



For
**Navigating the Unknown:
An Ensemble Hero Journey**

**Containment As An Essential Support For Personal Development:
Building Self Awareness Along the Journey**

Working with Contact, Boundaries & Limits

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Working With Boundaries

Being “grounded and bounded”, being limited to a specific place in space and time, is what gives us a sense of self - a direct, immediate sensate experience of being me, ‘who I am.’

When we are well-contained in body and mind, and connected to our own resources, within and underneath us, we have the support to develop and grow as human beings.

Without ‘grounding and bounding’, we lose our ability to contain ourselves. We cannot hold proper inner boundaries, build up inner power, and grow into maturity.

Without a solid boundary container, our energy gets dissipated and diluted, and we become ineffective in our actions.

This can cause people to feel vague, wispy, ethereal, insubstantial, undefined, mushy, gooey, unending, and unavailable for contact and connection.



Boundaries & Limitations

Boundaries are limits, and vice versa. A boundary separates us from what is around us, in order to define and distinguish us. It initially is a necessary limitation in order to allow us to experience ourselves as unique, distinct, specific and whole.

We must learn to accept the necessity of our human limitations, in order to grow, and to eventually transcend them. This is what helps us to know what the differences are between

pre-personal fantasies that create ungrounded ‘ thought/energy bubbles’ that arrest personal development, and transpersonal experiences that transcend the ego, expand our personal consciousness, and foster personal development.

In assessing mental health and well-being, it is important to pay attention to how an individual acknowledges, honors and works *within the limits* of their own sense of boundary, before they can be capable of transcending these limits.

In a professional practice, you will be able to assess the health and functioning of both the practitioner and the client by watching what transpires at the boundary points in the process facilitation work.

Boundaries in Professional Practice

Some of the crucial boundary markers in a practice are time, space, money, personal sharing and touch.

Boundaries and limits create a sense of “professionalism” in practice, which creates a sense of safety and trust for the neurotic aspects of our selves. At the same time, they also tend to offend the more disturbed forces in one’s psyche.



Contact As Life-Giving Energy Exchanges At a Boundary Point

From Gestalt theory – two separate and distinct energies meeting *at a specific boundary point in time* – and having an exchange take place across that permeable boundary.

When an insufficient or overly permeable boundary occurs, *contact will often be confused with merging*, where there is an ability to distinguish one person’s experience from another’s.

When an overly rigidified boundary is in place, there will be a tendency to experience life *in abstraction*, with no felt sense of an encounter happening. The other is “un-touchable”, or flavor-less. There is a tendency to confuse the menu with the meal!



Making Contact

In order to make contact, there must be an exchange between two distinguished and separately experienced, defined selves.

There has to be a felt sense of something else, that which is not me. There is an experience of a 'someone else' who is here, now – someone to come up against, to move towards, to penetrate or impact, to yield or give over to. There is a sense of both giving to and receiving from, sometimes a leaning against or pulling towards.

This gives a felt sense of '*something happening*' between two bodies and two minds. Both parties involved feel the exchange happening between them and are changed by such encounters.



Boundaries & Contact

A solid and yet permeable boundary between two people, where a distinct limitation can be clearly felt and established, initially provides a support function in the relationship, and it creates a sense of safety that builds trust.

Once safety is established, risk-taking or challenging functions provide a sense of approaching the established boundary. This feels enlivening, and a healthy individual will feel a desire to venture forth, and will respond to the invitation of challenge of exchanging at the boundary, in order to grow the relationship.

The art and craft of relatedness obviously required a necessary balancing of being supported in where they are in relationship, and challenged to go beyond where they have been, to create new experiences.

On your Hero's Journey, you can think about this balancing place of support and challenge as your "*development edge*". It is where you will learn the best, through embodiment and mindfulness, to stay at the 'contact boundary' more, and to cultivate more aliveness, from being here more.



Defenses

Our defenses come into existence to prevent or manage the contact exchanges between two or more people. They can keep contact from happening, and they will be employed to manage or control how it happens.

One will not simply be able to give up their defensive postures and strategies unless there is first an appreciation of both the potential usefulness of the defense's function, as well as the awareness of the depth and degree of negative consequence created by over-using the defense.

NOTE: Often it is the case that the consequences of defensive maneuvers is more severe than the consequences that it is employed to prevent.

One reason that a defense is incredibly difficult to surrender is that it is experienced by as “ego-syntonic” by the personality it defends.

This means that the defense ‘makes sense’, it feels like my life works this way, that it is the way things ought to be for me. It feels familiar and “right”, and it will at its core have the feeling of defending one’s way of being as if one’s very life depended on it.

We have to learn to engage in “ego-dystonic” behaviors and thinking. These ways feel very foreign and un-nerving, but we have to learn that it doesn’t mean they are wrong for us. We simply are very under-developed in these ways, and therefore we have the most potential to realize in ourselves, if we allow ourselves to explore them. This is very important to do.

Remember that our defenses are not something we should try to eliminate so much as they are to be improved upon and so they can become more developed, refined, sophisticated, and useful, imbued with more consciousness and discernment.

Defenses are not to be judged, but rather, they must be appreciated and understood, and also deemed relevant or irrelevant to the present moment environment.



One of my favorite Rumi poems, that stresses the importance and essential nature of a solid container:

*A Chickpea leaps almost over the rim
Of the pot
Where it is being boiled.*

“Why are you doing this to me?”

The cook knocks it down with the ladle.

*“Don’t you try to jump out.
You think I’m torturing you;*

I’m giving you flavor,

*So you can mix with spices and rice
And be the lovely vitality
Of a human being.*

*Remember when you drank
Rain in the garden?*

That was for this."

*Grace first. Sexual pleasure,
Then a boiling new life begins,
And the Friend has something
Good to eat.*

*Eventually
The chickpea will say to the cook,*

*"Boil me some more.
Hit me with the skimming spoon.
I can't do this by myself..."*

*You're my cook, my driver,
My way into existence.
I love your cooking."
-Rumi*