

- Step 3b: What If There Are “Issues” (Mid-to-Late March)

I was extraordinarily lucky with the Apotheosis raiders in that we didn't have twelve people who wanted to be monks, nor did we have six people want to join our existing healer group or whatever. Things remained fairly balanced! This does not always happen. In fact, in an expansion with a new class, it will rarely happen.

Prior to Cataclysm, I didn't have too much concern about overlap because I was recruiting everyone personally and I knew we already had a couple of tanks, a few decent healers, some great DPS and such. I knew I needed a balanced bunch of new people and I knew that I was going to over-recruit. After the fiasco that was my utter *lack* of preparation for Wrath of the Lich King, there was no way I was going to be caught off-guard at the start of Cataclysm. I aggressively recruited a lot of people, took some chances with various folks and made sure my rear was covered if those people didn't work out.

By contrast, Mists of Pandaria recruitment and roster organization could *easily* have been a complete nightmare if things hadn't worked out nicely in terms of balance.

So, because this is supposed to be a fairly comprehensive guide, here's what you can do if your roster is completely *unbalanced*.

- 1) Start Negotiating.** You may be the leader of the guild, but everyone pays their own \$15 a month and you can't tell someone they can't play the class they want, not at the start of a new expansion. If you try, you will probably lose them to another guild. Period.

Say that you have five people who are interested in re-rolling DPS Monks. Chances are, your roster cannot handle five DPS Monks.

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Maybe your roster can handle three. Here's a hypothetical situation for you with all five of these people wanting to be a Windwalker (DPS) Monk.

Person 1: Hunter

Person 2: Shadow Priest

Person 3: Rogue

Person 4: Resto Shaman

Person 5: Protection Warrior

Now (and here's the important part) assuming all skill is equal between the five individuals, I would be inclined to ask for two volunteers to either stick with their current spec (based on balance, of course) or pick a different DPS class (assuming you can handle more DPS). Maybe you'll luck out and get two people who will happily stick with what they're doing or something other than a Windwalker Monk.

If no one volunteers, I would be inclined to ask the resto shaman and prot warrior how badly they want to be monks and if they would consider, for the raid's balance, doing something else. Why? Again, assuming all skill is equal between these people, the hunter, shadow priest and rogue have been main spec DPS for you for X number of months or years. They KNOW (probably...) how to kill things as a DPS. They have the experience. If you had five people wanting to be Mistweaver (healing) Monks, I would want to favour the resto shaman. If you have five people wanting to be Brewmaster (tank) Monks, I would want to favour the prot warrior.

In short, if you're having roster conflicts, assuming skill is equal, I would tend to *favour those with good experience* in that role already.

Of course, skill probably will *not* be equal amongst all of these players, so I would approach your "less-skilled" players and ask them about the possibility of playing something else. If that doesn't work, perhaps you'll want to examine a priority system based on who's been there the longest or some other distinguishing factor.

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No matter what you do (or what you don't do), it could get ugly. There's no getting around that.

If it looks as though people are going to get upset, there's another solution for you, but it really only delays the messiness of it all until Later™. Let's look at that option, though, shall we?

2) Trial Them All. If no one gives, then, short of cutting people loose, you have one feasible option and that is to flat-out tell them that you have room for three DPS monks (for example) and that if none of them are willing to stick with their current role, or another viable role, you'll trial them *all* and the two who don't do as well as the other three just won't get a raid spot.

This is messy for about seventeen separate reasons, but it might work to your benefit. People might not feel as competent or as confident in their skills when compared to their fellow guild members and, when viewed as competing for the spot with other players, they may back down and solve your problem for you. Similarly, they may leave for another guild, which is unfortunate but still sort of ends up solving your problem.

Don't count on that, though. You have to be ready to follow through with your solution! There is a way to sort of soften that blow for those who don't make it, but we'll get to that in just a second.

During this whole situation, by the way, you'll certainly want to talk to your officers about what to do. If you come up with better ideas than what I've suggested (or what I'm about to suggest), fantastic! Still, if you're stuck, here's what I would write to five people who would all be competing for the same three spots.

Hey there, folks! I'm just writing to you today to talk to you about your chosen classes and specs for the upcoming expansion. I've already made this information public, so I'm sure you're all aware that all five (!) of you are anxious to get started as Windwalker Monks.

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Unfortunately, after discussing things with the other officers, we've decided that due to our potential raid roster in Mists of Pandaria, we only have room for *three* Windwalkers.

I've spoken to a couple of you in an attempt to see if you'd be interested in something else, but it appears that you're all firm in your desire to be Windwalkers. So here's what we're going to do: you'll *all* be placed in a trial period at the start of the expansion and, quite simply, only three of you will get the raid spot.

