

# Respecting Boundaries

## RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

Aviation is a global endeavour that connects people and cultures. Differences may create challenges; it is important to always engage with respectful communication and behaviour. Misunderstandings are created and conflicts can arise when behaviour accepted by some is experienced as inappropriate by others.

Everyone has physical and emotional boundaries shaped by their own cultural, religious, national, and personal background. Crossing these boundaries can be as simple as an action, behaviour, or even a comment, which, if found to be objectionable, could cause offence.

In some cases, this can escalate to company disciplinary actions or criminal charges. Unwanted behaviour and microaggressions can take many forms, which can be grouped into the following three categories<sup>1</sup>:

- **Crossing the boundary.** Incidents which occur when an individual inadvertently oversteps a personal boundary of another individual (e.g., accidental inappropriate touching, comments, inferences etc.).
- **Infringement/violation/assault.** Incidents during which individuals repetitively show inappropriate behavior despite having been warned or reprimanded (e. g., repetitive insults, physical contact despite explicit guidance not to). This could also include racial harassment which includes mimicking the way a person speaks, making jokes about a persons' race or national origin.
- **Criminally liable abuse.** In this case, criminal proceedings depend on local law (e.g. incidents during which individuals perform battery, sexual abuse, and insult or abuse and extortion, stalking, misuse of personal media material or pornography).

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<sup>1</sup> These are examples and do not form an exhaustive list.

[https://www.vcockpit.de/fileadmin/dokumente/themen/arbeitsgruppen/Flyer\\_Respecting\\_borders\\_s.pdf](https://www.vcockpit.de/fileadmin/dokumente/themen/arbeitsgruppen/Flyer_Respecting_borders_s.pdf)

## OPTIONS FOR SUPPORT

Some airlines and companies may have training or defined procedures on how flight crew and other employees should respond to inappropriate behavior in the workplace, offer Peer Support Programs, confidential teams, equal opportunity commissioners, professional standards persons, and social counselling. Support can also be found in colleagues and employee representatives.

Inappropriate behavior and a lack of respect for boundaries can lead to detrimental work performance. Pilots should expect to work in an environment that is free from violated boundaries. All MAs should have a code of conduct to address these violations and support those involved.

A positive atmosphere, open interaction, and a functional work community elevates the wellbeing of employees. It is important to be conscientious of the impact of one's words and actions. One should think twice before making a comment or a joke or saying something that could be crossing someone's boundary. It only takes a moment to reconsider an inappropriate comment or action. This supports a respectful and safe work environment.

## HOW TO RESPOND TO INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

If you become aware of an inappropriate behavior, you can offer a confidential conversation in which you suggest options to a person affected on how to proceed. This conversation should create a positive environment ("I am listening to you", "I am taking you seriously").

It should be clear that this conversation is not about an investigation into the matter but help for the person affected to find options. The person affected should also be the one deciding what course of action to take (the person affected may choose to do nothing). Further counseling may be necessary; contact with a specialist may be helpful. In the worst case, legal actions may be required.

If you are witnessing an inappropriate behavior, **SEE IT, NAME IT, STOP IT**. For example, if coworkers are making inappropriate comments about a new employee, inform them that this is harassment, and tell them to stop.

If you are witnessing a person engaging in **SEE IT, NAME IT, STOP IT** actions, be a supportive ally. This cooperative support is called **upstanding**. You don't have to be part of the initial conversation, but you can support a corrective action.

If these events occur on the flight deck, control room, or a crew room (i.e., behind closed doors), it becomes more difficult, as allies are unlikely to be around and there are safety situations where leaving is not always an option. Therefore, it is recommended to foster and develop a professional, appropriate, and respectful working environment.

Sometimes comments, “jokes”, or sensitive topics can be interpreted as rude or offensive. This has a negative impact and takes away a layer of safety from the working environment and has detrimental effect on work performance<sup>2</sup>.

#### NOTE

This publication constitutes a basic approach towards the many faces and forms of inappropriate behavior and should not be considered exhaustive.

Legislation and jurisdiction differ from country to country as might the wording, connotations, and definitions for certain legal terms. This basic concept should encourage MAs to develop and amend it further, taking into account local law, other applicable rules, or supporting mechanisms as appropriate for their respective country.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://grad.uw.edu/kimberly-perkins/>