The Modern Editor Podcast – Episode 7:
Why You Need Boundaries in Your Business

Tara Whitaker: [0:03] Welcome to *The Modern Editor Podcast*, where we talk about all things editing and what it's like to run an editorial business in today's world. I'm your host, Tara Whitaker. Let's get to it.

Tara Whitaker: [0:18] Welcome to today's episode. We are going to be talking about boundaries and how they are a form of self-care in our businesses. And no, I do not mean the whole bubble bath, bonbons self-care. I think—I mean—I hope we know by now that's not the definition of self-care, right? I hope we're past that by now. But I'm talking about self-care in the form of taking care of ourselves first before we pour into others and our businesses. So, I think it goes without saying, but I'll say it anyways, that boundaries are incredibly important. And yet they can be so difficult to implement and enforce. And we're going to talk about some reasons for that later. But I think one of the main things to do to help get ourselves more comfortable with setting and enforcing boundaries is just to keep talking about it. And hopefully, giving you some mindset shifts around some of these concepts to make setting boundaries easier to enforce. So, we're going to talk about what exactly boundaries are, we know why they're important, but we'll touch base on that a little bit. And then, we're going to talk about just a few boundaries that you can have in your business that will make the biggest impact from the start. So, this episode is not going to be an exhaustive list or an exhaustive discussion on boundaries. I think this will be the first of many episodes because we can dive so deep into boundaries and the specific types and how they affect us in our businesses. So, for now, we're just going to start with an overview to just get you thinking about what you can implement in your business quickly in the near future. So, I want you to walk away from this episode and be able to take one small step forward right away. All right?

Tara Whitaker: [2:08] So let's dive in. What exactly are boundaries? And here's where the first mindset shift might help you. So, a definition I found that I really like—and I think I paraphrased it—is that boundaries are limits we set for ourselves within relationships. And I think where at least a small portion of the hesitation or lack of a—lack of enabling?—lack of ability to set and keep those boundaries is that the word boundary has, can have a bit of a negative connotation to it. When I think of a boundary, I think of a gate, or, or like a fence or a barrier or a wall. And that can seem a little harsh, or too—I don't even know what the word is. It just might not resonate with you. Putting up a wall between someone in a relationship doesn't exactly feel good. Right? So, if that is you, I would try and think of a boundary as a safety net instead. So, when we think of a safety net, we think of something underneath us, right? It's not something in between us, you know, you're—if you're looking at something or someone, it's not a wall in between us; the safety net is under us. So, it allows us to grow. It allows us to have these relationships and allows us to have risks, but it's still there to protect us. And I think that's the whole point of setting boundaries is protecting ourselves. So, if that's you, maybe instead of saying boundaries, you're gonna set some safety nets and see if that helps.

Tara Whitaker: [3:46] Now, as always, this is an editing podcast. We're going to focus on things that will help our editing businesses. But remember that these can be—these concepts—these ideas we talk about can be tweaked for personal use as well. There's a lot of overlap. And for a fantastic book about boundaries, I cannot recommend the book *Set Boundaries, Find Peace* by Nedra Glover Tawwab. I'll link it in the show notes. But we read this book inside the Freelance Editors Club one month when we were focusing on self-care and boundaries, and I just love it. She goes into so much detail about the different kinds of boundaries, why they're important. She gives specific scripts and things to say when enforcing boundaries. And not just for work, but personally, in relationships, work relationships, I mean, across the board. Get yourself that book ASAP. All right.

Tara Whitaker: [4:42] So, like I said before, we know boundaries are important. But one of the—my favorite quotes from that book was that "burnout is a response to unhealthy boundaries." And at the time when I read that, I needed to hear that. You know when you read something or see something, and you just know that it was meant for you? And it hit in the gut because I was in a bad place of burnout that month. I said yes to too many things. I panicked, I got overwhelmed, I did not enforce my boundaries, and it led to burnout. And that's such a succinct explanation of why boundaries are so important. And like I mentioned before, they also protect our peace, they protect our well-being, they also protect our businesses and our reputations.

