

Management Lessons from the Sith

Disclaimer: Recently, it has come to the Hobbit's attention that there are some constipated chaps out there who need more fibre in their diet. These are the same guys that have no sense of humour and can't take sarcasm, a satire or a joke. If any of these applies to you, please **DO NOT READ ON**. If you decide to read on, do so entirely at your own risk because the following article is made in jest and true to the spirit of pure satire. It means malice to no one and should you feel offended after reading, eat more fibre. Any semblance to any real persons, living, or dead is also purely coincidental.

"The Dark Side of the Force is the pathway to many abilities; some considered to be unnatural."

- Darth Sidious in "Star Wars Episode 3 – Revenge of the Sith"

Obviously, in this day and age of predatory office politics, being a goody-goody Jedi just doesn't quite cut it anymore. We need to learn from a more relevant role model – The Sith Order. This is for the Daft, I mean "Darth" in all of us.

1. Create two armies and let them fight it out. Either way, you win.

There is much to gain in a war when you are NOT in the war. The Sith* created both the Republican Clone Army** and the Droid Army of the Separatists***, and let the two of them fight it out. The Sith is the final winner in the end. Sounds familiar in healthcare? You bet! And some doctors actually thought they are the "Jedi"**** on the "right" side... ha ha...

* Sith – A group of Force practitioners devoted to the Dark Side of the Force, in contrast to the Jedi. They believed that true understanding in the Force laid in anger and power. The Sith Order's fundamental beliefs are stealth, subterfuge and cunning. Members of the Sith have names with the title "Darth".

** Republican Clone Army – The Galactic Republic did not have any army until the Separatists developed their Droid Army. This army of clones was grown by the Kaminoans from the genetic code of bounty hunter Janga Fett.

*** Separatists – Otherwise known as the Confederacy of Independent Systems, this collection of star systems are disenfranchised worlds of the Old Republic devoted to the cause of capitalism and trade. They have immense economic resources and funded the creation of the Droid Army. Led by Count Dooku to break away from the Republic, they were eventually made part of the Galactic Empire after their leaders were all killed by Darth Vader.

**** Jedi – "For over a thousand generations, the Jedi were the guardians of peace and justice in the Galaxy."

(Obi-wan Kenobi) The Jedi are selfless practitioners of the Force dedicated to good. They believe in passivity and contemplation as paths to true enlightenment in the Force. Ruled by a Jedi Council based on the Republic Capital Planet of Coruscant.

2. Power leads to understanding; not the other way around!

Not mentioned in the movies but in the "Star Wars Episode 3 – Revenge of the Sith" novel, the Jedi meditates a lot, believing greater understanding leads to more power. However, the Sith revels in power and its execution. They believe the practice of power will bring about understanding.

Some doctors think that you have to be of a certain age to achieve enough clinical gravitas before a doctor can attain a senior management position. On the other hand, a lay administrator could have achieved a senior position before 40 when the doctor is still a mere Associate Consultant. By the time the clinician gets around to start out in administration (usually in his late forties), the administrator might be looking at retirement in a few years and enjoying his pension. How to compete? Doctors study so much but did that make us more powerful, better at influencing healthcare beyond the level of the individual patient? Heck, you don't even have a say in how you reply to a complaint from a nasty unreasonable patient – you just apologise like you are told!

What does the Jedi call an apprentice? "Padawan"*. What did Sidious call Anakin once he became a Sith Apprentice? "Lord Vader" – which certainly looks a lot better on his CV than "Padawan Anakin". Similarly, "Assistant Director" sounds a lot better than "Medical Officer Trainee", yes? Give him the power and title first, and the understanding will follow. This is the Way of the Sith.

* Padawan – The title given to a Jedi Apprentice.

3. Recruit foreign talent if necessary – forget training.

Anakin Skywalker* first appeared as a kid in Episode 1. Already Yoda** thought he was too old to start training. But look at the Sith! They don't care! And they poach from the competitor if necessary. They recruited even a geriatric Jedi like Count Dooku (AKA Darth Tyranus)*** to join their side. Get 'em from anywhere and anytime, as long as they are useful to your purposes. Let someone else do the training and the Sith will just put the finishing touches. You think the Sith had BST and AST interviews, log books, HMDP fellowships, exit exams and compulsory CME? Fat lot of good all the tough recruitment and training policies did to the Jedi.

