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Alacrity of the Commander

An extensive guide to the operative specifics of command...

“When to Step Down”

Serve the Brotherhood —

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“When to Step Down”

1—INTRODUCTION

Deciding to step down from a position, especially one long held and of high stature, is never an easy choice to make. Recognizing the signs that show a need for change is an important and respected skill; leaders demonstrate greatness by not dragging that which they helped build down with them. A leader is rarely ever faulted for stepping down when the time comes; burnout, ideological differences and Real Life issues strike even the most dedicated of Dark Jedi. This document outlines the main reasons for leaders stepping down, how to recognize those situations and what to do in the event that you are in one.

2—BURNOUT

When a member of the Brotherhood first takes on leadership responsibilities, furthest from their mind is their eventual resignation. Even after the novelty of their promotion has worn off, the newly-ascended leader focuses on the daily ins and outs of their position without focus on when that might all end.

After months or even years, however, the leader's feelings can start to change. The weight of responsibility begins to press more heavily on their shoulders. Gradually, the once-relaxing time spent in the Brotherhood becomes less and less enjoyable. Leaves of absence become more frequent, and when the leader is present, previously effortless deadlines pass by like signs on a highway drive. Finally, one day, the leader stares at their screen and thinks, “I’ve hate this stuff.”

This common feeling is what the Brotherhood terms “burnout.” Besides Real Life interference, it is the most common reason for leaders to leave their positions. After a time, leaders will encounter an inability to continue at a desirable level – burnout occurs, and remedial measures must be taken

2A—SIGNS OF BURNOUT

The signs of burnout are as varied as they are common. The introductory story, above, details some of the signs, but by no means is representative of every case. Some specific examples of burnout include:

- General loss of enjoyment in the activities mandated by the position (over all activities, rather than one or two specific ones)
- Avoidance of work (frequent leaves of absence, delegating more and more work to assistants)
- Loss of efficiency (projects and daily duties take longer to complete than usual with no identifiable reason)
- Resentment of the position
- Sensitive or defensive mood when asked about work relating to that position
- Long, unannounced periods of absence
- Stress caused by overworking
- Significant drops in overall activity and speed
- Increased frequency of conflicts with members

Any or all of these symptoms may be signs that it may be unwise to continue in your current state.

Input from others about your performance in your job is important in recognizing burnout. If fellow members say that you've been snappy lately, or often complaining about your position, you may want to take a closer look at your suitability for the role. While it may not be easy to listen to a description of failings in your performance, regular reviews from friends and colleagues can help you recognize increasing pressure at times when you wouldn't usually notice it. Self-evaluations are also an extremely useful tool in predicting and preventing burnout; seeing trends of decreasing activity and increasing difficulties or time away can be a telling predictor of necessary change. Please refer to the Self-Evaluations leadership manual for more information.

2B—THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNIZING BURNOUT

Burnout is possibly the single most dangerous thing that could happen to a Brotherhood member in the course of their membership. It is important to recognize burnout for your own sake and that of the Brotherhood – there's no sense in maintaining a position you resent and that decreases your enjoyment of what is ultimately an activity for your own relaxation. Further, if you are not carrying out your leadership role effectively, other members of the Brotherhood will suffer for it. It's important to be honest with yourself in evaluating your fitness and desire to continue in your position, less you hurt the very unit you have worked so hard for.

One of the biggest side effects of burnout is that the member stops enjoying their time in the Brotherhood. The reason for joining the Brotherhood in the first place was to have fun, whether by participating in gaming, writing, or just sitting around on IRC chatting with like-minded Star Wars fans. Even for the most dedicated members of the Brotherhood, Brotherhood activities are recreational. Burnout puts the enjoyment of the Brotherhood at risk. At first, it may simply be that the member doesn't enjoy their activities as much as they did before. Eventually, the member loses interest in Brotherhood activities, but their responsibilities don't cease. This puts the member in the unfortunate position of feeling like they're being forced to take on duties that they don't want, generating a great deal of resentment. This resentment and frustration can lead to an intentional or reckless neglect of their duties, as well as a spill over into personal relationships.

When burnout occurs, projects taken on by the member fall by the wayside, or in the worst cases are intentionally sabotaged. Unit activities relying on a leader will break down, leading to inactivity in an entire Battle Team, House or even the whole of a Clan, which in turn will cause more active members to become bored and possibly leave. Superiors start asking the leader when that project they agreed to take on will be done, members ask if there are more competitions coming, fellow leaders ask if the leader's unit wants to participate in some kind of event. The additional pressure on the leader of having “everyone asking for something” builds the resentment and frustration even more, until finally the burned out member simply explodes and walks away with burned bridges and unfinished work.

