

- **Whining and Complaining vs. Disagreeing**

Despite touching on certain related topics in this section, I haven't exactly addressed whining and complaining *specifically*. I actually wondered if I needed to, but since this issue is something that contributes *a lot* to leadership fatigue, I thought I should write a little something about it. Or, well, a big something...

Generally speaking, people who are raiding in *World of Warcraft* are old enough to behave like adults. I'm sure there are exceptions (we once recruited a 13-year-old tank and he was awesome!), but by and large, most people raiding either *are* actually over the age of 18 or are close enough to know what acting like an adult is like.

Surprisingly (or perhaps not surprisingly), many people seem to be completely unable to act in an adult manner. That's to say, a lot of people don't seem to be able to act mature and reasonable in a variety of situations.

As with all forms of communication, a lot of your message comes from *how* it's said. It's perfectly okay to disagree within a guild atmosphere. I encourage guild masters to recruit officers who *do* tend to disagree with them! But disagreement in the wrong setting, said in the wrong way, becomes *complaining*.

Complaining, particularly when paired with its buddy "whining", is difficult for many guild leaders to tolerate and it's got very little to do with the actual disagreement. It's draining to constantly field questions at an inappropriate time. It's tiring to respond politely to someone who is yelling at you. In every interaction with the guild members, good officers try to put aside their own frustrations to try to deal with the guild member's frustrations, but it's really, really difficult to do it if the guild member is yelling or throwing out profanities or overreacting or whatever, really.

As such, when you disagree with your leadership – as you ought to do when appropriate – try to be calm about things.

The Great Apotheosis EPGP Reset Fiasco

There is a huge difference between sending a note like the ones I've sent to various guild leaders over the years and just flat-out whining or complaining. As to those issues, I feel that an example might come in handy. Back in August of 2011, as Apotheosis was clearing through normal Firelands, we realized there was a problem with our loot system (the EPGP system) in that those that hoarded their points essentially broke the system for everyone else. EPGP is based on people spending freely for upgrades. Certain individuals in the guild

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would hold on to their priority and not bid on things that were upgrades in the hopes of getting a *different* upgrade. For example, someone wouldn't bid on a perfectly good ring (that they wanted... eventually) in the hopes of being able to get a trinket or a tier piece. While, by and large, this may be seen as "planning", if your group isn't even *killing* the boss who drops the trinket or the tier piece, why on earth aren't you bidding on the ring?

The officers discussed it and decided that we would wipe EGP values once we downed Ragnaros on normal, thus clearing all that priority for the heroic half of the tier. The guild pretty much, well, exploded at us over this decision. It was a good thing we'd given a couple of weeks' notice before implementing things, because it gave us time to adjust our approach to the problem.

Here's an example of some of the whining and complaining that we saw.

I think you fix (the problem of hoarding) by talking to the people in question and strongly encouraging them to act differently. You don't fix that by screwing over everyone else. That's like taking a sledgehammer to the situation. Smart raiders plan what loot they want and they prioritize their use of points. Not all upgrades are created equal from a dps perspective (for example a new hat for me is 700 dps while a pair of gloves is only 150ish).

None of this loot is being disenchanting and so it is going to use by someone. It is thus continuing to benefit the group as a whole. If it were being disenchanting then that would also be a different story. [It] doesn't seem to justify massive changes. Again, the way to deal with that is by dealing with those people, not upsetting the apple cart in an entirely arbitrary way that disturbs the settled expectations of the whole group. Changing the rules in the middle of the game, so to speak, creates all sorts of bad incentives.

I have no objection to future changes, such as faster decay that do not completely wash away the status of the current tier.

What makes this a whiny complaint instead of a message expressing disagreement? This individual did have some interesting points, such as the fact that not all upgrades are equal (although they failed to acknowledge that not all costs for gear are equal). However, the fact is that this person accused the leadership as a whole of screwing over the guild members. "screwing over everyone else", "sledgehammer to the situation" and "upsetting the apple cart

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in an entirely arbitrary way”, plus “creates all sorts of bad incentives”, are all inflammatory, even threatening! Sure, this person is indicating that he or she doesn't like the idea, but the manner in which it was said lends itself to being interpreted as “the leadership of the guild is out to get us”. And while this individual did offer a solution (faster decay, which is actually what we ended up doing, based on other factors), it was phrased in a way that implied that the leadership was not just wrong to try to fix the problem in this fashion (that's valid), but that the leadership was doing so without justifiable cause.

