

LEADERSHIP

The Force Has Clearly Awakened: What Has Star Wars Taught Us About Leadership And Management?

By Tom Phillips, Managing Director, TLP who has enjoyed 20 years of working with both the private and public sector, during which time he has gained extensive experience and demonstrated considerable success in management, sales, marketing and training. Tom is an excellent communicator and motivator and has designed/delivered training at all levels from trainees to directors at both a national and international level. Such is Tom's love of training and development that, in his personal life, he is also a qualified fitness and diving instructor.



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In December 2015, it was almost impossible to avoid the thundering juggernaut of movie history that is Star Wars, episode VII: The Force Awakens. It was one of the most anticipated movie events in cinematic history and has smashed all previous box office records set by the likes of Titanic and Avatar.

Personally, I am a huge Star Wars fan - I was practically weaned on the adventures of Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, Han Solo et al! As a 7 year old I queued excitedly at the Odeon in Liverpool and was 'blown away' by the movie experience that followed. By the time this article goes to print, I will have no doubt seen all seven films numerous times.

The events that took place long ago in that galaxy far away can have a lot of relevance to leaders and managers in the NHS. Here are just a few of the key learning points that stand out for me.

Everyone needs a coach/mentor

A strong theme running through all of the Star Wars movies is the relationship between a wiser, older coach/mentor and their younger, less experienced trainee or learner. Luke and Anakin Skywalker have Obi Wan Kenobi. When Anakin turns to The Dark Side, he comes under the tutelage of the Emperor. In the Force Awakens, Kylo Ren has Supreme Leader Snoke and it looks like Rey is about to be taken under the wing of Luke Skywalker. A good coach/mentor will challenge you whilst still leaving you feeling supported. They will encourage you to find your own answers and ultimately help you to fulfill your potential.

Learn from your mistakes and don't keep repeating them!

In the new film, the evil Empire of the old films has become the First Order. Despite the new name and some natty looking

upgrades to their Stormtroopers' uniforms, they are just as guilty as their predecessors of making the same school boy errors! In the original Star Wars, the Empire's ultimate battle station, the Death Star, has one fatal flaw. An exhaust tube that is just big enough to fire a torpedo into, thus bringing about its untimely destruction! Oops! In Revenge of the Sith, there's a newer, bigger Death Star - and guess what! Yep, it has a fatal flaw. Only this time the Rebel Alliance is able to fly an entire ship into the Death Star's superstructure, fire a few well-aimed lasers, blow up the new improved Death Star and get home in time for tea! I mean seriously! You would think the designers would have learned from their previous mistakes. In The Force Awakens, the First Order has converted an entire planet into a floating battle station that will rule the universe (queue maniacal laughter)! Surely they will have safeguarded against a band of motivated rebels, entering said battle station via what is basically another exhaust port, placing bombs and oh well, if you are one of the two people on the planet who haven't seen the new movie by the time this goes to print, I won't spoil it for you.

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Great leaders aren't averse to making mistakes, but they do learn from them and they certainly don't repeat them.

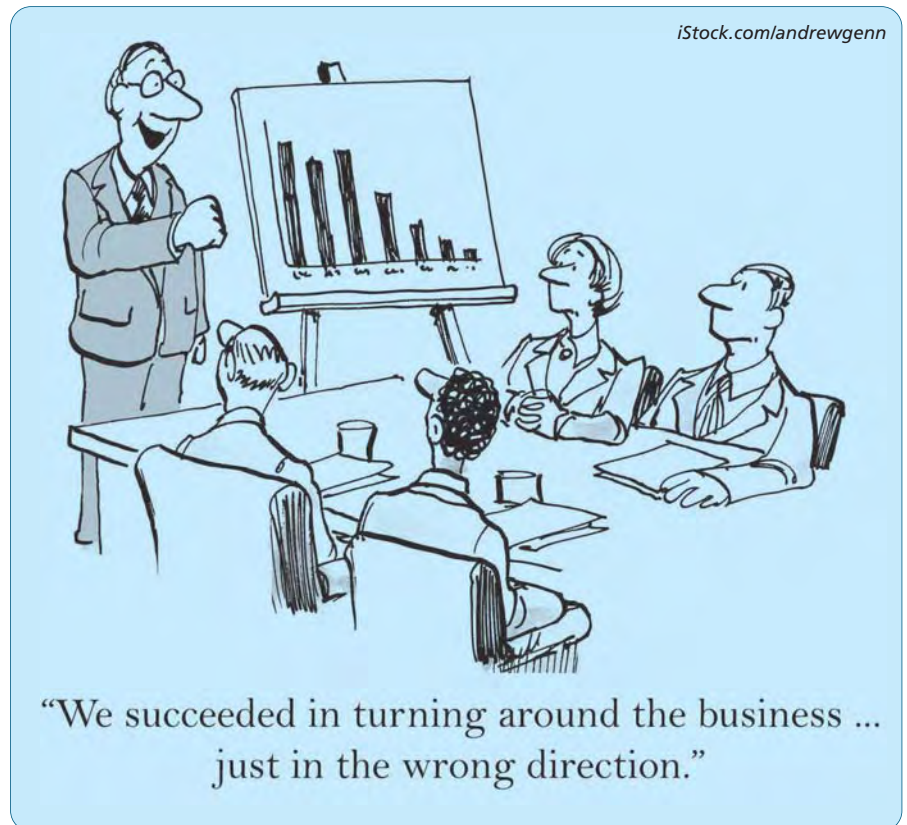
Control your emotions

If there's one thing we learn from the Jedi, it's that controlling your emotions is definitely a good thing. The Dark Side of the Force preys on negative emotions and consumes those that display them. Great leaders suffer negative emotions, but they don't wallow in them. Whenever you find yourself feeling sorry for yourself, feeling angry or frustratedSTOP:

- S:** Stop wallowing in the negative emotion.
- T:** Think about what has caused these feelings.
- O:** Options. What can you do to remove or reduce the cause of the emotions?
- P:** Plan. What will you do next time the causative event (or person) happens? Think about learning from your mistakes (see above). Don't repeat your mistakes. What options have you got that will allow you to act and feel differently the next time? One of the options may be to talk things through with your coach/mentor.

Leaders take risks, but don't gamble

I have this discussion many times during the various leadership and management programmes that I run. That discussion focuses on the difference between taking a risk and gambling. For me gambling means that you know there may be negative consequences to your actions



but you can't control them. Taking a risk means that you take every precaution to eliminate the negative outcomes and also put into place contingencies that minimise the impact of any negative outcomes, should they arise.

Obi Wan Kenobi takes a massive gamble that Anakin Skywalker is ready to become a Jedi. It's a gamble that goes horribly wrong and thus Darth Vader is born.

George Lucas took a massive risk in making Star Wars. Science fiction films weren't exactly in vogue in the 70s and, despite the film's title, the only recognisable stars involved were two ageing British actors in the form of Sir Alec Guinness and Peter Cushing. Neither of these were very well known outside of the UK and certainly wouldn't guarantee the worldwide audience that Lucas hoped for. Lucas took a risk that an old

fashioned tale of good versus evil would resonate with a worldwide audience and that solid, albeit relatively unknown, actors would create characters that audiences everywhere would warm too. In a final stroke of genius that was also a massive risk, Lucas negotiated a distribution deal for the film that saw him keeping all of the merchandising rights to the movie and its subsequent sequels. He is a very wealthy man as a result!

Remember . . .

. . . the force will be with you, always!

Declaration of interests

- Tom Phillips discloses payment for writing the article and professional fees from Pharmacy Management outside the submitted work.

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