Star Wars Lessons HR Can Use – Especially During COVID-19

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"A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away..." If you know this opening line, you instantly recognize it's from Star Wars. This famous little phrase seems very relevant to the current state of things because it does seem like it was a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away that we were all in our regular work environments. In celebration of May 4 th and Star Wars Day, we've highlighted some valuable, applicable insights from the series that directly relate to the workplace and the world of HR, especially so now more than ever.

Strengthening Your Assets

As the world continues to adjust and plan ahead due to COVID-19, it's becoming even more apparent that the world and workplace as we know it will no longer be the same. This pandemic has become an accelerator for probably one of the greatest workplace revolutions of our lifetime, as touched upon in our article A Ride through the History of the American Workforce. This transformation will have a

major impact on many domains, such as the ways we learn and how and where we work, and this leads to the question: how can HR adapt their workforce? As we seek answers, let's look at what Star Wars can teach us.

Mentorship and Employee Development

"Pass on what you have learned." – Yoda, Return of the Jedi Throughout the Star Wars franchise, you can see how important training, development, and mentorship in the Jedi Order is. A great example of this is demonstrated by the well-known character Obi-Wan Kenobi, first seen as a Padawan apprentice to Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn in *Episode I* . At the end of this film, he is promoted to Jedi Knight and is shown taking on apprentices of his own, eventually becoming a Jedi Master himself. During uncertain times like these, mentors play a critical role and should support, care, and listen to what their workers need. Just because many aspects of our daily lives have changed doesn't mean your organization should stop mentoring and developing its biggest asset – employees. Instead, continue enabling them and delivering value-creating efforts. The market research company Ipsos- found in 2017 that 31% of all adult employees did not receive training in any formal manner, with a rate of 25% for full-time workers. A Central Michigan University article also reinforces these Jedi practices, explaining that "as training continues to change and adapt to new demands by the workforce, personalized and learner-centric training is becoming more and more prevalent. Gone are the days when individuals were presented with wave after wave of materials and information and expected to learn it using a 'one-size-fits-all' method." Training is a valuable investment in your workers a nd organization, and you can create training programs that can now be easily implemented virtually. A nd, just like the Jedi's training system, it's good to emphasize practical, personalized, and relevant i nstructions.

Teamwork

"Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope." – Princess Leia, A New Hope Whether you've seen every Star Wars film or just one, you've probably noticed that every win against the dark side was achieved by a team. Teamwork allows for the allocation of all efforts into a single cause. Projects and goals that might be impossible for an individual can frequently be attained by teams, as long as the whole team is committed to accomplishing the shared goal. Teamwork is essential but more so now during this pandemic. You can produce greater results when working as a team, even if most or all members are working remotely. Not only that, but teamwork fosters greater creativity, innovation, and problem solving, and it is true what they say: two (or more) heads are better than one. If your organization is mostly or entirely working from home, consider virtual team meetings, brainstorming sessions, and casual get-togethers (lunch and happy hours, for example) if you haven't done so already. And don't forget – just as the Star Wars protagonists often relied on tools to accomplish their objectives, like starships, lightsabers, and comlinks, tools like Microsoft Teams, Slack, Zoom, and even Animal Crossing (well, probably not the last one, but you get the point) can greatly enhance teamwork and collaboration in the workplace from anywhere – the office, your home, or the desserts of Tatooine.

Invest in Technology

The Star Wars universe has many futuristic gadgets, like droids, bionics, and holograms, all of which play a crucial role in helping the Rebels communicate and succeed in taking down the Empire. Just like our galactic heroes, you need technology to be able to communicate and manage your workforce, although unfortunately not by hologram. Luckily, modern technology has made remote communication and management easier than ever.

Communication

Even though intergalactic teleconferencing is still beyond our reach, we have email, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom, Slack, GoToMeeting, and many others. The point is to keep your teams engaged, in the know, and productive. As cliché as it may sound, communication really is the key, especially with initially transitioning your workforce to working from home, managing them remotely, and successfully transitioning them back to the office when this is finally over. Having the adequate technology will help you keep your workforce informed about important decisions and clearly communicate expectations.

Management and Accessibility

When working remotely, you have to be able to manage your workforce, including tracking hours worked for payroll and managing employees' time off and sick leaves, and you need the help of technology to do that. Even though your employees won't be able to visit Naboo or Bespin any time soon with the social distancing rules in place, they still have to be able to access their time off balances and request time off; in order to do that, they need a program like Employee Self Service (ESS). ESS is an online portal that allows your employees to request time off and view things like remaining PTO hours, pay stubs, tax information, team information, and pretty much all the important bits of info regarding their employment. ESS is a bonus feature of your payroll and HCM system. As the Society for Human Resource Management puts it, ESS "consolidates information into one user-friendly gateway that creates efficiencies and helps quickly align employees with organizational objectives." As you start planning for the future, you can take inspiration from these Star Wars lessons to help ensure your organization runs smoothly while maintaining an engaged and motivated workforce. To learn more about what HR can take from Star Wars, read The Ultimate Star Wars Inspired Trilogy for HR and the Workplace, and May the Fourth be with you!

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