literature (American College Health Association, 2019). The global pandemic has shed a harsh light on our current practice of work/life balance at all levels of education. Our preservice teachers are struggling to manage their time and are hesitant to say “no” because they don’t want to miss out on an opportunity. Quint and I have become dedicated to incorporating concepts of work/life balance and selfcare as recurring themes in our teacher preparation courses. We have shared our personal stories with students in the hope they would not make similar mistakes. However, actually developing strategies and personal behaviors needed to meet our holistic goals proved difficult. Providing preservice teachers with personal and professional work/life balance examples, including boundary

setting, is extremely important. If we wanted to change the culture of agricultural education in Arizona, we knew it needed to begin at the preservice level. We just didn't know where to start.

The Impact

One solution to our issue came from undergraduate student Erynn Labut. She attended an AAAE research conference and was excited to share with me a boundary setting research session she experienced. When I asked her why she was interested in pursuing a potential opportunity to have Drs. Haddad and Traini present to our cohort, I was not prepared for the wisdom in her answer. "Dr. Rice, maybe we are too focused on *what* is an ag teacher instead of *who* is an ag teacher." She was absolutely right. Despite our attempts at integration, Quint and I weren't supplying our preservice teachers with the practical tools to practice boundary setting. She reached out to Dr. Haddad the following day on behalf of our program. We debriefed as a class the day after the workshop. Quint and I were overwhelmed at the preservice teacher reception. They felt validated in their feeling of being overwhelmed by their schedules and commitments. They found it valuable for someone else to say, "It is okay to say 'no.'" They needed to hear from people they trusted that the expectations and demands on them were not always feasible. They appreciated that their personal values, priorities, goals, and dreams were acknowledged.

They welcomed honesty from their instructors and teaching assistant who took part in the workshop and admitted they were learning too. They felt empowered by the clear, tangible strategies surfaced like the "tomorrow test" and the "no committee." They said they could

"Dr. Haddad and Dr. Traini's workshop taught me that it is important to set boundaries now, so when I have a family or other commitment later in life I will already have boundaries to preserve my time for them." -Angus Donaldson, preservice teacher

"The boundaries workshop was applicable to school, personal, and professional life. My biggest take away overall, is that boundaries are about saying no to some things, so you can say yes to other things." -Alexandra Schoeffling, graduate teaching assistant

implement these strategies immediately. They saw possibilities before problems. What we didn't anticipate was the impact it would have on us as instructors. The workshop was not just for them, it was also for us. Collectively and individually we engaged in

meaningful reflection. We plan to revisit these concepts again during student teaching to ensure we are all implementing the knowledge in ways that work for us as individuals. Committing to boundary setting is a process and must be continually reinforced through purposeful conversation and encouragement.

"I realize I have much work to do in this area myself and I have a renewed purpose for engaging in personal reflection. I want to serve as an example to students and currently I do not practice boundary setting. I can't rely on saying "do as I say, not as I do." I want to be able to show them this works in practice, and that starts with examining my own life and enacting true change." -Amber

"We have spent a great deal of our instructional time trying to coach better and more balanced life behaviors into our cohort and this boundary setting workshop has helped us tremendously. We will revisit the concepts and strategies during their student teaching experience, and I will continue to implement the strategies right alongside my preservice students. I am by no



“I hope that our students will leave our program and utilize boundary setting to establish themselves not only as a teacher but as a happy and healthy individual away from the profession. An individual with fulfilling relationships, friendships, and interests that are in no way related to their work.”

-Quint

means an example of balance and need to reflect on the concepts in the workshop daily in order to improve my own situation. I want them to see that it is never too late to make some incredibly positive changes that lead to personal growth and happiness.”

