

December 18, 2015

A Long Time Ago, in a Galaxy Far, Far Away...

[PROLOGUE: Once again, this is not the piece I had intended to write for today. I'd been playing with another topic all week. Then, this morning, I found myself on a website with short videos of professors from Georgetown University (<http://www.georgetown.edu/georgetown-faculty-talk-star-wars>), talking about scholarly issues raised in Star Wars. How good is the science behind light sabers? Was Darth Vader a villain or a hero? Reminiscent of this time last year, when I did a series of posts on *Star Trek* parallels in DSS work, I thought I would take some time out to celebrate today's release of the new Star Wars film, DSS style!]

They are releasing the newest offering in the *Star Wars* series today. The first *Star Wars* movie was released in May, 1977 – within a month of the time that HEW issued the original 504 guidelines. That seemed prophetic in some way, so I started wondering if I could find other similarities between that galaxy far, far away and our day-to-day work in DSS. I found it wasn't too hard to see the parallels in the people who inhabit those very different worlds. Granted, there aren't many evil emperors or storm troopers in our midst. Our "villains" aren't so much evil as they are stubborn, or annoying, or frustrating, or... we'll deal with them next week! But what about the heroes? We have plenty of parallels there.

LUKE SKYWALKER – This intrepid young hero battles for good against evil and is passionately engaged in the fight. Sound familiar? I can think of LOTS of DSS providers I know that I could cast in that part. Luke has skills and abilities that he doesn't realize he possesses at first, but he joins the fight on faith – because he believes it is the right thing to do – and he learns from those who have been at it for a while. That's an important point. As we learned over time, Luke Skywalker was only brought in to the battle in "Chapter 4" of the saga. The struggle had been ongoing for many years before he came on the scene. And yet his contribution to the rebel cause was a turning point. The folks who lead the field of DSS today weren't there at the start. It doesn't matter. What they bring to the fight is what is important today!!

PRINCESS LEIA – This lady is a purist. She, too, fights passionately for the cause, but she isn't ready to accept any half way measures or responses ("It was too easy. They let us go. It's the only answer.") Leia is impatient with those around her who aren't prepared to take a firm stand for the right reasons. She probably is a staunch advocate of Universal Design of Learning (*sorry – I couldn't resist throwing that in! GRIN*). But no one questions either her competence or her dedication to the work that needs to be done. This is one tough lady. I admire her (and her DSS counterparts) tremendously.

HAN SOLO – This was actually the hardest parallel to find. Han Solo enters the quest strictly for the money (and you KNOW that isn't why folks turn to DSS work!). He eventually returns to fight because of his allegiance to the people he has come to respect and care about, but he is never as committed "to the cause" as the others seem

to be. I decided the best parallel here was to the “loners” out there. I am always surprised when I meet someone who has been doing DSS work for many years, at the same school, and whom I have never met (or heard of) before. They tend not to be AHEAD members, although they may be involved with their state affiliates of AHEAD. They clearly know what needs to be done and are doing it – but they do their jobs largely without deference to what/how everyone else does the same job. They are rogues, not in their views (or practices), but in their insular view of the field. (There probably aren’t too many Han Solo’s out there reading this!)

CHEWBACCA THE WOOKIEE – There was no difficulty finding a DSS counterpart here. The Chewbaccas of our world are the worker bees. They are the staff members -- professional staff or administrative staff -- who don’t take a starring role, and never get much publicity (quick – name the actor who played Chewbacca. See?). But without Chewie, the Millennium Falcon wouldn’t/couldn’t have run, and he was there fighting for the cause alongside our more visible heroes every step of the way. Hats off to our unsung heroes.

C3PO – This unlikely hero is a protocol droid. He is capable of translating more than 900 languages and dialects, but he is very tied to rules, and is thrown off his stride when confronted with a situation or suggestion that doesn’t match his programming. Boy – have I known DSS providers like that!! They are very good at their jobs and know just what to do, so long as it is a familiar situation. For example, they know the rules for how to assess a request for a dog or cat as an ESA, but can’t figure out how to apply those SAME rules to a request for a pig or rat. They aren’t always very creative or original in their thinking, but they are tireless workers who can always be depended upon. We need the C3POs in our world.