Tara Whitaker: [5:33] So, let's say that you have a habit of letting clients take advantage of you. Or—you know—you don't say no, you're, you're always the one that says yes. And I hate—you know—the editing industry is shockingly small. It really is. And you'd be surprised at how small it is, especially when you hear things. And you never want to have a reputation, a negative reputation, that doesn't truly reflect who you are. A lot of the times, if you're someone who lets clients, you know, take advantage of you a little bit, it's not because you're weak, or anything like that, it's because you're so giving, and so just want to help. And, of course, that's a great thing. But, of course, as well, there's a boundary to put in place for that. So, keep that in mind when setting and enforcing these boundaries. It's not that—you know—be afraid of what people talk about you by any stretch. But understand that you can have a greater impact on the industry. Even though we're all freelance editors, and we all have our own businesses, and we're kind of all in our little—you know—offices and such, we are still part of a wider industry.

Tara Whitaker: [6:52] And like I mentioned before, I know boundaries can be difficult to enforce. And there are so many personal reasons for that, societal reasons for that, cultural reasons. And so, so many more that are much bigger than—you know—us as individuals. And historically, women are told or expected to give, give, give, right? Put others first, ourselves last, which makes for very poor boundary setting. And I think that's where the self-care movement came from originally was to take care of ourselves first. And a lot of that, of course, was, you know, bubble baths and manicures, which absolutely can be a part of self-care. But it's expanded a lot now to encompass things like setting boundaries, saying no, and learning how to say no. You know—taking care of ourselves so we're not pouring from an empty cup. I know we've all heard that before.

So, there are so many more things at play. And it's, it's not an easy fix, but I just want to make sure that we're all aware of that. It's not just something that, like I said, is an easy fix. There are deeper societal/cultural things at play here that can take some work to get past or to manage or to work around. All right.

Tara Whitaker: [8:14] And I will say this, when it comes to boundaries, no boundary is better than an unenforced boundary. And I'll give you an example of this. Because again, it was one of those gut punches that I did to myself. I had set a time limit for how long I was going to spend on social media every day. Because I looked at my phone and—you know how the iPhones record what apps you're in—and I was appalled at how much I was on social media. I didn't think it was that much. But it was bad. And so, I said, okay, I'm going to set a boundary, and I'm only going to be on social media x hours a day. And x of those hours have to be the social part. I have to actually be using it for my business or using it to connect with people, not mindlessly scrolling. Well, spoiler alert, did not, did not enforce that. Blew past it. I gave myself a month. And it was—I think I actually even was on social media more that month and had no excuse for it. And when I realized that—again, that punch to the gut—I thought, wow, Tara, you set that boundary, and you completely disrespected yourself by not enforcing it. You just spent all of that time and energy, mental health on [a] social media app, and you can't—you have nothing to show for it. Nothing. I wasn't socializing; I was consuming. I could have read so many books in that time. I could have spent time with my family. I could have done so many other things. And that's when I really realized that unenforced boundaries are just—I think they're worse than no boundaries at all. Because when they can't—when it comes to boundaries that are specific to you (like the social media), not enforcing that is really just disrespecting yourself. I know I went on a little bit of a tangent there. Can you tell I got really upset with myself? Because I did. But that's where these boundaries are, are so important.

Tara Whitaker: [10:26] So some other ways of knowing if you need to enforce a boundary (and this kind of goes with that) is when you know that you have a habit of doing something that you would rather not do, like scrolling social media. Or if you have a habit of just saying yes all the time. You don't ever want to disappoint your clients, so you're always going to say yes. And you know that you say yes to family members, you say yes to friends, you're always the one that will help out. That's knowing that you have a habit. So, knowing that means you probably need a boundary in place. Also, if you have a gut feeling, or you realize that you're being taken advantage of—and that can come in business and personal too—if something becomes a habit of someone else, like a client is habitually asking you to do extra work or something keeps happening, that's usually a good indicator that there is no clear boundary in place and, or there's a clear boundary, but it's not being enforced. So those are just some ways to see if you need a boundary or not or to enforce the boundary.