-Quint

The Future

“If our preservice teachers can implement true boundary setting early, I think it will pay dividends for the rest of their careers. I care about our students and want more for them than I had for myself. The profession can do better, and it is our obligation as teacher educators to assist them in developing positive, productive strategies early.” -Amber

We only have so much time to prepare preservice teachers. It feels like there are always more concepts than class periods, more

lessons than time available. We are constantly re-evaluating what to focus on and when to create a maximum impact. However, I implore you, as teacher educators reading this, it is worth the time to focus on the whole person. Worth the time to engage in this workshop. Worth the time to heed Erynn’s advice on developing the person behind the position.

After preservice teachers leave the university, there will be things they will remember, and many more they will forget. This lesson on boundary setting is one they will remember.

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Prioritizing Boundaries

by: Hannah Wedger

Whenever I hear the term boundaries in relation to Agricultural Education I immediately want to lean into the conversation. Let's be honest, in the world of Ag Ed we could work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and still have more we could do. From school farms to bee hives, floral shops to dog grooming facilities, agriculture programs always seem to encompass some of the school's most hands-on, engaging student experiences. With that comes the work teachers put in to make it all happen. But where are the lines? When does going into school on a Sunday until 11:30 PM become too much? When does being with students seven days of the week versus your family cross a line?

Boundaries are hard. The pressure from administration, FFA members, and even the community can be stifling. Not to mention most agriculture teachers I meet love

competition. They want to be the best. I don't blame them. It feels really good to have a lesson plan go just right or have a CDE team qualify for state. It's the best to receive a grant to build a new greenhouse or expand an existing vineyard. It feels great to haul a load of steers to a stock show and watch students perform with peers from across the state. But where does it stop?

A key to being successful in keeping your boundaries, is someone to keep you accountable. Let me say that again:

You need someone you trust, who isn't afraid of tough love, to hold you accountable.

It could be your mom, your friend, your teacher candidate, your spouse, the science teacher, or a mentor.

In my opinion, sometimes someone outside of the agriculture world is probably better. They can help you hold onto those boundaries by asking:

- Who is this event serving? How many students? How many teachers?
- Is it moving our program in a positive direction? Is it moving the needle in big ways or is it something very small that isn't providing real, noticeable results?
- Is it required to complete? No really, is it actually required by your state or district? No? Then it is not **REQUIRED**.
- What do you need to give up to do this?

While I think that I have always been really good at setting and keeping boundaries, I also know that there are times when I over commit, take on too much, and then become completely overwhelmed. Enter in my favorite boundaries coach, my husband, who has helped me take back the areas where I may have let my boundaries lines blur. He reminds me:

- "I know you said you wanted to do that but you know you don't have to."
- "Let them know you don't have room in your schedule currently to be a part of that committee."
- "You know your worth, your success as a teacher/ advisor is not connected to that specific FFA event."



In a conversation with Dr. Tre Easterly early in my career he said, “Make a list of everything that is important to you. Take that list and rank the items from most important to least. The things that are the most important, especially your top three, should be at the forefront of your mind when you are making decisions.” It made so much sense to me. Those top things might include family, friends, traveling, faith, sports, a hobby, or your job. Those top ones for me are faith, family, friends and THEN my job. Wow. Mind blown. I had to think about my top priorities when making decisions about events, committees, or other engagements I was involved in and make decisions that provided me space and respected my boundaries.

But it wasn’t enough for me to make decisions that provided me space and respected my boundaries. I also need to share my boundaries with others. Some of these conversations with coworkers or even students went something like this, “These are the things that are most important to me and I would like to keep them in mind when we are scheduling events, meetings, and other important job-related things.” One of the best things I ever did was tell my FFA officers what my top priorities were. It went like this, “Hey officer team, I really care about you and I am committed to the success of our chapter, I just want you to know that when we make decisions about events, meetings, or other things, I am going to be thinking about my family and their needs first.” Here is the crazy thing: they were okay with it! They even held me to it. “Well, Mrs. Wedger, we can’t have an event that day because we already did one weekend event this month. How about we hold this event next month?” What a great feeling to

know that my students supported me in my choices! Not only did they support me but I was able to model to them what it looks like to set boundaries, keep the things important to me a priority and still be a successful teacher and advisor.

