



Boundaries are for Safety

By [Charles Vogl](#)



I understand why many leaders I talk to seem to be afraid of creating boundaries. They don't want to emulate the jerks they've met who create elitist, snobby, almost pointless boundaries simply to keep others out.

Earlier I discussed that it is important that you know, at some level, who is inside your community and who is outside. This can sometimes be a fairly fuzzy line.

I know of a neighborhood that hosted an annual community block party with too much food and drinks, a fire pit, and lots of friendly conversation. Over the years, some people moved away and others moved in. Of course, the newcomers became part of the community, but what about the those who moved away? It got fuzzy. They (informally) decided that once a member, always a member, so party invitations went out locally and sometimes to towns, states, and countries far away. Membership can be informal. The boundary can be crossed through self-selecting visitors. There still must be a sense that not everyone is in your community at any time. Communities are bound by values. Anyone not sharing your values, really

shouldn't be in your community. (Valuing the residents in your neighborhood counts!)

Boundaries can be used to create a safe space inside for members. Members want to have a place where others share their values, where they don't have to explain themselves, and where they know others want to help them grow. I call this a sacred space. You can recognize it because others are willing to be vulnerable. In this context, vulnerability means that we are willing to share the parts of us that we fear may make others reject us when they see them.

To create a sacred space where vulnerability can be shared, we need to hold the boundary where our members feel safe. This means we protect the space for those who share our community's values. This doesn't have to be every event or space our community gathers, but for deep belonging we need to have a time and place where members know they are safe among members. This means not any visitor can swing by and observe and/or judge at any time.

For example, my friend Bjorn is part of a Tibetan Buddhist community. At each of the weekly meetings, visitors are welcome, even given hot tea at the end of the Dharma talks. However, on the weekend retreats, attendance is limited to the students who have achieved a certain level of understanding in the tradition. The head teacher prefers to avoid using that time to convince visitors of the teaching merit. These sacred space weekend retreats are times when real depth and vulnerability can be explored in the tradition.

Here's another example: My friend Adam is part of an informal executive chef community in San Francisco. They make meals together and welcome their friends who like to eat. The kitchen, however, is a sacred space. Only chefs are welcome inside. They don't want to spend their evening explaining what they are doing or training novice cooks. It is their time to celebrate their enthusiasm amongst professionals.

Further, they have some dinners to which only chefs are invited. Adam explained that if a first-time visiting chef does not demonstrate adequate investment or creativity, they are not invited back. Those dinners are sacred space for those who value quality and creativity in pushing the boundaries of culinary arts.

Are you creating sacred spaces for your community? Is there a time and place that your members can gather where they know they can be vulnerable, when they can share what they care about, and when all want to support one another in growth? If not, there is real opportunity to bring the belonging to the next level.

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