

NO BOUNDARIES

The printed word is dead and everybody knows it. But that won't stop the bigwigs at Corporate from trying to salvage their investments and keep the shareholders from jumping ship. "We'll turn this thing around in twelve months!" they boasted in the latest earnings report.

It's all bullshit. The writing is on the wall, no pun intended.

We, the workers at Boundaries Books & Cafe, know we probably won't have jobs a year from now. For some of us that would be no big deal. For others it's the end of an era, a change nobody wanted and no one is ready for. How will each of us get through this last chaotic year at the bookstore?

SUPPLIES AND SETUP

You will need:

- × A stack of index cards
- × Pens or pencils
- × 3-5 players total

Everyone should sit at a table together. Put the cards and writing utensils within easy reach.

Review your group's safety mechanics for play. Make sure everyone understands and agrees to them. If your group doesn't have established safety rules, consider using John Stavropoulos's X-Card mechanic.

ABOUT THE BOOKSTORE

Review the following details about the bookstore, then discuss the question that follows:

Boundaries is a national book retailer with hundreds of stores across the country. Ours is medium-sized, with between twenty and thirty employees in all. Boundaries sells new books and magazines, as well as related items such as bookmarks, journals, and reading glasses. Each Boundaries location also has a cafe that sells coffee, pastries, and other food items.

- × **What's around our store? Are we isolated, part of a strip mall, in the heart of a city, or someplace else?**
-

EMPLOYEE CREATION

Each player has their own character that they alone will play. To create your character, take an index card and follow these steps:

STEP 1

What's your role at the store? Choose one of the following jobs, or make up your own. It should be a low-level position at the bookstore. Share your answer with the group and write it on your index card.

Entry-level jobs at Boundaries

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| × bookseller | × janitor |
| × cashier | × shelver |
| × customer service | × receiving clerk |
| × loss prevention | × [genre] specialist |
| × story-time reader | × sign spinner |
| × barista | × giftwrapper |

STEP 2

How do you feel about working at Boundaries? Share your answer with the group and write a note about it on your index card.

STEP 3

You would rather have a different job than the one you currently have. What's your dream job? Share your answer with the group and write a note about it on your index card.

STEP 4

Let's be honest here: we're all a little messed up, okay? Each of us has a character flaw that comes out in the workplace. What's yours? Choose one of these flaws for your character or make up your own. Share your answer with the group and write it on your index card.

Character flaws

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| × flirt | × drama queen |
| × prankster | × oversharer |
| × nitpicker | × chatterbox |
| × slacker | × blabbermouth |
| × brown-noser | × bitter veteran |
| × control freak | × one-upper |

If you chose the same character flaw as another player, discuss together how the two of you are different (for example, if you both chose *flirt*, maybe one of you is naturally charming but not actually flirting, while the other actively hits on everyone).

STEP 5

Give your character a name. Use a folded index card to make a name stand.

STEP 6

Describe your character's gender, age, and appearance to the group.

RELATIONSHIPS

Successful work relationships are based on setting appropriate boundaries. As long as lines are maintained, most of life's thorny situations can be easily avoided.

Unfortunately, we haven't done a good job in this department.

Each of us has a dysfunctional relationship with the characters on our left and right. These relationships exist because lines that should not have been crossed were, in fact, crossed.

GOING OVER THE LINE

You did something to or with the character to your left that you shouldn't have done. What was it? Choose one from this list or make your own. Write your crossed boundary on an index card and put it between you and the player to your left. Discuss the details together: What happened? When? How do you feel now? Make sure you and your fellow player are happy with your choice.

Crossed boundaries

- × We stole something valuable from work.
- × We hooked up once.
- × We got in a fistfight at work.
- × We did drugs together at work.
- × We are secretly dating.
- × I took credit for your successful idea at work.
- × I told a lie about you to everyone else at work.
- × I stole a friend or partner from you.
- × I sabotaged one of your projects at work.
- × I run a blog about you.
- × I lied to you about something important.
- × I blamed you for a mistake I made at work.
- × I ate your lunch out of the work fridge. More than once.

PROLOGUE

Read the following aloud:

It's January 1st. The store opens in an hour. All of us have just arrived and are waiting around for a manager to show up and unlock the door.

There've been ups and downs for Boundaries in the last few months, sure, but it seems like the ship is sailing in the right direction now. "All we need is patience and elbow grease and we'll get this company back on track," or a least that's what management tells us. Last night the thousand-dollar suits at Corporate went to a fancy gala to watch the ball drop. On the company's shrinking dime, no doubt.

And what about you? Where were you on New Year's Eve?

Together, describe your characters waiting outside the store and discussing what each of them did on New Year's Eve (last night). Where were they? Who were they with? How do they feel about the year ahead?