My challenge to you is this; make that list, find your top three, and then share those with someone to hold you accountable. You are capable and I am excited to see how prioritizing just a few things makes a difference in your life!



Hannah Wedger works as a high school agriculture instructor and coaches speakers for the Germinate Virtual Conference, all while being a full time wife and mom of two. She values quiet time in the morning to read, hiking as a family, and a hot cup of coffee from Starbucks.

The How's and Why's of Building a Fence

By: JoAnn Pfeiffer

Boundaries are lines that indicate what a person is comfortable with in their lives. Boundaries help us spend time with our families or take care of ourselves. Many of us probably struggle with setting and establishing boundaries between our personal and professional lives.

Since this pandemic hit, my husband (who is the other ag teacher at my school) and I have spent a lot of time at home working on the farm. Our fences have received some well-deserved attention, and I want to share why fences, just like the boundaries we set in our lives, are so important. You can own livestock without having fences, but it's a lot easier in most parts of the country to manage your animals with fences. Fences save you having to spend all day tracking livestock down or worrying about where they are. The same goes for boundaries. We can continue doing all the great things we have been doing, but with some boundaries in place, hopefully, the good work we are doing can continue, just on a more sustainable level.

Often, when we start our first jobs, we have goals and aspirations, and we sprint as hard as we can to do everything. After a few years, we decide we can't continue at this pace, and something needs to change. If we

have boundaries in place before we have taken on too much, we avoid burnout and conflicts in our personal lives. Boundaries can be anything from not responding to texts/phone calls after a specific time to deciding to only grade papers while we are at school. It also may be deciding we need help and hiring someone to clean our houses or setting aside time to exercise. While these things may initially sound like admitting we can't do everything, it's a commitment to making sure the things we do are of quality, not necessarily quantity. There's just not enough time to do everything, so our boundaries, just like fences, help us keep safe what is ours and keep out what isn't. As with fences, boundaries bring specifications to consider in establishing and maintaining them. Here are the ones I thought of:

Decide what type of fence you need.

The type of fencing needs to match the need. We have three strands of high tensile electric fence keeping our cows and horses where we want them. If we had sheep or goats, we would have a different type of fence. One

strand of electric string would not work if we had goats. Just as our fencing type needs to meet the needs of our operation, so do the boundaries we set for ourselves. We must decide what it is that we need and what is ours. Our time, families, programs, and well-being are a few examples of things that we value and want to protect with boundaries. These boundaries make our lives better. We have to decide what it is that we need and want. Very few people will have the same boundaries. If you are already doing a good job balancing work and family, maybe you only need to add taking care of yourself. That could be a few hours a week doing something that you love. When my husband and I married, we spent time researching and thinking about what kind of livestock we wanted and what we wanted to accomplish. We wanted to raise Shorthorn cattle and use rotational grazing to produce grass-fed beef. When we decided to use rotational grazing, it impacted how we used fence



to manage our grass. We had a 50 acre pasture we divided into seven smaller paddocks. The interior fence had fewer strands of electric wire than the perimeter fence, simply because if the cows got out, they would still be contained, and not loose on the road. The rotational grazing and the paddock fence allowed us to run 40 cow/calf pairs in this field which was a higher stocking rate than if we had an undivided 50-acre pasture. This was some of the best time spent because we were able to match our decisions to our overall goals. Each decision we made to contain what was ours made us maximize our resources and made our goal of grazing Shorthorn cattle attainable. In the same way, each boundary we decide to enforce helps us reach our goals as agriculture teachers.

Fences need to be clean and easily visible.

I am not the best tractor driver. That is usually a good enough reason to keep me off the tractor when we are driving posts. However, sometimes, it's only the two of us, so there aren't any other options. One of the best ways to keep your



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fence building relationship with your spouse on a positive note is to keep the tractor out of the fence. Sometimes I've hit the fence because I wasn't paying attention! And my husband has reminded me of that. When that happens, we fixed the fence, made a note of why we got so off track, and moved on. The same holds true for boundaries. We know how easy it is to get wrapped up in preparing an FFA team for a competition or the time involved in helping with a community service activity. While we made the commitment to carve time out of our schedules for our families and ourselves, sometimes it's easy to infringe on the boundaries we have set. We may even find ourselves on the other side of the original boundary!