However, because we do value all of you as long-time members of the guild in good standing, for those of you who do not pass your Windwalker trial, you'll be given the option to return to the raid group as your *current* class and spec or another class and spec you might enjoy that we might still have room for. Of course, that character will need to catch up to your Windwalker and meet our raiding requirements for entry-level raids in the early expansion. You'd have three weeks to get yourselves to 90 on the other character and to meet those gear requirements and such.

So if you're up for it, we'll accommodate your desires and trial *all* of you at once. If this changes your mind about anything, please do let me know as soon as possible so we can get going on expansion recruitment.

Again, we do value all five of you and while we respect your personal desires to play a different character, we do need to keep the guild's roster reasonably balanced to give us the best chances of success. I sincerely hope we'll all find some common ground regarding what you want to play versus what the guild can accommodate. :)

Sincerely,

Kurn :)

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Now, with any luck, you'll end up with a volunteer or two. Perhaps you'll lose someone to another guild. Or maybe you'll have to trial them all. There's really no way of knowing what will happen until it does. Thankfully, you can be prepared for most of those eventualities.

Again, though, I must stress that this is a last resort and a tricky maneuver that may not work out in your favour! Make sure your officers are on board with this before you try it and be prepared to lose people. Still, it's better to lose them sooner than later, so you can get cracking on recruiting to replace them.

As an aside, yes, sometimes you do have to treat people as just a number, as just a class, as just a set of buffs, but while you're doing it, try to remind them that you know they're human. Let them know that you're *also* human and that you hope they can understand the difficult position that has led to this kind of a decision. Remember that even if you're treating someone as just a number, there's no reason you have to do it to their face, without even some human compassion and understanding. There's no excuse for the lack of a *personal* discussion about such tough choices.

That doesn't mean it might not get ugly, mind you. Be prepared for some backlash and some anger and try to handle it maturely and with understanding. That's probably the best advice I can give you.

- Step 4: What You Need & Integration (Mid-April through Launch)

That's right, folks, the only way to get what you need is to... go recruiting! Yes, I can hear the chorus of sighs, whines and groans already. Please do refer to **Module 2: How to Recruit** for a variety of potential tactics on *how* to recruit those needed individuals,

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because my focus here will be more on the timeline and ways to integrate people into your raid group.

We wanted to be recruiting for Mists of Pandaria no later than July 30th, 2012. The equivalent date for the upcoming expansion is **April 15th, 2014** or so. This is just about eight weeks before the new expansion should launch, according to our assumed launch date of June 10th.

Here's what Apotheosis was looking for as of July 30th, 2012:

- + 1 elemental shaman
- + 1 rogue
- + 2 DPS monks
- + 2 balance druids
- + 1 warlock
- + 1 shadow priest
- + 1-2 hunters

That would have brought us up to 26 DPS or 36 people total, if we had found all of those individuals. But before we went out in search of these people, we wondered how on earth we could find quality raiders who planned to be monks (or another class) in Mists of Pandaria. No parses on a monk, no real experience except maybe on beta for that particular class possibility... How to tackle this?

Well, if they were currently raiding, we wanted to see parses of them on their current character. Even if the parses didn't mean a lot in terms of ability use, you can still see if someone tends to use their cooldowns or if they tend to stand in fire. Even a Looking for Raid parse will get you a lot of good info that can be used to form an opinion of someone.

Do you let them raid on that character with you, though? Well, not unless they're appropriately geared for the content you're in, to be honest. You don't want to carry someone through content, generally, particularly not on a character they won't even initially be levelling in the expansion. Why not? Well, primarily because your core group probably has earned the rewards instead of this new

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person. You don't want to start the new person off on the wrong foot with the rest of the guild by insisting that 24 (or 9) other people carry the new person through the instance. No, it's best to let a new player who isn't geared just wait for their official trial to start with the new expansion. If they can't keep up with the rest of the group at that time, their trial will end, it's just that simple. Feel free to have them join the guild, too, allowing you and them to get to know each other. Alternatively, have them roll their new character at launch and get guilded then. (We set a strict limit of within one week of launch to be transferred over as we valued the levelling and gearing experience as bonding time.)

So what you want to do while recruiting for an expansion is to be very clear that you're accepting applicants *for* the new expansion *or* for the current one (and moving into the next one), based on needs you'll have in the expansion.

This is also where your beta guild can come in handy!

Prior to Cataclysm, in the Cataclysm beta, I had an Apotheosis guild set up and had a bunch of people on beta invited to it. I had old Burning-Crusade-era Apotheosis members in there, Wrath of the Lich King era Choice members, my real-life friend the resto druid, plus numerous people who knew of me from my blog. We used it to see how people might get along, plus doing instances with people could give you a really good idea of how decent a player they are. We had a Mists of Pandaria beta guild, too, but didn't make as much use of it for guild-planning purposes as we did in Cataclysm, but we were, you know, completely reorganizing the live guild, so I think we can be forgiven!