R2D2 – This one was easy! The R2D2s of the DSS world are the techies. That’s not a title of derision, but of infinite respect. They speak a language that few of us can understand, but they can be relied on to follow instructions, find a tech solution to the problem – and to find creative ways to use that technology (remember the scene where R2D2 is serving drinks on Jabba the Hut’s barge?). Luke Skywalker rescued R2D2 from oblivion with the Sand People, and the little android was at his side from there on out.

YODA – The Jedi Master has been training new Jedi’s for more than 900 years. He doesn’t tolerate anything short of one’s best effort (“Do or do not. There is no try”). But he carefully leads Luke on his journey of self-exploration, as he has done for countless Jedi’s before. In the world of DSS, Yoda appears, not as a person, but as the DSSHE-L. For 20 years now, the practitioners in the field of DSS have looked to the DSSHE listserv for answers, counsel, and advice. Sometimes it is not given as politely/kindly as everyone would like, but there is much wisdom there.

OBI-WAN KENOBI - Obi-Wan was a soldier and teacher, and a Jedi Master in his own right (though not as wise or all-knowing as Yoda). He trained Anakin Skywalker in the ways of the Force (but he was not responsible for Anakin’s turn to the Dark Side). He

mentored Luke Skywalker, gave him confidence in himself, and helped Luke take control of his own destiny. When he had helped all he could, he led Luke to Yoda to complete his training. Let's see – fighter, teacher, mentor, referral resource... Hey! That's ME!

Janie

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU!

December 25, 2015

“I Find Your Lack of Faith Disturbing...”

(Most of you won't read this until after the holidays – which is good. We have all earned a break! But for those who are still at work, or compulsively checking their email while they are NOT at work, I thought I would send out this week's entry a little early and avoid the Christmas rush! JEJ)

I promised a follow-up to last week's post about *Star Wars* and how many of the characters might be represented in our DSS world. I had some great conversations with folks after last week's post. Several folks wrote to ask what parallels there might be to the Evil Empire. In the end, I decided that just as Yoda is represented by the collective wisdom of the DSSHE subscribers, perhaps the Evil Empire is represented by the collective higher education establishment that seeks to maintain itself and its power against any and all change to the status quo (the Rebel Alliance? That's US!), and thus is resistant to the presence and participation of students with disabilities.

It is harder to populate our DSS world with counterparts to the villains of *Star Wars*, in part because we face different challenges on different campuses, and in part because there aren't many DSS providers who are dealing with someone who wants to annihilate them. Rather, our villains tend to be those who get in our way (recalcitrant faculty?), drag us down and delay us with nuisance concerns (doting parents?), or who simply don't provide support for what needs to be done (too many administrators!). But perhaps the lack of recognizable “villains” is part of what often leaves us feeling scattered, as a field, with each of us responding to brush fires on our own campuses, rather than fanning the flame of rebellion together (a little too allegorical for you? I thought it sounded very Yoda-ish!).

I have to admit, I had more fun researching this post than any I have done in a long time. I searched online for “lessons learned from *Star Wars*.”, and found a whole lot of lists to work from. I have pulled out just a few of them for you here, with the *Star Wars* examples liberally cribbed from various sources I tapped...

“ALL THINGS ARE TRUE, FROM A PARTICULAR POINT OF VIEW”

That is what Obi-Wan tells Luke when asked why he didn't reveal the truth about Darth

Vader. And it makes sense. (There is a great quote in the play/movie 1776 when Benjamin Franklin says, "A rebellion is always legal in the first person, as in 'our rebellion.' It only in the third person -- 'their rebellion' -- that it becomes illegal.") DSS providers would do well to remember that when, for example, they are dealing with students/parents who insist that you need to provide this or that accommodation, or administrators who seemingly give in too easily to pressure from those parents because "it is better to just provide it." The fact that they have a different agenda, and therefore want to follow a different path to achieve it doesn't make them wrong, or bad. You just have to keep focused on YOUR agenda and not be seduced by the dark side.

