

EXPLORE YOUR ENTHUSIASM

EPISODE 63: BUSINESS BOUNDARIES: WHEN YOU NEED THEM AND HOW TO SET THEM.

Today we're going to talk about the experience of being both a person, and a business. Before we get into it, I wanted to let you know that while I'm recording this audio podcast, I'm also streaming this video on Periscope. So if you'd like to get podcast episodes a week or more early, follow me on Periscope. And if you're watching the stream now, double-tap the screen to "heart" it, so I know you like watching these recordings. You can also right-swipe on the screen to share it with your friends! I'm going to be recording the next few and then listen to your feedback on whether you like it! After the podcast recording will be a live Q+A, so stick around.

Ok, now, let's talk about Business Boundaries. Honestly, I had no idea what I was going to speak about today, so I asked Twitter. [Andi Satterlund](#) said: "Finding balance between being friendly and establishing boundaries with your customer base? It's a hard line to walk. Building a community is wonderful, but expectations can get unreasonable when it's no longer just biz."

Whoa, this is totally amazing, because before I started recording, I had a session with a client and we talked about EXACTLY this. She had the experience of a personal kerfuffle turning into a business issue. She and a friend disagreed about something personal, but the friend starting saying "I can't believe you'd treat a customer like this" ... even though their conversation had nothing to do with the business or her services. My client asked: How do I keep things separate between business and personal? How can I keep people from turning something personal into something business-related?

My answer to her was: You can't help what other people are going to do and say. You can't control how someone is going to blow something out of proportion. However, you can set boundaries about how you act and interact, and what you allow and don't allow in your business.

But you know, I have the same issue. I love getting emails from readers and listeners, and I love replying and being helpful. But I can't be everything to everyone and I can't be working all of the time. At the same time, I want to make everyone happy and never let anyone down.

This is where boundaries and setting expectations is useful - to help you do your best work, serve your customers wonderfully, and not feel taken advantage of.

The first principle of boundaries and business is this: although it might be hard to hear, **You teach people how to treat you.** Yes, some people will be inappropriate no matter what, but for the majority of people, they are going to treat you and respond to you, in the way you train them to.

HOW DO YOU GET PEOPLE TO TREAT YOU WITH KINDNESS, COMPASSION AND PATIENCE?

First, set expectations.

Tell people exactly when they'll get a response and what kind of response they'll get. You can set expectations on your Contact or About page about when you'll reply to an email. You set expectations in your product listings (do you specify that you answer questions? How quickly?). You set expectations in your social media use, on your Ravelry page, Instagram or Twitter profile, how you interact on your Facebook page.

So if you feel people aren't respecting you, and are asking too much of you, check what expectation YOU give - do you tell everyone they can email you? Do you say you'll get back immediately?

For example, on my [contact](#) page, I say that if you're a customer, you'll hear back within 24 hours, but if you're just writing to introduce yourself or ask me something, it may be up to 2 weeks.

Also, I explain clearly which of my classes get 1:1 feedback from me and which don't.

I also make a point to reiterate that no one person (ie, me) can solve your business, YOU have to do the work, YOU have to determine what you want. This is an integral part of my message, and how I help people, in part because I want my students to have healthy expectations about what *I* can do.

You can change expectations first by changing the actual wording you use on your platforms, and then by how you act. If you keep your inbox open and reply to every email the moment it lands, you're training people to expect you to reply immediately. If you answer 10 people's questions on Ravelry or Facebook immediately, the 11th person will expect the same.

Second, model the behavior you want in return.

This might be obvious, but be sure you're talking to everyone in your social media streams the way you want them to talk to you. Even if you get a hateful or a weird message, respond with the tone you'd like your customers to take with you (or ignore it, that's ok too).

This is especially important if you have a physical location or an online community - YOU set the tone for the community and the experience. If you're sour and whiny, your people will think that's what kind of place it is. If you're enthusiastic and silly, your people will feel safer being silly and showing enthusiasm.