“Wash[ing] away the status of the current tier” is perhaps a reasonable description, since we were wiping EPGP values, but we felt that this phrase, combined with the other inflammatory comments, indicated that this person felt we were deliberately undermining the efforts of the guild throughout Firelands so far. Maybe we were stretching, but previous messages from this individual would have left most people feeling like that was their intention...

Not whiny enough? Okay, that's fair, since readers might not have the necessary context to interpret it the way we did. How about this?

I'll tell you what Kurn, I think this is a terrible decision on the part of the officers. You've established a set of rules and now arbitrarily changing the rules at a moment's notice. It's obvious who is going to be hurt by this decision, cloth DPS (Mages, Warlocks, and Shadow Priests) and who is going to benefit ([Tank Officer], [Holy Paladin], yourself, [Disc Priest], [Holy Priest], [Resto Druid]). I know your level of integrity and I trust you, but it looks downright awful.

Messing with the loot system is a mistake and one I think you'll come to regret. I wouldn't be surprised to see a strong backlash from this even to the point of losing people. It's not a matter of "My loot is more important than the guild" or some such selfish nonsense. It's a matter of trust. The Officers established how things will work and then decided with absolutely no input from those affected that you're going to change the rules midstream (9 of the top 10 Priority are not Officers, talk about disproportionate impact). Any other rules the Officers are planning on setting aside or changing in the near future? How could anyone trust that won't happen?

It sounds like this is being done for "fairness", but there doesn't seem to be much fair about it.

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Okay, here we see that this individual is pretty ticked off. “Terrible decision” is an emotional response versus “potentially unwise” as a different way of phrasing it, for example. “arbitrarily changing the rules” is another one – and was echoed by the other individual whose response I just went through. In neither of these responses did the people writing to me see the bigger picture. That’s okay, I guess, and perhaps I wasn’t 100% clear in my guild-wide explanation of the bigger picture, but the fact remains that the officers didn’t “arbitrarily” do anything. We didn’t do it on a whim. There was a lot of discussion involved in how we saw the loot system was breaking down and what we wanted to do about it, and I’m pretty sure I was clear about the amount of discussion that went into the decision.

“I think you’ll come to regret”, “strong backlash”, “losing people”... threatening phrases, all of them! Essentially, this individual was saying “Bad idea, you go ahead with this and I’m out and others will probably leave with me”. This is not how a mature adult should handle such a situation. Even though they say that they know I have integrity and they trust me, the threats, combined with the implication that we decided to do this in order to screw over the cloth DPS and in order to benefit the healers (and other officers), are totally uncalled for.

This is the kind of complaint that just takes all kinds of energy out of a guild leader or officer. Instantly, it places you both on opposing sides. So what else could this person have said? They could have said “Hey Kurn, I think a better way to fix this hoarding problem would be X, Y or Z. I think it would have less potential backlash than this method. I think it would be less controversial because, as it is now, it *looks* as though you’re doing this to benefit yourself, the healers and the officers, even though I understand you’re trying to fix the underlying problem in the EPGP system. I also, personally, would have liked to be consulted on such a major change and I suspect others would have enjoyed the opportunity to help figure out a less-drastic solution to the problem. Let me know if I can help to offer other solutions that might be easier to swallow.”

I mean, is that so hard? No threats, offers to help, a line stating that the reset could look like the leadership is trying to benefiting themselves, but an acknowledgement of it really being us trying to fix a problem. It can be quite difficult to not be threatening and overly aggressive (or defensive) when you’re upset. I get that. So hold off on sending anything until you’ve cooled down a bit!

And if that one wasn’t bad enough, how about *this* one, from one of the very people who was hoarding? Yikes...

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I understand you want people to spend their points on upgrades as they drop, and not, as you say, "hoard". I know you made it easier for people to justify spending points on minor upgrades. The decay system has worked as intended, in my personal case – [Shadow Priest] won the trinket off Baleroc, I was waiting for tier, and by the time tier finally dropped, the decay had eroded my "lead" over him to almost nothing, so he was second in line for a tier token this week (so while I now have a tier token, he has both a tier token and a highly coveted trinket). It's the risk I took by waiting for tier first, and I messed up because of taking that risk. But me taking that risk, in my opinion, hurt no one but myself.

