KAI STUDIOS

Setting Effective Boundaries

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PROJECT MANAGERS

Boundaries in a professional setting are about protecting yourself, your team, and the project. When you're clear and transparent from the start, everyone knows what to expect.
Some people struggle to set boundaries because they don't want to come across as "difficult" or they want to avoid conflict. However, clear boundaries build trust, not tension.
Here's how to set them while still maintaining strong relationships with your team, clients, and key stakeholders.

Setting a Scope Boundary

Effective planning starts before the work does. Make sure requirements are understood by both client and team through a requirements meeting, followed up by email and written documentation: A backlog, sprint plan, prioritisation list, and validation process. This gives everyone a shared reference point, not just a shared memory.

Build in a change request process from day one, and walk stakeholders through it directly. Encourage questions so they genuinely understand it. Then send the documentation so they have it in writing.

In a project, almost everything the client wants can be done the real question is whether it's in or out of scope. A change process and prioritisation list give you a structured way to say yes, providing clarity, transparency and collaboration while protecting you, the project and your team.

Setting a Capacity Boundary

The foundation here is making sure neither you or your team are overcommitted. Know what you can and can't deliver, and say so. If you are working overtime, be transparent about it in your timesheets rather than letting it become invisible, unpaid expectation.
Some useful language:

- "I can take this on from [date], once I have capacity. What I can't do is start this week without something else moving."
- "I want to do this well. To do that, I need to be realistic about what I can carry right now."
- "I'm at capacity until [point]. Can we revisit this then?"

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This applies to your team too, not just you. Check in regularly: how are they doing, are they at capacity, what do they need to avoid being overloaded? Watch for the quiet signs: overtime that isn't mentioned, more frequent mistakes, dipping quality, a rise in bugs at QA.

- "The team is at capacity until [date]. I can slot this in after that, or we de-prioritise something else."
- "To take this on now, something else needs to come off the sprint. Let's run this through the change process and align on priorities?"

The Boundary Framework

Acknowledge → Assess → Direct → Collaborate

1. **Acknowledge**
   Acknowledge the request: "Thanks for raising this. I can see why it matters."
2. **Assess & Flag**
   Raise any issues concerning the capacity, scope, or risks: "Right now the team's at capacity, and taking this on as would put [X] at risk."
3. **Direct to Process**
   Redirect to the process that exists for exactly this situation
4. **Collaborate**
   Offer a way to work together: "Can we look at what moves to make room, or agree a realistic date this can start?"