Keeping our boundary fences clean and easily visible may mean letting others know how we take care of ourselves. Everyone at our school knows Wednesday nights are my husband's night to trap shoot, and he will not intentionally plan activities during that time frame. This makes it easier when planning activities, as everyone knows that time is not available. It also shows others that teachers have a life outside of school.

Other fences may need to have warning signs about electricity. Those things in your life that are especially important should probably be highly visible to others. When I hand out my summer schedule, dates are crossed out that are non-school essential events that I'm not willing to give up. It's important for students to see us prioritize and have commitments in our lives.

I try to give my students

examples of what commitment and prioritizing things look like. Many times, I simply tell students stories of what we did over the weekends. We don't have romantic picnics on the hillside, nor did our family go on an all-inclusive cruise to the Bahamas. I talk to them about fixing supper for someone who lost a family member or helping our elderly neighbor clean up a tree that fell in his yard. Sometimes it is about how hard it is to work together to get cows gathered, sorted, and hauled and how we have to make up with each other when we are done because we have been harsh with our words in the heat of the moment. Helping others see our boundaries lets them know what's ours, how to interact with us, and how we can best help them.

Fences are easier to maintain if they run in a straight line.

Some of our fences follow a crazy property line that is not straight. Curves in fences put a lot of stress on fence posts, which result in posts being pulled out or broken off. Jogs in fences are expensive and difficult to build, along with being tough to keep the fence tight. All of this is true when we haven't thought about what it is that we want to accomplish with our own boundaries. It makes it hard to keep the fence tight and to explain to our kids when we are building the fence why we are building a fence in a curve.

The same is true with how we go about setting boundaries. If things are predictable (e.g. Wednesday nights are trap night), it's easier to keep our boundaries in place. However, sporadic fences are tough to enforce. They also lessen the importance of keeping that boundary in place. This makes it easy to fall out of the

habit of reserving time for what we initially scheduled. If it is easy to cross a boundary, pretty soon, the boundary no longer exists. Our boundaries serve a purpose, and they need to be well planned.

Fences need maintenance.

Staples fall out. Wires get broken or need tightening. Posts rot or get broken off. Gates sag. Brush grows up through your fence. We don't need to spend a lot of time on our fences that are in good shape, but we do need to check the condition of the fence and take care of the things that are not a big deal today so they don't become big problems if ignored. The easiest way for me to maintain my boundaries is by reviewing and updating my goals. As long as I am working toward my goals, my boundaries should only need a little updating, unless my goals have changed. By revisiting your goals, it helps remind us of why the boundaries are needed (so we can reach our goals). The boundaries we set make us and our lives better. That, in turn, will make our teaching and coaching better.

One of the things I try to avoid is making a second trip back to school in the evening. I don't chaperone dances. I usually only attend one sporting event a season. I don't volunteer to serve on committees unless I'm really passionate about the topic. If I do have an evening meeting, I try and fill the entire time with other things, like an after school FFA recreational activity, so that I can get as many things done as possible. These are all small things, but they are like those staples. These seemingly minor meetings can eat time you may not want to put into these activities. Staples may not seem very important either - until you don't have any! A little time spent maintaining our

goals and updating what we want to do is time well spent in making sure we don't have to reclaim boundaries later.

Fences are not the same for everyone.

We run electric, high-tensile fence for our cattle. It has worked well for us. Our neighbor likes barb wire. Another neighbor has no livestock but they have beautiful vinyl fencing. We get to decide what kind of fence we use to meet our purpose, in the same way the boundaries we enforce are specific to us and our needs. Perhaps, as a teacher, you're looking to let in classroom management and keep a high CDE coaching load off your plate. Maybe your focus is integrating FFA throughout your program, so SAEs are school-based rather than individual enterprises. The fence we build depends on what we will let in and what we are keeping out. I love having practices Wednesday after school because I know my husband will be busy with trap shooting. My time at school is not time spent away from my family.