Once everyone has shared what they want to share, regular play begins.

ROLE-PLAY

Role-play proceeds in rounds. There are four rounds in the game (representing the four fiscal quarters of the year), and each round consists of one turn per player.

Follow these steps:

1. To start a round, pick a player to choose a quarterly event. A new player does this each round.
2. Pick a player to go first this round. That player chooses a scene type and frames a scene.
3. When the scene is over, move clockwise to the next player. That player frames another scene.
4. When all players have done a scene in the quarter, start a new round.
5. When all four rounds are complete, move to the epilogue.

QUARTERLY EVENTS

Every three months, those out-of-touch jack-offs at Corporate implement a change to try to save the company. Every single attempt is a disaster.

To begin a round, one player chooses an event from the list below or creates their own. A new player should choose each time. The player who chose the event should read the text aloud and answer the question or follow the instruction given.

EVENTS

Boundaries adds a new product to the store

Boundaries begins carrying a new line of items that may be innocuous but definitely don't belong in a bookstore. What is the new product? *Examples: cats, yarn, sex toys, VHS tapes, frozen meals*

Corporate implements new rules

Corporate's updated rules begin making everyone's lives hell. What draconian new policy or restriction do they implement?

Corporate cuts schedules and personnel

Twice the work for the same pay. Give each character a second job from the list in Employee Creation or make your own.

Corporate hosts a membership card contest

Corporate pits employees against one another to sell member cards for limited rewards. What is the big prize for the best seller? At the end of this quarter, decide which character won it.

Boundaries teams up with another company

Boundaries enters into a partnership with a well-known brand. This pairing is at best ill-advised and at worst downright horrifying. What company did Boundaries partner with? *Examples: Cheezos brand cheese puffs, Dr. Salt soda, Yipee.com search engine, Criekeo auto insurance*

Corporate promotes from within

In a move that many consider reckless, Corporate decides to promote randomly-selected employees within each store. Add "Assistant Manger" to your name stand. You are now the supervisor of the character to your right.

Corporate sends everyone on a team-building retreat

Each player frames a scene during the retreat that reveals their character's feelings about another character in some way. *These scenes replace normal play for this round.*

Boundaries gets a new image

In order to connect with the younger generation, Corporate rebrands to be more trendy and exciting. What clueless changes do they make? (Consider things like new uniforms, new job titles, new lingo, etc.)

ON YOUR TURN

On your turn, frame a scene that includes your character. You will frame only one scene per round. You can frame the same type of scene as another player if you wish.

FRAMING SCENES

Describe where the scene is happening, which character or characters are there, and what they're doing when the scene begins. Other players play their own characters if those characters are present, or volunteer to play non-player characters if needed.

SCENE TYPES

On your turn, choose one of the following scene types:

Relax in the employee lounge

In this type of scene, your character and one or more other player characters are taking a break in the employee lounge.

While in the employee lounge, characters may only gossip or complain.

Take a smoke break

In this type of scene, your character and one or more other player characters are outside having a smoke or vape.

While taking a smoke break, all characters must be completely honest about their thoughts and feelings.

Even if your character doesn't smoke, they can still take smoke breaks.

Help a coworker with a customer or task

In this type of scene, your character and one or more other player characters are helping a customer or helping each other with some task in the store.

While helping a coworker, emphasize your character's flaw.

ENDING A SCENE

Scenes end when any player feels it is a good time to end the scene. Say "scene" or "cut" to end the scene; people can add just a bit more if they have one last thing to say.

After your scene ends, your turn is over.

THE FOURTH QUARTER

After three quarterly events, read the following aloud:

Corporate swore up and down they'd get the money to revive the business, but as September opens, bankruptcy is nearly certain. The suits plan to try one last desperate gamble before the rising tide of red ink swallows us all.

Then continue play as normal, with one more quarterly event. After the last quarterly event, proceed to the Epilogue.

EPILOGUE

Read the following aloud:

By Thanksgiving everyone knows the score: Boundaries is closing, permanently. There's a rush on the stock and the company's market share plummets in a free fall. They're shuttering branches left and right, and two days before Christmas, our bonus arrives: We'll all be out of a job starting January 1st.

So... what are you doing for New Year's Eve?

Taking turns, share how your character spends New Year's Eve. Where are they? Who's with them? What are they doing?

Once each player has shared, the game is over.

CREDITS Game design by Marc Hobbs. I wrote this for Game Chef 2017 but forgot to submit it on time. Whoops. (Theme: *borders*; Elements: *yarn, smoke, cut, echo*)

Thank you to my playtesters: Caroline Hobbs, Christian Griffen, Julie Southworth, Orion Canning, Robert Bruce, Shuo Meng, and Twyla Campbell. Special thanks to all my former coworkers at B&N for your inspirational drama.