ALWAYS LET THE WOOKIEE WIN

That is the advice that Han gives to R2D2 as he is beating Chewbacca at a board game during downtime on the Millennium Falcon. When asked why, Han states that Wookiees pull people's arms out of their sockets when they lose. (C-3PO: "I suggest a new strategy, R2. Let the Wookiee win!") Know who you are pitting yourself against. Conceding a small battle doesn't mean you forfeit the war. I have seen DSS providers who are enraged (legitimately) at the silliness of the stance of some faculty member, or administrator, and who respond with an all-out, not-very-polite attack. You may win – but at what cost? That faculty member may play golf with the Dean on Thursdays, and that administrator may have sway over how much money is allotted for your budget, or how much cooperation you can get from the folks who report up to him/her through the chain of command. Winning for the sake of winning may make you feel better in the moment, but could have long term consequences. (Remember, it is better to change a policy than to change a professor.) Focus on your overall goals, not the fuzz-bag in front of you. And to go along with that...

"IT'S A TRAP!"

Rest assured, the battle station you are attacking is fully operational. Don't assume your enemies are idiots, no matter how many Bothans died to bring you the information. When you are ready to take on some long-established tradition (such as the inappropriate technical standards in place with the nursing program!?!), don't assume that everyone else will welcome your involvement just because the new Dean suggested it, or the request came from the Department Chair. Sometimes, you are being set up. Sometimes, they want you to propose something expressly so that they can shoot it down –and make it all look like a legitimate educational exercise/decision. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't proceed, if it is a battle that needs to be fought. Just don't go in expecting any easy wins!

SAND PEOPLE ALWAYS WALK IN SINGLE FILE TO HIDE THEIR NUMBERS

When issues of policy or procedure are raised by others, chances are the unrest goes deeper than what appears to be the immediate complaint by a faculty member or administrator. Troubles come not as single spies, but as battalions. I can remember too many DSS providers over the years who I have heard complain that there is "just one prof who is objecting to our testing protocol" – only to be blindsided when the issue shows up on the agenda for the next Faculty Senate meeting. By the time someone has the guts to make a public stand on some aspect of your policy, there is a good chance

that he/she has either been whipping up support for that position, or is actually being encouraged to be the public face of others who feel the same way – and who will swarm you, given half a chance. When one person raises a concern, look behind them.

“DON’T TELL ME THE ODDS!”

According to C-3P0, the odds against successfully navigating an asteroid field are approximately 3,720 to 1. But if Han Solo can do it, so can you! Buckle up and take some chances. It may seem to you that the higher education establishment makes changes only at glacial speed (on inch every hundred years!), but it CAN be moved – and you might be just the person to do it. You won’t know until you try, but you know that nothing will change if you DON’T try!

and finally...

USE THE FORCE

I had forgotten what The Force really **is** until I started my research this morning. Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi describes it this way...

“The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It’s an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together.”

and later:

“...but the tools to our salvation lie within us as well. Discovering how to channel these forces is what makes our journey. Let it go.”

The greatest lesson *Star Wars* teaches us is that the hero is within! I can’t think of anything to add to that!!!

Enjoy your holidays!
Janie

(I could have just ended this post as I did last week – “*May the Force be with you!*” But I found so many great quotes from the movies that brought a smile to my face – even though they don’t seem to have much to do with DSS work – that I thought I would leave all of YOU with a smile or two, as well.)

“Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You’re my only hope.”

“If there’s a bright center to the universe, you’re on the planet that it’s farthest from.”

“You came in that thing? You’re braver than I thought.”

“Aren’t you a little short for a storm trooper?”

(and of course)

“I’ve got a bad feeling about this...”