Tara Whitaker: [11:38] Now, here are a few boundaries that you could use in your business. No matter where you're at in your business—if you're brand new or you're a seasoned veteran. This is not exhaustive like I said, but it's just a good start that I think will give you the most bang for your buck, so to speak. So, the first one is your business hours. Because we're freelancers, for the most part (depending on our clients), we get

to choose when we work. You know, we can work 2:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. if we want to. We can work in the wee hours of the morning. But what business hours are you going to do things "publicly?" So, when will you email clients? Are you going to do that at 11:00 p.m. at night? Or are you only going to do that within, you know, nine-to-five, or whatever the times are? Because, like I said, we can work behind the scenes at any time of the day. But when will our clients expect us to respond? So, having clear business hours for them is going to be really important because—and to go with that—how quickly you're going to respond. You know, if you respond within five minutes all the time, and then one time, you know, you're dropping your kids off at school or going to grab a latte, and you don't respond for twenty minutes, and they freak out, might be a good place for a boundary. And to go along with that, the next one is how you'll communicate with your clients. That's going to be business hours, that's going to be how. As in, if you say we need to communicate via email and they keep sliding into your DMs, that's a boundary that needs to be enforced. Or vice versa, whatever the case may be. Or if they're texting you at all hours of the night or they're texting you questions constantly, instead of holding them all for a little while and sending them all at once. That's going to be a very big boundary that you'll want to enforce as soon as you can with any new client right up front.

Tara Whitaker: [13:43] And then how you're going to enforce any contract scope creep. Now, if you don't know what scope creep is, that means anything that pops up that is outside of your original contract. So, if you have a manuscript, let's say, that you're copyediting and you're chugging along, and the contract says—you know—this 80,000-word manuscript, and you get halfway through and the author emails you and says, "Hey, I decided to add four new chapters in. Here's another 20,000 words. Add that in." That's scope creep. That is outside of the original contract that needs to be—you need to be paid for that. So, you have to go back and—you know—redo the contract or do an addendum to include that new portion. Now, if that client expects you to just do it without getting paid for it, that's a red flag. But this is where you're going to really want to enforce those boundaries. How are you going to handle that if it pops up? How will you adjust your contract? Or is it just going to be a simple email that lines up or explains what the new services are going to be and at what rate. And then, how far are you going to go, if at all, with these types of additional requests? Is your contract going to say whatever you submit to me is the end-all-be-all, and there [are] no additions, no deletions, no changes? Or are you going to allow something like this to be okay, as long as there's a written addendum? That's completely up to you and your business, but having those processes in place will also help. But also knowing what that boundary is going to be upfront, so you're not scrambling when it does happen.

Tara Whitaker: [15:28] And then the last boundary I will chat about is what you will or will not share online. Now I know a lot of us use social media for our businesses. And it can get tricky, right? Are you going to have a separate business account? Or are you going to combine your business and your personal account on a certain site? Will you friend or follow your clients on social media? Will you talk about them on social media? Obviously, if you are, you need to have their permission. Are you going to share family stuff or pictures of your kids, or anything personal on your business account? For example, my, my Instagram account is really my only active account. And I definitely mix

business and personal stuff, although my business is probably like 80% of the content. But my husband and I decided way before we had kids that we were going to severely limit our kids' pictures on social media for a variety of reasons. So, if you look at my page, you will see very, very, very few images of my kids. That's just a boundary we set. You know, there are other people who don't have that boundary, which is completely fine. It's just up to you. And knowing what you want to do ahead of time is going to be a big help.

Tara Whitaker: [16:56] So that's your brief, brief overview on boundaries, why they're important. You've now got some examples of some boundaries that you can implement in your business. And like I said before, I really encourage you to come up with just one boundary right now that you can implement in your business this week. Doesn't have to be something earth-shattering or huge. But I encourage you to just put one boundary in place. Because taking that one small step often leads to another small step and another small step. And before you know it, you're going to be a boundary rockstar. And let me tell you, when you have those enforced boundaries set up, life can be a lot easier. And if you do decide to implement a boundary after this episode, I would love to hear about it. So, head to my website tarawhitaker.com. You can contact me on there, you can grab a free 15-minute chat if you want to talk "live" on Zoom, or you can always send me an email at hello@tarawhitaker.com. So, until next time, keep learning, keep growing, keep setting those boundaries, and know that you've got this!

Tara Whitaker: [21:57] Thank you so much for tuning into today's episode. If you enjoy *The Modern Editor Podcast*, I would be so grateful if you left us a review over on iTunes. And as always, you can head to tarawhitaker.com to connect with me and stay in touch. We'll chat again soon.