If I am not passionate about a proposed project or I can't see the benefit for our program, I'm not interested in being involved. I've learned not to have reservations about sharing that philosophy. As I have gotten older, I have become better at guiding those types of requests to others who might be able to help. This strategy keeps me out of the picture and sends the asker on a mission to find someone else.

In the same way, our boundaries help keep what we can manage close to us. These same boundaries help keep what does not concern us away from us. I keep a running to do list on my wall. Many times, when someone asks for help, I have responded with "Here's my to do list. What can you help me with?" This strategy has helped. Some people are not interested in helping me do anything. Some are happy to tackle one of my tasks. When the drama teacher asked for help in building a set, I asked if she's willing to proof my public speaking manuscripts. Some boundaries are give and take; we let the good in and keep the bad out. These are our boundaries - we don't need others trying to get us to do things we do not feel are important.

There's a cost to building and maintaining fences, but there are returns.

We spent quite a bit on fence posts and wire last spring. It was time to replace posts and the payoff is the cows should be securely contained and safe. We went back to what our goals were and evaluated how our original fence worked. The one thing we changed was in several stretches we had more than three strands of high tensile. We have learned that three strands are all we need for the vast majority of our fence. We eliminated extra strands where it was easy to do. Now, we should be done with the big job of replacing posts for a while. Boundaries in our lives are sometimes challenging to establish. It's hard to say no. It's harder for me to say no when I put my family

first. It makes me feel selfish that my children are more important than my students. But my kids should be more important than my students! Somewhere along the line of working really hard to do a good job, this has gotten confused in my mind. When you tell someone, you can't do something because your child has an event, they understand. Parents understand. Administrators understand. The biggest challenge is me telling them I have something important to do that is not FFA/school-related. And that's on me. I'm the only one that can fix that.

These changes only happen when you place value on the big picture of your life and decide that you want more than just a career. We've got horses, cow/calf pairs, and fall born heifers on one farm. The only reason that can happen is we have fences that keep everyone where they belong. If we didn't have fences, we have a mare that would be with the cattle and she likes to kick calves, our bull would be with the heifers that were too young to breed, and our cows would probably not be near the bull. It might look like it would work from the outside, but I'm sure it would be a huge mess. The return for investing in the fence is animals are safe, well-managed, and healthy. Boundaries do the same for us.

There should be agreement about where fences go.

Our fence building last spring was easy because we were just replacing the existing fence and repairing what was already there.

We have a neighbor who agreed to help us by allowing us to straighten a line of fence that is in a crazy "U" shape. That only happened because we talked to them about how hard it was to build the fence on the crooked property line and involved them in the conversation.

Setting boundaries needs to include the other people that are involved in our lives, as well. Our spouses, our children, our students, and our parents may all make demands that we can't possibly meet 100% of the time. Regular schedules may help with this, such as regular date nights or family dinners. Setting plans can make things easier because we won't have to rearrange our schedules or juggle how we are going to make all of this happen. Consistency is a boundary that keeps the important things close while reducing our need to justify, rearrange, and misprioritize.

In conclusion

We use fences to keep our cows where we want them and to keep wandering animals out of our cow herd. Fences also provide a visual marker of where our property lines are. We could not have livestock without fences in our area. Fences help our neighbors identify when we may have a calf out - because the person can see the calf is on the wrong side of the fence. My summer calendar is a boundary that shows when I have dates that are off-limits; it helps me keep what is mine and lets others know too. The act of sharing my boundaries enables others in helping me maintain them.