Still, I urge you to take the opportunity to bring people onboard in beta to get a good look at them, in terms of personality, in terms of playstyle, in terms of ability and comfort with the class.

If someone *isn't* switching to a class that's unavailable prior to the expansion's launch, but *is* switching to a new role or class prior to the expansion, there is a great time to test people out in this class

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before the expansion drops and that is when the pre-expansion patch drops.

Typically, about a month or so before a new expansion is launched, all the major changes (barring new content, quests, the ability to level up and the like) are implemented into the game. For example, Deathwing's destruction of Azeroth hit in the 4.0 patch about a month before Cataclysm actually came out. As another example, the new talent system (with talents at levels 15, 30, 45, 60, 75 and 90) came out with the 5.0 patch, about a month before Mists of Pandaria actually came out.

If someone is swapping to a class and spec that is available prior to the expansion (and they're relatively geared for your current content), this is an *excellent* time to start their trials, assuming your current roster can sustain the change. Actually, to be fair, particularly if you intend to take a break from content between the end of one expansion and the start of another, a couple of weeks *before* that patch would be ideal.

In terms of our timeline, assuming June 10th, 2014 is the launch date, we can assume that patch 6.0 will drop around May 6th or May 13th, so to give someone a decent trial (in Apotheosis, that was ~3-4 weeks of raiding), you might want to ask them if they want to officially switch EARLIER than the expansion's launch, perhaps as early as **April 29th**.

I recommend this because Apotheosis absolutely, 100% dropped the ball on this with two individuals at the end of Cataclysm. One of our raiders, who was playing a discipline priest, was going to switch to her druid tank. Why on earth didn't we have her start playing her druid in early August or late July? Same with a shadow priest of ours who was going to go holy in the expansion. Why not let them start their trials early? Quite frankly, we just didn't think that far ahead. That said, in our defense, Blizzard is *ridiculously* secretive about launch dates. You will not get a lot of warning for patches or expansions. You can expect about a one week warning (or, if they're feeling generous, a two-week warning!) for a major patch and not

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much more than a month before the launch of the expansion. As such, it can be very difficult to plan appropriately. That's why I'm including this schedule, which I will edit as dates become apparent and allow for free download from my website. Note that the free version will only have the header titles: Step 1, Step 2 and the like. It won't have the content or precise directions for each step!

I digress. The major point is that if anyone in your guild wants to swap to a new character for the next expansion, so long as it's appropriately geared and, obviously, already available in-game, you want to see if they'd like to start a new trial probably no later than **April 29th, 2014!** This should ensure them a full trial before you stop doing stuff prior to the new expansion, with the bonus that it should allow them a good amount of time to play with their new abilities and the like when the 6.0 patch comes out.

Trialing New Members vs. Old Members

I feel it's important enough for me to mention here that new members and old members should be treated exactly the same through a new "trial" period during the start of a new expansion. As in, I think you should take your raiders and re-trial them.

Why?

There are *so many* reasons why, but, for simplicity's sake, we'll stick to just three of them.

- 1) Not letting your raiders get too cocky.** While everyone wants raiders who are more confident than unsure of themselves, people tend to slack off when they think no one's watching them. Make sure your entire team knows you're watching. This should allow you to see the best performances from everyone.
- 2) Allowing newer people to gel with the older people.** You may not think this is too important, but especially in already-established guilds, cliques (see **Module 4: Community Management!**) can make newer members feel unwelcome or at

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least uncomfortable. Put yourself in a new applicant's shoes: would you be comfortable asking people to group with you? Would you be comfortable asking questions? What if you were all on the same footing, so to speak? If you're ALL Initiates, or whatever you call them, it at least gives the impression that you're all viewed equally by the guild's leadership and may help the more nervous Initiates gain more confidence. It may also help underline to your previous raiders that their new raid companions are, in fact, *equals*, at least for the time being. It can certainly help to accelerate the process of having team spirit and working together as a team.

3) Loot disparity. If those more nebulous reasons don't resonate with you, then there's the practical side of things to consider. If you don't demote everyone to a trial rank and your loot policy has some kind of priority system for raiders, as many guilds do, then all your older raiders will be geared right when you need to evaluate your Initiates! The way I explained it to the Apotheosis officers as we discussed it for our own group was like this: *Essentially, by not demoting people, we are putting the people we most need to evaluate (the newer people and people changing specs/roles) at the biggest disadvantage, not to mention actively harming our roster by only having one tank having priority on loot. If we demote everyone, it's an even playing ground and EPGP priority will assert itself quickly after the first week, allowing gear to be spread out more over the entire raid group, which can only be helpful to overall progression.*

It wasn't until I brought up the loot disparity issue that people really understood there was a good reason to do it. That single point, though, convinced everyone it was a good idea and the raiding team then benefited from the other points as well.