Members who know their limits, on the other hand, lead much more fulfilling DB lives. They take on the projects that they can and want to, without loading themselves with too much work. They take on enough responsibility to keep themselves busy but content, and when they do decide to step down from their position, they will leave with a sense of accomplishment rather than resentment and frustration. These leaders also serve as better role models for junior members, giving them a positive, constructive example to follow.

Burnout is also one of the most compelling reasons to train your subordinates in how to perform the duties of your position. The most immediate practical benefit of this is being able to take breaks when you need, rather than forcing yourself to do the work because “nobody else knows how”. Another benefit of training your subordinates is that you can more easily divide up the workload to prevent your own burnout while you maintain your position.

If you are forced to retire from your position due to burnout, training your subordinates beforehand will ensure the presence of a capable successor. However, the training should ideally take place early enough that the subordinate's skills can be used to help offset the danger of burnout.

2C—PREVENTING BURNOUT FROM OVERWORK

After exploring some of the dangers of burnout, it's worthwhile to spend some time explaining ways to prevent burnout from occurring. As we've seen above, burnout usually happens when members stop enjoying their participation in the Brotherhood, especially when they feel that they are being forced to carry out their duties rather than taking them on willingly. As such, the most effective way to prevent burnout is to retain a sense of enjoyment in Brotherhood activities.

The key to preventing burnout is to avoid taking on “too much”. Precisely what “too much” is can vary from

person to person; it's difficult to predict exactly how much work is going to be too much. However, several indicators are useful in determining your personal work limit:

- You feel like you have to rush to finish projects.
- People often have to remind you to do things.
- You consistently forget about work you've agreed to complete.
- You often get frustrated about how much you have to do.

Keeping these signs in mind will help you recognize signs of overwork before burnout rears its head. Once you've seen these signs, there are a few steps you can take to prevent burnout:

Don't take on too many things. Be very careful of how many projects or duties you take on at any given time. Try to strike a balance between Brotherhood positions, and don't forget your real-life responsibilities. Get a rough estimate of how many hours per week you can spend on Brotherhood activities and keep track of how long each thing takes, including buffers for things that may take longer than you expect.

Learn how to pace. Pacing your work can make a dramatic difference in how much stress you experience. For example, say you're required to develop a three-page proposal for a new Clan starship, write an article for the Dark Voice and create the House webpage. If you were to try to do all of these things in a weekend, chances are that none of these things would get done – or if they did, you would be under a significant amount of stress while doing so. Rather, pace your work according to its volume. If you know a Dark Voice article is due two weeks beforehand, don't wait until the day before to start writing it. If a project has no fixed due date, don't try to do it all in one sitting. Regardless of the situation, leave yourself enough time that you can easily finish the work without getting yourself too stressed out.

Evaluate whether you really need to do the work. If you're occupying one or more positions that generate a lot of work for little satisfaction or reward, consider dropping that position before you begin resenting the workload, especially if the position doesn't require specific skills.

Delegate tasks. Good leaders know what tasks to delegate to subordinates. Basic tasks – such as updating the unit's googlegroups list – can be handed to willing and able subordinates. However, do not delegate tasks that require your direct involvement too often as doing so is an indicator of shirking duties, and thus of burnout.

Again, frequent self-evaluations will help you track your performance and spot signs of possible burnout before they become a problem.

2D—RECHARGING AND STAYING ENERGIZED

When determining whether you are burned out, it is important to know the difference between being needing to resign and simply needing a break. If it's the latter situation you face, there are several steps you can take to recharge your batteries, and hopefully create a less stressful environment.

- Take a short leave of absence (one to two weeks). During this time do nothing Brotherhood-related, except for the evaluations described below. Do not check your DB email, visit any DB-related websites, hang out in DB IRC channels. Nothing.
- Make a list of the duties required by your position. Which of these things do you seem to spend the most time doing? If you have an assistant, can some of these duties be delegated? If not, is there a way you could change your work process to make these duties easier? If you hold multiple positions, is the workload too much to handle?
- Make a list of the personal projects you've taken on in the Brotherhood that aren't specifically part of the duties of your position. How much time do these projects take up? If you're working on a team, can you step back from your part of the project and pass it to someone else? If you're running the project, can you temporarily hand the reins over to another person? Will the project have to be postponed?
- Speak with your leaders about how they can help to reduce your workload.
- Be honest with those that you are working with and let them know that you are having troubles that

you are trying to rectify.

- Once you've answered these questions and finished your leave, make a plan and put it into action. Reduce or delegate your workload as needed.