I've never seen any awards given at my school for who works the hardest

or puts in the most hours. Awards are given based on results, and results happen because of careful planning and time spent in areas that you feel are important. How do we want to be remembered? As the teacher who was always at school? As a person who helped a teenager through a rough patch? As a coach who made sure all teams came home from competitions with awards? As an advisor who made learning fun and used life events to teach lessons? And will our families remember us in the same light? Setting some boundaries now helps us get the results we want. They are the fence that helps us mark what we want. When we have a highly visible, straight, well maintained fence, built for the purpose it communicates with those around us and returns dividends for our personal and professional lives in reaching our goals.



JoAnn Pfeiffer is a wife, mother of two, and an agriculture education instructor/FFA advisor at Federal Hocking High School/Middle School.

Avoiding the Burn

by: Jay Solomonson and Trent Wells

Dear Dr. Jay, I am really struggling right now. I have been teaching at the same school for three years. I teach six different preps, advise a very active FFA chapter, and try to do the best I can to work with all 115 students' SAE programs. We compete in numerous FFA activities every year at the chapter, district, and state levels. I currently manage an agricultural mechanics lab, a greenhouse, a large row crop plot, and my principal wants me to build some coops and start raising a flock of chickens next year. I am responsible for running our FFA chapter's social media accounts, organizing fundraisers, building projects for folks around the school and the local community, maintaining the school's landscape, and teaching both in-person and online. I also help coach the school's football and baseball teams. While my first two years were difficult and very busy, I thought I would turn the corner this year. It hasn't happened yet and I'm afraid if things don't change soon, I may leave teaching. I love what I do and am passionate about agriculture, but I feel so overwhelmed each day with no end in sight. What do you think I should do? I need your advice.

- Kevin Bigly

Does anything in this letter personally resonate with you? Over the course of my career I have had many conversations

with teachers facing similar circumstances. Due to the nature of our profession, we are all very busy. We teach multiple classes that address different aspects of agriculture, advise the local FFA chapter, supervise students' SAE projects, among a list of 100 other things. Research indicates the average agriculture teacher works far beyond the 40-hour work week (Hainline et al., 2015; Lambert et al., 2011). This workload can result in significant levels of stress, a leading contributor to burnout within our profession (Lambert et al., 2011). Consequently, teachers' personal lives often suffer. Admittedly, I was one of those teachers. It wasn't until my wife and I had children I realized things had to change. I did some research and began to implement several small changes that have made a tremendous difference in my ability to balance my responsibilities. As an agricultural teacher educator who studies these issues, I am now asked to provide guidance to both novice and experienced teachers struggling to get their lives back. I am going to share five strategies you can implement tomorrow that will have a dramatic impact on your ability to balance both your personal and professional lives.

1) Establish a Vision to Determine Your Priorities

The very first thing to do is determine what is most important to you. Establish a vision for who you are and who you wish to be.



This process will reveal who and what matters most in your life. These will become your priorities areas. Once your priorities areas are realized, create personal and professional goals to guide your actions and make your vision a reality. Make sure your goals are specific and measurable. You are also more likely to achieve your goals if they are written down. When I did this exercise, I wrote down everything I value and categorized those items into six broad areas: 1) Faith, 2) Family and Friends, 3) Health, 4) Career, 5) Finances, and 6) Making a Difference. I then created SMART goals for each area. I wrote out these goals and put them on my desk where I see them every day as I plan my schedule. After I accomplish a goal, I create a new one for that priority area. By successfully completing this step first, you will help create life boundaries so you can devote your time to your top priorities. This will allow you to be intentional in your actions and plans.

2) Schedule Everything on Your Calendar

Now that you have established your life goals, the next step is putting those activities on your calendar. It is important to schedule all your tasks to ensure you have time each day to complete them. This

Scheduling tasks allows for greater success in maintaining priorities.

includes scheduling items you may typically never put on your calendar, including time for your family and yourself. This prevents you from procrastinating on the activities you say you value most. Blocking out time for your priorities stops you from filling open time with non-important tasks. At the end of each week, I plan for the following week. I make sure I put everything I have to do that upcoming week on my calendar first then I schedule in time for my priorities. It could also be beneficial to color-code tasks in your calendar by priority area to make sure you do not leave anything out. This provides a visual representation of your efforts towards a work-life balance. Another thing I try to do is schedule particular tasks on specific days to provide consistency within my schedule. My Mondays are reserved for planning next week's classes while my Tuesdays are for

making copies and gathering materials. I designate Wednesdays for grading. Trying to stay a week ahead allows me some flexibility in case of an unexpected crisis.