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* Anakin Skywalker AKA*** Darth Vader – A slave boy from the desert planet of Tatooine who was discovered by Qui Gon Jinn to be incredibly gifted with the Force. He was reputed to be the Chosen One who would bring balance to the Force. A hero during the Clone Wars, his fear of losing his loved ones, in particular his mother and his wife, led him eventually to turn to the Dark Side – and he became known as Darth Vader. He eventually killed all Jedi in the Jedi Temple, his wife and the Separatist leaders. Defeated and badly disfigured and injured by his former Jedi Master Obi-wan Kenobi, he was kept alive with mechanical breathing and artificial limbs. “More machine than man” was the description given by Obi-wan Kenobi. He is Number 2 in the Galactic Empire.

** Yoda – A small green sentient being of unknown origin and 800 years old. Leader of the Jedi and supremely strong in the Force. Unfortunately, he could not see the threat coming from the Sith and could not defeat Darth Sidious in battle. Eventually in self-exile in the swampy planet of Dagobah, he redeemed himself – in a way – when he trained Luke Skywalker who was instrumental in destroying the Emperor and the Galactic Empire.

*** Count Dooku AKA Darth Tyranus – A Master Jedi who once trained Qui Gon Jinn. He was dissatisfied with the Jedi Order and left it; only to resurface years later as the leader of the Separatists. He had by then turned to the Dark Side and took on the title of Darth Tyranus. A skilled lightsabre-welder, he was betrayed by his Master, Darth Sidious in Episode 3 in the latter's attempt to recruit Anakin Skywalker into the Sith Order.

**** AKA – Also known as.

4. Highlight the positives. Hide the negatives.

Appear positive and hide the negatives. Chancellor Palpatine (AKA Darth Sidious)* highlighted to people that he will satisfy their need for security, peace and justice, but he completely neglected to tell the same folks that they will lose their right to freedom and liberty.

Similarly, the clever administrator well-versed in Sith tactics will tell people that the new remuneration system will potentially give the clinician more money (on a good day), but will omit the fact that the same clinician will earn considerably less when he goes on leave or gets older and can't work at the same blistering pace.

Another example would be for a Sith administrator to tell the masses that healthcare will be affordable and accessible. The patient may not know that quality has gone down the tubes like Luke Skywalker down Bespin Cloud City** in “The Empire Strikes Back”. Anyway, would any layman really know the difference between a bare stent and a drug-eluting stent, or the chances of catching VRE in a single-bed A1 room versus a bed in a Class C ward?

* Chancellor Palpatine AKA Darth Sidious – Once a senator of the Old Republic representing the planet of Naboo, he rose to become Chancellor of the Galactic Republic. Revealed in Episode 3 to be a Sith Lord – Darth Sidious – he started the Clone Wars between the Separatists and the Republic in an attempt to destroy the Jedi. Once that was achieved, he changed the Republic into the Empire and proclaimed himself Emperor. The most powerful Sith Lord of all.

** Bespin Cloud City – A mining city in the clouds of the gas giant Bespin. This was where Han Solo was captured by Darth Vader and Boba Fett, and where Darth Vader uttered these famous words to Luke Skywalker, “No, I am your father” and “Join me in the Dark Side, Luke, it is the only way.”

5. Apply absolutes to others – if you are not for me, you are against me. But be grey on yourself.

The Sith manager will always tell the folks around him where the line in the sand is. That was what Anakin told Obi-wan* before they fought in the last scene of Episode 3 on the planet Mustafar**. This inculcates correct behaviour amongst the others so that they don't mess around with you.

On the other hand, bend the rules for oneself. Anakin bent the rules for himself when he killed Dooku but he later told Mace Windu it was wrong for the latter to try to kill Darth Sidious on the spot. There are OB markers for everyone except yourself. Double standards is the way of the Sith.

* Obi-wan Kenobi – A master Jedi who learnt his craft from Qui Gon Jinn. He was Jedi Master to Anakin Skywalker, the man who would eventually destroy the Jedi Order after he turned to the Dark Side.

** Mustafar – The fiery planet of molten lava where the Separatist leaders hid at the end of the Clone Wars. They were ultimately destroyed by Darth Vader, who was in turn defeated by Obi-wan Kenobi.