Example: KAP Darkflower is a long-standing Quaestor. Her House is very active, and she tries to run competitions for them at least monthly, often juggling several competitions at once. She also maintains a House run-on and organizes competitions with other Houses as part of her Quaestor's duties. In addition, she is helping her Consul with a project to compile and present the Clan's history on a new webpage, which she is responsible for doing the layout and graphics for. As if this weren't enough, Darkflower is also a Trainer in the ACC and the Knight-Class Envoy for her Clan, taking up a great deal of her time with ACC training matches and setting up information and guidance for new members of the Brotherhood. After a year of juggling these positions, Darkflower has started to resent the new members rather than being eager to help them. She sees running competitions as boring and stressful instead of fun. The ACC matches seem to linger and none of the Initiates ever seem to do anything right. After a day of chatting with a fellow Quaestor, Darkflower realizes she's completely burned out.

Darkflower takes two weeks off and evaluates her workload. She realizes that she runs an average of three competitions per month, plus the House run-on. Her Aedile participates regularly, but hasn't really organized any of the competitions. Darkflower decides to place two of the three monthly competitions in the hands of her Aedile. She also decides to assign her two Battle-Team Leaders to manage the run-on, since it'll give their teams a chance to be active and provide the two Leaders with some experience that will help them get promoted in the future.

Turning to the Clan history project, Darkflower realizes that she needs to ask her Consul if she can take a smaller role in the project, since graphics can be very time-consuming to create – perhaps the Consul can find a second person and they can work on the layout together. Darkflower's ACC training battles have already suffered because of her lack of time, and even though she should have more opportunities to take on those battles she decides to wait and see how her House and Clan duties pan out. Finally, she decides to delegate more of the daily Envoy duties to the House-level Envoys, maybe even needing to appoint new ones, and step back to a more supervisory role.

After two weeks away, Darkflower comes back to active status and makes the changes she needs to. Within a week her workload is considerably eased, and the enjoyment gradually returns to her Brotherhood activities. Instead of crashing, Darkflower has managed to salvage her position in a way that it can still be enjoyable for herself and others.

There are a few steps Darkflower could have taken to prevent her burnout from happening. As described in the above section on preventing overwork, Darkflower could have reviewed her workload when taking on any one of those new projects. She could have trained her Aedile and Battle-Team Leaders earlier to take on some of the duties of running the House. Rather than running three or four competitions all at once, Darkflower could have stockpiled ideas and simply run one competition per month, both pacing herself and simply deciding that the volume of work she was doing didn't need to be done.

3—REAL LIFE INTERFERENCE

Sometimes an overload of Brotherhood work is not the only work a leader must consider. Some Brotherhood leaders also have an abundance of real-life responsibilities which interfere with their duties. Recognizing the need to step down in these cases is relatively simple, although the signs are slightly different: a leader overcome by real-life issues may have any or all of the signs outlined in the burnout section above, typically more frequent unannounced absences. More than one leader faced with a heavy real-life workload has come back to the Brotherhood and asked, “Has it already been three weeks?”

Needless to say, an imbalance between real-life and Brotherhood issues can be just as damaging as a burnout on Brotherhood issues alone when the end result of both is neglect of a leader's duties. Once this time imbalance is

recognized, the steps for rectifying the problem are the same as those for dealing with burnout – pace yourself, delegate duties to others where possible, and step down from unnecessary positions.

Always remember that real life comes first; your responsibilities in the real world far outweigh and pre-empt your DB responsibilities. If your real life situation is in flux or you know that the next couple of months will be trying, step down before it becomes an issue.

As a final note, never, *ever* fake a real-life crisis in order to stall stepping down from a position. Doing so compromises your integrity as both a DB leader and a person. When it's time to step down from your position, the least you can do to help others is to be honest about your limits. Deception is never a good policy, and you may find that an otherwise positive response to burnout is instantly soured by the hint of a lie.

4—IDEOLOGICAL OR PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES

Sometimes resigning from a position has nothing to do with the workload undertaken by the leader in question. In some circumstances, an irreconcilable personality conflict with a fellow member (whether a superior, fellow leader or subordinate) leaves a member no choice but to resign. Really, conflicts with other members are one of the most effective ways of evaluating your suitability for a position. Without placing the blame on one party or another, take a critical look at who the arguments are occurring with and why. If you find that arguments or explosions are happening with increasing regularity, especially over issues you were previously content with, you should step back and re-evaluate your position.

Superiors, fellow leaders on the same level (other Quaestors in the same Clan), trusted subordinates and outside friends can all help you keep track of possible personality conflicts.