3) Remind Yourself You Can't Do Everything

One of the most important and fundamental things you can do as a teacher is stop comparing yourself to others. As a young teacher, I was always comparing myself to other successful teachers and programs I aspired to be like. I made it my mission my first few years to have the best lessons, a successful team in every CDE, and the most innovative events for the National Chapter Award program. I believed I had to do these things to be a successful teacher. Moreover, I still had responsibilities to my administration, community, friends, and family. I quickly overwhelmed myself assuming I could do it all. What can you do about it? The first step is to accept the fact you cannot do everything. Otherwise, you will always be overwhelmed and overstressed. There will never be enough time to accomplish everything people want from you. The second thing is to say, "no." It is perfectly acceptable to decline invitations to participate in certain tasks. Every time you accept one thing, you decline something else. You can still be an effective teacher without doing everything. Focus collectively on what is best for you, your family, your students, and your community. Remember, more isn't always better.

4) Rethink Productivity

This sounds obvious, right?

We know there are things you have to accomplish on a daily basis. However, many of us find ourselves at the end of the day only knocking off a few items on our lists but adding several more to it before we go home. How do you get everything done? Change your mindset. Instead of asking yourself what you need to do today, ask how you can accomplish these tasks in the time provided during work hours. Give yourself a set amount of time to accomplish a task and accept it. This will be difficult, especially if you are a perfectionist; however, an essential step if you desire a quality work-life balance. These suggestions have helped me maintain productivity during

1) Focus on one thing at a time, as multi-tasking is typically not productive.

2) Set a timer. Work on a particular task without interruption for 45 minutes then take a break.

3) Sign off your e-mail while focusing on a task. If the message is so important it cannot be addressed when you take a break in an hour, it should have been a phone call.

4) Organize your work area. Reducing clutter can save you time in the long run.

5) Ask for Help

work hours: One of the things I struggled with most as a new teacher was asking for help. I thought my program was my responsibility alone. I was envious of multi-teacher programs and was always hoping we would grow enough to justify adding another teacher. This never happened. Instead, I had to figure out a way to handle the workload. I did this by asking for help. People volunteer their time to things meaningful to them. Identify those parents, alumni, community members, and others who support your program and ask for assistance. Delegate tasks that have to be accomplished but not necessarily by you. This includes your FFA chapter. If you are like me, much of your non-teaching time was spent on FFA. You have FFA officers and committees for a reason. Give them ownership in the chapter. It truly does take a village to be successful. You do not have to do this alone. More often than not, people will help because they believe in our purpose and mission. All you have to do is ask.

Remind yourself you are to, “advise from time to time as the need arises,” not all day, every day.

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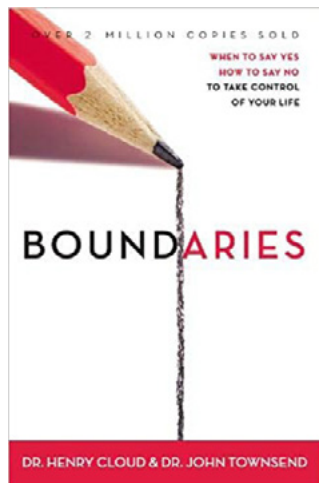


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Boundaries by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

by: Kayla Loewenhagen

As an Agricultural Educator, I am constantly intrigued with what other educators are doing. I am looking at ways to build a stronger program and bigger FFA. But I also feel the burnout from taking on too much, not having enough family time, saying yes to one more community project, and those late-night grading sessions. For me, it has always felt like my career is the center of my life and everything else just needs to fall into place around it. Sound familiar? It seems to be a trend of the profession. But does it really have to be this way?