6. Carry a big stick.

This is an extension of Lesson 5 – if you carry a big stick (and I don't mean the red lightsabre, chum), show it! Ain't no good to you if you don't flaunt your assets once in a while. Governor Grand Moff Tarkin in Episode 4 (The original Star Wars – “A New Hope”) was spot-on when he blew up the planet of Alderaan for effect.

In management, it's useful to summarily execute a guy in public to drive the message of fear and compliance in the rank and file.

Lessons 5 and 6 are best summed up by the man himself, Darth Sidious, in Episode 3, “Every single Jedi is now an enemy of the Republic. Do what must be done. Do not hesitate, show no mercy.”

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7. Give a grand vision and create mystery.

People are generally gullible when it comes to grand plans – even a guy as clever as Anakin. Darth Sidious gave him the vision that the Dark Side of the Force will enable him and his wife, Padme Amidala*, to cheat death. This was untrue but hey, at the point in time, Anakin bought this grand and mysterious vision hook, line and sinker.

Also from Sidious, “Learn to know the dark side of the Force and you will achieve a power greater than any Jedi”. How alluring the prospect.

Compare this to the insipid Jedi Mace Windu**, “You may sit on the Council, but we do not grant you the rank of ‘Master’”; or Yoda to Luke Skywalker in “The Empire Strikes Back”, “Excitement, adventure, a Jedi craves not these”. Gee, what a wet blanket.

Similarly, come up with a grand vision-mission statement – complete with a fancy Powerpoint presentation and an American (real or fake – hence mysterious) accent – at yearly strategic planning retreats. And top management will often buy the well-packaged “koyok” being sold.

* Padme Amidala – Formerly a Queen of Naboo, now a Senator. Loyal to the cause of the Old Republic and secret wife of Anakin Skywalker. Eventually killed by her husband. Mother of Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia.

** Mace Windu – The co-leader of the Jedi and probably the best lightsabre-welder in the entire Star Wars saga. The only Jedi to have defeated Darth Sidious in battle. Unfortunately, not a very thinking guy – one wonders why he did not tell the off-Coruscant Jedi that Chancellor Palpatine was Darth Sidious before confronting him. That would have saved the entire Jedi Order from the deadly Order 66.

8. No need to roll up your sleeves and dirty your hands, hire folks to do the dirty work.

Look at the rebel alliance. They depend on like-minded people (those that can live on love and fresh air) to join their cause. They do everything themselves and their body count stacks up. Compare this to the Sith. Don’t expose yourselves to danger unless absolutely necessary. Count Dooku hired bounty hunter, Jango Fett* for the clone army, to try and kill Padme Amidala in Episode 2 “Attack of the Clones”. Later on, Darth Vader hired his son/clone Boba Fett* to capture Han Solo** in Episode 5 “The Empire Strikes Back”. Did anyone cry when the Fetts died? Look what happened to the Jedi when they personally led armies into battle all over the galaxy?

Similarly, administrators hire management consultants to do their bidding. If the consultants die, they die (yawn) but the administrator doesn’t take the hit. Life goes on, baby.

* Janga and Boba Fett – Janga Fett is a bounty hunter who will do anything for money. His “son” Boba Fett is actually an un-accelerated clone of himself. Janga Fett was chosen for his superior stock and has such quick reflexes he actually killed a Jedi in Episode 2. He was eventually beheaded by Master Jedi Mace Windu. Boba Fett also became a bounty hunter like his father and was responsible for capturing Han Solo in Episode 5. He was eventually swallowed by the dune monster Sarlacc in Tatooine.

** Han Solo – The swashbuckling smuggler and captain of the legendary ship, Millennium Falcon, hails from the system of Correl. He became a great general in the Rebel Alliance and married Princess Leia.

9. Outsource and profit-sharing.

Long, long ago before globalisation, call centres in India and sneaker sweat shops in China, there was outsourcing by the Sith. They outsourced cloning to the Kamino* System. They outsourced droid production to the Geonosis** System. And they didn’t even have to pay upfront except to the cloners in Kamino. They just promised profit-sharing with the Separatists! They even “outsourced” basic training in the Force to the Jedi – for Count Dooku and Anakin Skywalker. Talk about efficiency.