Resigning due to personality conflicts isn't recommended until all other options (including speaking to superior leaders) have been exhausted. It is assumed that members will make every effort to get along with fellow members rather than simply resigning when they don't like someone. However, when all else fails, a resignation due to ideological differences should be performed with as much respect as possible.

It's the leader's responsibility to make sure that personal and professional opinions don't mix when announcing the resignation – simply stating that a leader will step down is all that is necessary, rather than launching into a tirade about the inadequacies of another member of the Brotherhood.

5—RESIGNING

Unfortunately, some of us are not so lucky that we can salvage the positions we occupy. Perhaps the volume of work is simply too great or help is just not available. Perhaps you've already recovered from burnout a time or two and are simply unwilling to continue fighting. Perhaps real-life concerns are mounting and the workload of the Brotherhood has become more of a permanent hassle than a diversion. If any of these are the case, then it is truly time to resign.

Resignations can be either planned or unplanned. Planned resignations are the easier of the two to deal with, as the member knows that the resignation will happen and can tailor their workload to suit the deadline. In these cases, the resigning member should take steps to transfer authority and workload, with the help of their superiors.

In the case of planned resignations, the superiors of the resigning leader have just as much responsibility for the leader's transition as the leader themselves, if not more. If the resigning leader is a Quaestor, their issues still fall within the purview of their Consul and Proconsul. Rather than leaving everything until the last second, superiors should proactively look for a replacement for the outgoing leader, or at the very least someone who can temporarily take on their duties. If possible and necessary, the superiors should take on those duties themselves while a replacement is sought.

Unplanned resignations often come in the form of a superior sending the member an e-mail to say that their

performance in the position has been unsatisfactory, and that if they do not resign they will be dismissed. At this point, many members will simply throw up their hands and walk away. It is important to remember that even in these positions, it is the responsibility of the outgoing member to assist their superiors and the new leader in assuming their position.

Chances are that if you're resigning from a position due to burnout, some areas of your duties have already suffered, especially in the event of unplanned resignations. At this stage, you should have three priorities:

- Ask your superiors to choose your replacement.
- Move as much of your work as you can to that replacement if available, or if not, to your superiors.
- If your resignation has been planned, finish any work you can't delegate as quickly and completely as possible.

If you are in a position that has assistants, finding an interim replacement will be fairly simple. If not, you may have to negotiate with your superiors to find someone to take on your duties until your successor is appointed.

Once the replacement is found, the transfer of duties will begin. Only the bare minimum of duties should be passed on – half-finished projects and competitions not yet started should stay with you until you find a suitable caretaker, or even be scrapped completely. Discuss with leaders and colleagues which work can be passed on, which can be dropped and which work you need to finish yourself. For more details on this process, please refer to the “Leading Transitions between Subordinate Leaders” leadership manual.

After you've discarded all of the work you can, finish up what's left as efficiently as possible. Realistically, there shouldn't be much left – even ongoing competitions can usually be handed off to someone else, unless it's a large-scale Vendetta event. Ideally, all of your work should be finished within two weeks.

Finally, take a breath and relax.

6—THE AFTERMATH

After resigning, it's best to take a break from the Brotherhood for a while; some Dark Jedi even go Rogue and leave the Brotherhood completely. However, if you'd rather stay, you may wish to consider staying at House level for a while, relaxing and participating only in the events you want to.

Take this time to reflect on your tenure in that position and on your DB career as a whole. Understand why you resigned and how that could have been avoided (if possible), what you could have done better in command, where you see yourself in the DB in a year. After being in command, you will have insight into how the DB works. Thus you will be more capable of analyzing what you want to do than you were before you got your position.

Once a reasonable length of time has passed – this will be different for every person – you may want to consider trying a leadership position again, perhaps in a different Clan or a different area of speciality than before. If your burnout didn't affect your performance too badly in the previous position, you may be able to use that position's experience as a springboard for further advancement. Even after exhaustion, a member may still find the Brotherhood enjoyable after a suitable rest.

7—PREVENTING BURNOUT IN OTHERS

As a leader, you may be faced with the challenge of recognizing and preventing burnout in your subordinates. Much of the information in this manual will help you recognize signs of burnout in others and give them opportunities to step back and recuperate. More details on this can be found in the Working With Subordinate Leaders manual

8—CONCLUSION

Burnout, Real Life issues and ideological conflicts can affect any member of the Brotherhood, but, handled

properly, can be reduced to a mere bump in the road instead of an explosive end to a career. Even if the stress of Brotherhood duties becomes too much, a member can find constructive ways to ease themselves out of a position rather than letting everything come unglued. We hope you find these guidelines helpful in balancing your Brotherhood obligations with your enjoyment.