I was drawn to the idea of reading the book *Boundaries* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend as an overwhelmed, worn out, people pleaser who has quite often found myself saying yes to a lot of people when I should have been saying no. *Boundaries* shares a pretty simple concept, summed up as some things are our responsibilities and some things are other peoples' responsibilities. *Boundaries* are what tell us the difference, allowing us to decide where we should concentrate our time and energy.

This book has a fairly simple topic, but if every person understands the concept of boundaries, why do so many struggle with it? Because there are so many complex inner workings behind boundaries that

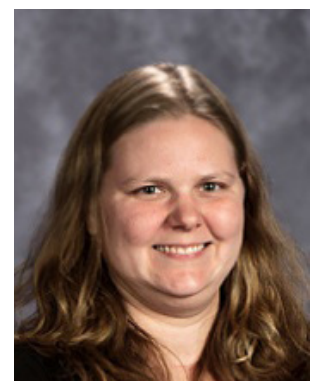
are waiting to be uncovered. Focused from a Christian perspective, the layout of this book takes a step by step approach, giving examples of a life with no boundaries. It moves directly into explaining what boundaries are, making a big statement for the reader. I could almost envision aspects of the stories as my life. The opening chapters outline boundaries as an important part of our lives, in every aspect. I didn't even realize there were aspects of my life that I should have more boundaries; I thought boundaries were about work-life balance, not all aspects of my life. The authors then dispel myths about boundaries—misconceptions I had as well as I started to think about setting boundaries.

The second part of the book details how people develop their boundaries (or lack thereof) with a series of examples. This is where I started to process and understand some of the examples from the first part of the book. This leads into a deeper dive into boundaries in all aspects of a person's life. This section breaks boundaries down into various categories including family, spouse, work, friends, children, and even the digital age, appealing to all aspects of one's life. This part of the book really inspired me to take a deep look at boundaries in all aspects of life not just the most talked about aspect of work, but all areas.

The final part of the book provides guidance for those committed to setting boundaries in their lives. It gives powerful insight as to how to start setting boundaries and

overcoming obstacles in setting those boundaries. One of my favorite chapters in this book talked about measuring success with boundaries. To me, boundaries are less scientific and more ambiguous with differences between people. This book highlights how to measure growth and accomplishment as boundaries are created or redefined. The book ends with an example of a life with boundaries giving a vision into the future possibilities.

I highly recommend the book *Boundaries* to my colleagues and friends who find themselves saying "yes" to everything and not feeling they are owning their own lives. We all have to take care of ourselves. As stated in the book, "boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and where someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership (p. 33)." Reading this book could help you take a step in the direction of owning your life.



Kayla Loewenhagen is a wife, mother, daughter, sister, lifelong learner, avid runner, and Agricultural Education Instructor for the Fall Creek School District.

Ready to Learn More

Ready to Learn More?

If we've learned anything about setting, maintaining, owning, and reclaiming boundaries, we know boundary work is difficult, accountability work that we need to continually practice. To aid in this accountability work, we invite women in Ag Ed to join us on BOMBs-NAAE on Facebook to be a Boss of My Boundaries.

What began as a group for moms has become an amazing group of accountability and support for ag teachers looking to own their boundaries. Wherever you're at, we're a group to support women and share the love found in boundary ownership. Maybe you're feeling your program shifting under your feet. Maybe you're rock solid and ready to share some wisdom. Either way, you probably have a million and one obligations at school and a few incredibly important ones at home (or two or three or more). Share your success, your frustrations, and your expectations as we offer each other support in the tough task of owning our boundaries!

If you are interested in hosting a boundaries workshop for the teachers you work with (pre-service or in-service), please contact Becky Haddad (bhaddad@umn.edu) or Haley Traini (haley.traini@oregonstate.edu).





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