* Kamino – A low-key watery and stormy world beyond the Outer Rim of the Galaxy, they are the best cloners anywhere. Responsible for creating The Grand Army of the Republic, used during the Clone War.

** Geonosis – A ringed planet beyond the borders of the Galactic Republic. It is a harsh world of rocky mountains and deserts. The most advanced life form are the Geonosians, sentient insectoids that inhabit towering spire-hives. The Geonosians maintain large factories for the production of droids and weapons. In particular, they are responsible for the production of the Separatists’ Droid Army and the design of the infamous Death Star.

10. Push the guy off the cliff.

Want a person to be loyal to you? Push him past the point of no-return. After Anakin killed Mace Windu, there was no need to send him off to the Jedi Temple to kill the remaining Jedi and especially the kids. And certainly, there was no need to send Anakin to Mustafa to kill the defenseless Separatists; those holed up there could have been taken out by a bunch of clone troopers. The reason is simple – once Anakin killed Mace and the kids, he was totally isolated. There was no return ticket for him.

Beware the invitation to you to join some project re-engineering or improvement project or team. In all likelihood, your work will anger your fellow doctors and then you are truly isolated. Your allegiance then can only be to the guy who pushed you over the cliff in the first place.

That is why Darth Vader told Luke Skywalker in Episode 6 “Return of the Jedi”, “It is too late for me, son, I must obey my Master.”

11. Always have Plan B

Just when the Jedi killed Darth Maul*, Darth Sidious found Dooku, who was then replaced by Anakin. The guy, Sidious, always had a back-up plan. Even when it came to constructing anti-planetary weapons like Death Star**, the guy built TWO.

Likewise, the Jedi had Plan B should Luke Skywalker*** fail – “There is another” (Yoda) – his sister, Princess Leia****.

Look around you. Doesn't everything exist in duplicate at least? You are not indispensable. No one is.

* *Darth Maul - A hideous, horned Sith apprentice of Darth Sidious. He appeared in Episode 1. Adept at using a two-handed lightsabre, he was skilled enough to kill the Jedi Master Qui Gon Jinn, only to be killed by the latter's apprentice, Obi-wan Kenobi.*

** *Death Star – The Galactic Empire's ultimate weapon. The size of a small moon, it has more than half the combined firepower of the Imperial Starfleet and is designed to destroy whole planets.*

*** *Luke Skywalker – Son of Darth Vader and Padme Amidala, he was raised as a farm boy on Tatooine. Luke is the hero of Episodes 4 to 6. The last Jedi who finally brought Anakin Skywalker back from the Dark Side, who in turn destroyed the Emperor.*

**** *Princess Leia – Twin of Luke Skywalker and raised as royalty – adopted daughter of Senator Organa and Queen of Alderaan. One of the leaders of the Rebel Alliance.*

12. Think of yourself first, then others.

Anakin said that the Jedi were selfless whereas the Sith

thought about themselves first. We always say “patients first”. But in management, the manager is taught to think “me first”. What are my career prospects? What is my CEP? Do I need a career coach? How do I enhance my CV and market value? What is my exit strategy?

13. Look cool. Sound cool. Be cool.

Let's face it: does a guy look cool in beige tunic and brown cloak, or in all black? Red lightsabre or blue lightsabre? (Mace Windu's purple is quite cool, but that's an exception.) Even the title matters – “Dark Lord of the Sith” versus “Jedi Master”. “Dark Lord of the Sith” certainly looks and sounds better. Similarly, “Clinical Head” or “Chairman of Division” just doesn't quite have the oomph or “sound-bite impact” of “CFO”, “COO” or “CEO”, yes?

14. When you finally get to the top...

This is the final lesson. After you get to the top and get to run your empire, don't forget those who helped and supported you. Remove all of them – the Separatists, the Senate, even the Clone Army, including your own apprentice, if necessary. Keep from the past only what you truly need and is of no threat to you. For example, keep a guy who still knows the Force, has no friends to go to, needs a ventilator to breathe and can't ever repel your Sith lightning because his natural hands and legs have all been chopped off. Another hypothetical example – get your new apprentice to run against your old apprentices in an election. Gather all your lackeys to come and vote for the new apprentice.

You are now secure, Dark Lord of the Sith...