

# The Freedom of Boundaries

By Allen J. Huth

The story has been told about a young family who moved into a new neighborhood. With no fence around the yard, the young children only played close to the back door, never venturing very far into the yard or beyond. Finally a fence was installed. The fence defined the boundaries of the back yard, and the play area of the young children expanded accordingly. They ran all over the yard, even climbed the fence from time to time to push their boundary to its full limits, and once in a while they jumped over the fence to explore what was out there, beyond the fence. Once the fence was in place they felt safety in knowing their boundaries.

Small and mid-size businesses are like young families who need to put a fence up around their business. Often, small business leaders come out of a big corporate environment of bureaucratic policies, procedures, rules, and regulations. They have rebelled against restrictive, highly regulated, hamstrung corporate structure and started their own version of a freedom company. Initially, the freedom style is refreshing, freeing, creative, and energetic. As the company succeeds, however, growing pains set in—freedom is challenged and stretched—people begin expressing the need for structure and accountability. Leaders hear: “There’s no leadership around here. No one knows what we are supposed to be doing.”

“Stuff goes in the executive office and never comes out. They want us to be proactive, yet they want to approve everything that goes on.”

“We need some structure, some organization, some accountability around here!”

They want a fence. They want to know the scope of the business, they want some boundaries, some policies and procedures. In other words: “tell us what to do and we’ll do it.” People get stuck hovering around the back door because they don’t know how far they can wander, where the business begins and ends, or what is beyond the scope of the business.

The leader may thrive in freedom, but as the company grows, most employees want and need boundaries to achieve peak performance.

Below are symptoms of a freedom company and steps to take to install some boundaries.

<b>Example</b>	<b>Freedom Company Symptoms</b>	<b>Boundaries Established</b>
Executives.....	Micro-manage, must approve everything.....	Leader with clear vision
Scope.....	Do everything for everybody.....	Work only in area of influence and control
Goals .....	Vague, if any; afraid to set.....	Clearly defined, tasks are related, accomplished often
Structure.....	Fly by the seat of the pants.....	Organization chart, job descriptions

Policies .....	Vague or absent (too confining) .....	Clearly defined, written and communicated (handbooks)
Procedures .....	None (Everybody doing their own thing, no quality control) .....	Written procedures (builds a business, not a personal company)
Processes .....	Random, chaotic, just get it done attitude, undefined .....	Efficient, frequent improvements, redesigned & streamlined
Performance.....	Reviewed.....	Track, measure and adjust
Prioritization.....	Handle urgent first .....	Handle important first
Accountability .....	Avoid.....	Subject yourself to accountability
Reactive/Proactive .....	Reactive- troubleshoot, put out fires.....	Proactive- plan of action, role play, light fires
Time .....	Wasted, procrastination .....	Scheduled, used efficiently
Bad habits .....	Keep, rationalize.....	Attack and eliminate
Job descriptions .....	Evolve when necessary .....	Designed to meet company's needs
Meetings .....	No agendas, too long, canceled.....	Purpose, agendas (honor each other)
Professionalism .....	"Get by" attitude.....	"Best" attitude
Budget.....	Historical.....	Financial plan

As employees understand the scope of the business, they can move away from the back door and explore the whole yard. Yes, they may climb the fence, push the boundaries and even jump the fence from time to time, but there will be more freedom to play in the yard once the fence is installed.

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