And I know you don't want people to "hoard". But it's the way I usually do things. I like to go for my big ticket items first, AND the 4-piece tier set bonus is significant enough to warrant trying to get ASAP (i.e. being the first to get tier when it dropped).

And you know what? There has never been a stated rule against "hoarding". Yes, it's frowned upon by some. But my goal isn't to get every single piece of gear possible. It's to get the best upgrades at strategic times. DKP/EPGP is a mini-game to me, and I play it because I like to play a part in "planning" my upgrades. I do occasionally lose.

But how does that hurt the guild? How does it mess up the system because I got the first Conqueror token? I'm still a viable raider. And hell, other people have upgrades and are ahead - how does hoarding "hurt" people as long as important pieces of loot aren't getting sharded?

You know what you could do? Whenever something comes up for a roll that is on someone's loot list, and they DON'T roll, they pay a "passing on an upgrade" fee. That will slow down any hoarding. People will be more motivated to not hoard and to roll on upgrades as they drop. As long as it's a stated amount that will be "charged" for "passing on an upgrade", then people can still plan whether or not it'd be worth it to pass for them. People will still hoard, I guarantee it, but it'll be less frequently I'd expect.

Resetting EPGP is unfair to those who like to plan things out (like myself), plain and simple. And since you are all about "being fair" and "having a fair system", I thought I'd throw that out there. A decay is already a "hoarding" penalty. Add another if you like (like the "passing

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fee" I suggested.) But don't just shit in the face of everyone who likes to plan their upgrades and have been playing with the assumptions about the system laid out at the beginning of the tier.

Okay, so this person, first of all, is wrong because saving up for a tier token rather than freely upgrading other gear did hurt the entire raid by virtue of keeping the average item level lower. Higher item level gear is almost always better because it has a higher item level budget. You can fit more intellect, agility, whatever, on a ring that's item level 378 (normal Firelands) versus item level 359 (normal Tier 11). Further, pieces of loot *were* being disenchanting because people like this raider were passing on them. But even apart from this person being wrong about how it doesn't hurt the raid group, even apart from being wrong about things not being disenchanting, this veers off into defensive/whining territory.

Defensively, this player starts talking about the "mini-game" of loot, claims (erroneously) that the only person hurt by this is him or her and points out that other people have more priority even while upgrading their gear. None of this has to do with the issue that hoarding EPGP priority by not upgrading breaks the system. In fact, they just proved that those with more priority AND upgrades are making use of the system as intended!

True, they do offer a solution, the "passing on an upgrade fee", but that's a lot of work for our loot masters, so we felt that wasn't a viable option. Even if it was, though, the last paragraph of this message is what made the officers collectively put their faces into their palms.

Using "being fair / having a fair system" in quotes, along with the emotional use of "unfair" in the first sentence, indicates that this person didn't think we were being fair and was, in fact, being sarcastic about our goals. Then the bit about "shit[ting] in the face of everyone" kind of nailed it. This person was angry and felt as though they were unjustly being targeted by our decision and wrote to us while still very emotional about it. If there was any doubt about that, a later message to one of our officers contained the following few phrases:

So as a raider and someone who broke absolutely zero rules, I'm the one getting punished the most by a reset. Whether this stems from Kurn hating me for being an upstart and not being quiet about my opinions, or anyone on my tier token or healers (coincidentally, Kurn on both accounts) being angry at realizing that I'm probably likely to get the first Rag main hand, I don't know.

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... no idea where THAT came from. Our original message stated that hoarding was breaking the EPGP system, that EPGP works best when people bid freely and often and this raider took from that message the idea that I hated them (for being an upstart? For not being quiet?) or wanted a better chance to get tier tokens, or other healers wanting an off-hand from Ragnaros.

Yeah, this is the type of message that kills your leaders' desire to lead.

In the end, we had a lot of feedback and *most* of it was pretty great. People pointed out things we hadn't considered and so we didn't go ahead with the reset, although we did severely augment the decay of our EPGP values. But examples like these three messages have a cumulative effect on your leadership. Trust me. Don't be like these people. Disagree all you want, but disagree at the right time, the right way and try to be divorced from the topic emotionally. It's not easy, you won't always succeed, but trying to be helpful instead of aggressive or overly defensive is going to be received so much better than this kind of paranoid stuff! As a bonus, trying to be helpful instead of aggressive will generally help save your leaders' sanity...

Remember, everyone wants to kill the boss. That's something everyone can always agree on. If you frame your messages in that context, your messages will be much better heard by everyone involved.