



Setting Strong Boundaries as a Working Caregiver

WIF Annual Event 2026 · Workshop · Leen Vermeersch



A QUIET PROMPT BEFORE WE BEGIN

**Before we talk about how to ask for what you
need,
*write down how you actually do it.***



THE WRITING EXERCISE

Step 1 of 4



1

Think of one thing related to your caregiving role that you need at work right now — flexibility, support, a lighter load, understanding.

Write the sentence you would actually say to ask for it.



THE WRITING EXERCISE

Step 2 of 4



2

Read what you just wrote.

How many words come before the actual ask?



THE WRITING EXERCISE

Step 3 of 4



3

What do you usually add to soften it?

An apology. A justification. A defense. A “but only if.”



THE WRITING EXERCISE

Step 4 of 4



4

If you never express your need out loud —

what happens instead?



You are the main character in this film.
Not the supporting act.



DEBA

Four ways we hand someone a reason to manage us



DEFEND

"I don't want to become a bottleneck..."



EXPLAIN

"It's just that with my dad's health and the kids and..."



BLAME

"If the team actually planned better..."



APOLOGIZE

"I'm so sorry to even ask this..."



The apology reflex

Apologizing is the trickiest of the four — it dresses up as good manners.

It feels like kindness.

It's actually a translation:

“This need is a burden, and I'm sorry for bringing it into the room before you've even heard what it is.”

You are not sorry for existing at work.

You have a need. State it.

PRACTICE

Notice the sentence before you say it. Catch the “sorry” reaching for the front of the line.



The clean ask

No defending, explaining, blaming, or apologizing

1

WHAT'S TRUE

"I have back-to-back meetings until 5, and pickup is at 5:15."

2

WHAT IT COSTS YOU

"That leaves me rushing and distracted, every time."

3

WHAT YOU NEED

"I need my Tuesday afternoons protected."

4

THE CONCRETE ASK

"Can we move my Tuesday 4pm meeting to Wednesday?"

The boundary is the message — there's nothing else the sentence needs to do.



This takes practice

You will not say this cleanly the first time.

You'll catch yourself mid-sentence, adding the “sorry” back in. That's not failure. That's the muscle finding its new shape.

Nobody in this room leaves fluent.

You leave having tried it once, on purpose, out loud.

You don't control the response, only the sentence.

No blame — not toward them, not toward you.



Practice, then take it home



UPWARD

Reduced hours

Moving to a 4-day week for a parent's care, without it reading as “less committed.”



DOWNWARD

The redistribution

Leading a team, asking a direct report to take ownership of a deliverable while you manage caregiving demands.



UPWARD

Sandwich generation

A teenager and an ageing parent, same month — asking for a temporary adjustment.

You leave with four concrete sentences, in your own words, ready to say next time you need to.

Your next step

1

The Conversation Scan — free.

Find out whether you default to Peacekeeper, Eruptor, Silencer, Rationalist, or Connector.

2

Scan the QR code.

Takes two minutes, right from your seat.

3

Want the four lines close by?

The book is available during the break.



Scan the code to get your result

The boundary is the message.
You don't need to apologise for it first.

