Drawing the Line: 
A Guide to Setting Boundaries 
And Avoiding Burnout 
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burnout /ˈbɜːrnət/ n. the state of being totally worn out and generally fried

Burnout can strike a student leader at anytime and it always makes it more difficult to do your job well and to enjoy it. The goal of this handout is to give you some practical suggestions for setting appropriate boundaries and avoiding burnout. Remember, the healthier and happier you are, the more you will be able to enjoy all of your student leadership positions.

General Suggestions:

- Schedule personal time daily (and take advantage of it faithfully).

- Find a hermit spot away from your room...consider finding a spot off campus.

- Learn and PRACTICE better time management, prioritize your “to do” list.

- Avoid committee or “business” talk at breaks, meals, etc. Let your down time be real down time.

- Use the supports and resources available to you (your exec board, other committee members, friends, etc).

- Tell people when they have stopped by at an inconvenient time...don’t let interruptions pull you off track. Instead, offer to schedule a better time to meet with them.

- Think before volunteering yourself...make sure you have set a reasonable limit for yourself and then stick to it (i.e. if you are already chairing 2 subcommittees, should you really volunteer for a 3rd?)

- Say “no” when it is appropriate and necessary...work to feel comfortable telling people “no.”

- Remind yourself regularly of all the benefits of your involvement and the reasons that originally motivated you to get involved.
Setting Boundaries Verbally
(learning to say “no” well)

One of the hardest parts of being a student leader is that you are often asked to do more than you can reasonably do. Learning to effectively communicate your boundaries can go a long way in helping you avoid burnout. Here are some common questions that student leaders are frequently confronted with and some specific suggestions for saying “no” effectively.

You will have to modify these answers to find your own style, as you do so remember:
- Be sincere and honest...don’t lie or make false excuses.
- Don’t say maybe if you mean no -- people often hear yes when you say maybe 😂.

Practicing Saying “NO”

**QUESTION:** “Can you do this, this, and this...?”
**ANSWER:** “Can you prioritize those for me...I won’t be able to do them all today (this week/before our next meeting/etc.)”
**OR:** “This week is really bad, is there anything that needs to be done for next week...I have some open time then.”

**QUESTION:** “If you’re not busy...”
**ANSWER:** “Actually, it is a little hectic right now...why don’t we schedule a time...”
**OR:** “I’m really distracted with tomorrow’s midterm, if I could come by tomorrow at ______, you’d have my full attention.”

**QUESTION:** “You’d be perfect on our committee and we really need people...”
**ANSWER:** “I’m already overextended and I just wouldn’t be able to give your group the time that it deserves.”
**OR:** “I decided that I need to limit myself to 3 committee commitments a semester and I’m already involved with three other groups...if I have time next semester, I’ll let you know.”

It may sound silly, but practice makes perfect. If saying no is a problem for you, practice. Think of situations when you were uncomfortable saying no and then practice different ways you could have answered no. Make a commitment to yourself to use one of these answers next time. 😊