

Boundaries are necessary.



Should we expect our clients will always follow our advice? Absolutely not. Should we do everything possible to accommodate the client's request when he or she asks us to modify our recommendations so they are more consistent with what is preferred? Without question.

Therefore, by no means is it a problem for a client to say no to our suggestions and/or want us to cut in half the time or effort involved in taking the next step. As much as we hope to

generate value by providing insightful suggestions that are then acted on, our primary function isn't to ensure clients do as we say, it's to help them make informed decisions.

That said, there is a line **high-impact practitioners** avoid crossing in their relationships with clients. A point can be reached where, instead of being asked to be flexible and creative about how to apply our skills, we are actually asked to ignore altogether some aspect of our craft that we consider vital to successful realization of the goals. This boundary is undetectable to clients, so it is up to us to be vigilant about knowing where it is.

The partition between appropriate and inappropriate elasticity in the delivery of our work is not always easy to recognize, even for us. Sometimes, our desire to be helpful or our commitment to seeing a change succeed can cloud our thinking. Other times, our unwillingness to be honest with ourselves gets in the way. No matter the reason, high-impact change professionals remain clear about the line that separates legitimate pliability on their part from unproductive pandering to sponsors' requests. Just because we are under pressure to make the implementation process appear faster, easier, or less expensive than is actually required to be successful, this is not a reason to toss in the towel and, with it, our integrity.

The problem isn't always that we fail to see the distinction between healthy adaptability on our part and abdication of our responsibility to make the case for what needs to be done. The line is sometimes all too apparent—it's our lack of **courage** and **discipline**, not unawareness, that more than likely prevents us from taking a stand. There is a long list of things we can put ahead of the incorruptibility of our work—minimizing tension, ensuring we are seen as likable and easy to work with, job security, etc.

That said, the demarcation between permissible and out-of-line client requests can sometimes be difficult to define, and, without a doubt, maintaining the fidelity of the standards of our work can be risky. These challenges, however, don't lessen our responsibility to do the right thing. It is in both the client's and our best interests for us to be unwilling to conciliate past a certain point. Standing firm against pressure to do otherwise requires us to claim what I'm referring to as our *sovereignty*.