I've run the Starship, my online community, for over 4 years and I am continually blown away by how supportive and smart and helpful everyone is. I mean, they go above and beyond what I would expect or imagine. But even though I can't believe it, I recognize that this is because, from the very beginning, I would show up with helpfulness and kindness and compassion. No matter how silly the question, how many times I'd already answered it, or what was going on with me, I make it a practice to only show up

with enthusiasm and love. Obviously I'm not always having a great day, so I make sure not to take that there. I've taken breaks from social media, because I knew I couldn't show up with enthusiasm and kindness, and I didn't want to begin to re-shape my community into how I was feeling on a single day.

What you're doing is building the culture of the community that forms around your business. You are the most powerful container for and example of that culture.

Does it work?

After 8 years of having an online business, I've only ever received 2 mean tweets and 1 mean email. The emailer actually apologized and said she was wrong within a day, and the mean tweeters, they were perfect strangers with very few followers, who were fishing for a fight. When I went back and checked the stream of the most recent one, I realized she was trying to start a fight with EVERYONE who had written on a particular topic, including Forbes and Huffington Post, all within a few minutes.

Now, as I said earlier, and these examples demonstrate, not everyone is going to respond or even recognize the culture of your community. They may act inappropriately or demand too much. That's ok, that happens. It's up to you to decide how much this person's involvement means to you.

You have a few options:

- ★ Ignore it. If it's something on social media that is going to disappear in a few minutes, just ignore it or delete it. I always recommend starting with this, so you don't blow it up bigger than the person means for it to be.
- ★ Let the person know this is inappropriate and fill them in on what is appropriate. I'd only do this gently with a customer (to let them know, "No, I can't do X, because you bought Y" or "In this group, we keep things inclusive"). I don't bother with a non-customer, unless they keep it up. Now, if it's someone asking for your time or expertise for free, I have a script for that. Say, "I'd love to help, but you purchased X and that doesn't come with personalized help. You can schedule a 1:1 here." (Or if you don't provide personal help, you can just say that.) If they haven't purchased anything, let them know what they can purchase to get that level of detailed assistance.
- ★ You can block them. If someone is harassing you, you don't have to engage at all. Whether they are a customer or a stranger, block them from interacting with you - even from buying from you. You don't need anyone's money enough to put up with abuse. (This is a super-small percentage of the interaction you're going to have in the life of your business if you follow these guidelines of boundaries!)

Third, decide what you're comfortable with and stick to it.

You don't ever have to talk about anything you're not comfortable with. You can be a social media or blogging STAR and never share anything more personal than your favorite recipes. Also, you don't have to be "friends" with your customers. I feel blessed that I truly get along with nearly everyone that invests in my work, but you know what? I don't have to. I don't have to go get coffee with someone if I think I won't have fun.

You get to decide about the level of intimacy you want with your audience and your customers, and you are allowed to enforce that however you want. If that means that you never meet-up with your customers when you're in their town - that's fine!

If it means that you never discuss your kids - that's fine!

Any way you want to have an online presence can work - just be clear about what you want!

Fourth, recognize that it's not about you.

People aren't trying to annoy you or take advantage of you. They're not responding because of who you are or because you deserve it. 99% of the time, they are reacting in the way they've been told is appropriate, either by you or a similar business. When customers freak out and demand a refund, it's not because YOU suck. It's because they either didn't get what they expected, or they didn't really want it.

I'm not saying that "It's not personal, it's business", because the business is personal. But it's very rarely about YOU. As we talked about before, people do and say what they do because of who THEY are. What they say (even if they say it about you!) tells you more about them, than it does about you.

I hope this helps you set clear and healthy boundaries in your business! Share your own boundary setting on Instagram with the hashtag **#exploreyoureenthusiasm** and remember that you can watch me record this live on Periscope, if you follow me, TaraSwiger.

Thanks, and have an enthusiastic day!