

- Community Moderation

Part of community management is the fact that you will, at times, need to moderate your community. What does this mean, exactly? Well, it means you will occasionally have to be the bad guy and tell people to knock it off, shut up or can it, lest you do something as a consequence to their behaviour.

Of course, how you moderate the community will differ largely based on the fact that your community is, no doubt, spread through multiple platforms.

1) In-game.

First, you have the game. If people are acting inappropriately in-game, you have two ways of shutting that down. You can do it in public, so the entire guild or group can see, or you can do it in private, so that the person in question knows they're acting inappropriately.

When do you do which?

The way I've always approached it is if there's a lesson to be learned, the person should be reprimanded in public. Similarly, if more than one person is misbehaving, you should do it in public.

Otherwise, privately is likely the way to go.

Let's look at an example.

In World of Warcraft, there is a chat channel accessible to you whenever you are in a major city, which is the Trade channel. Generally, Trade chat is the worst kind of chat you will find in the game, with trolls, jokers, morons and generally unhelpful people conversing. Something I didn't like to see my guildmates participating in was unhelpful chatter in Trade. I logged on to the game one day and a guild member was participating in some stupid

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chatter in Trade that was not at all clever, nor was it useful or helpful to anyone at all. Since anyone reading Trade chat could simply click on his name and know he was part of my guild, I wanted to shut this down immediately.

"Hey," I said in our guild chat, "that's not appropriate behaviour for a member of Apotheosis."

"Great," he replied, "just my luck."

"No," I said, "it's got nothing to do with luck. That behaviour isn't appropriate whether or not someone is here to see you doing it. You want to keep that up, you can leave. If you want to stay, you need to knock it off."

"Okay," he said.

He stopped messing around in Trade chat but left the guild a couple of days later. No skin off my nose, since he wasn't a raiding member of the guild and he was already proving to be more trouble than he was worth. The Trade chat blather wasn't the first time I'd had to talk to him about his behaviour.

Another example started in public, in guild chat, but ended up going private. A guild member, whom we'll call Stormy, was spamming Trade chat with an invitation to an older raid instance. It wasn't particularly harsh, but it could be considered rude, *especially* when he was spamming it twice in a row every thirty seconds.

I asked him, in guild, to stop it.

He did, but then started a private conversation with me. I explained to him that he was just annoying people in Trade and that was not something we wanted him to do because he was affiliated with our guild. Soon, he was back to spamming, perhaps mistakenly thinking I wasn't watching out for it. When I confronted him again, he said that he had to do it to attract more people to the run. I told

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him to stop it. He finally seemed to understand and stopped it before he logged off, perhaps realizing that not enough people were interested in the run. More than likely, however, Stormy likely thought that he would never be able to garner enough interest in the run without repeatedly announcing the run ~~and thus annoying the entirety of Trade.~~

2) On the forums.

These types of behavioural issues are interesting because there's always the possibility that someone else *didn't* see the post containing the questionable or undesirable behaviour, particularly if you come across it fairly quickly after it's been posted. There is, of course, always the chance that someone else *did* see it, regardless of how quickly you saw it after it was posted. So let's look at two scenarios: a) you don't think anyone else saw it and b) you think someone else saw it.

a) No One Else Saw That. (Probably.) This is likely the easiest scenario to handle and usually happens when you see something posted within about ten minutes of it happening. I like to keep records of, well, basically everything, so I would immediately move the thread (or that particular message within a thread) to the officer section of the forums so that I would be able to keep a record of it. After that, once it's gone from public view, I would copy the prohibited behaviour in question to a private message and start writing to the individual. Then I'd start a new thread on the officer forums with both the original message from the guild member and my response.

It's a simple response to a simple problem. Remove the post from the public, reprimand the guild member in private, keep the officer team up to date.

b) Other People Saw It. (And Maybe Even Responded.) When it's been up for a few hours, chances are, someone's seen it. Maybe someone's even responded to it. A great example of this

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was covered in the Lesser Incidents section of the Discipline portion of this module. In it, I mention a post Prisma had made in response to a guild member who was honestly just trying to help out. I responded to her, in public, and was a little aggressive in the sense that I said she was being “snippy”. I really could have handled that better myself and just said that there was no need to respond to the guildie in that manner, because my response provoked an angrier response from Prisma. That led me to responding yet again and then doing something I don’t particularly enjoy but is, at times, required: closing the thread. The best way to remind people who’s in charge is to exert some of your “power”, but I really hate doing that. I tried to build a respectful environment where everyone was heard and everyone could participate. Closing a thread is a little bit counter to that, isn’t it? Well, I think it is. Still, sometimes it’s required. I could tell that Prisma was not in a state to just drop it. I also didn’t want the guild member to whom she initially replied to join in and degrade the level of conversation. Nor did I want anyone jumping to anyone’s rescue. To me, this was a situation where the sooner the conversation, such as it was, ended, the better. So I ended it.

It’s important to note here that it’s not a bad thing to close a thread, but a surprising number of situations can be handled without doing so.

So when should you close the thread? When things are getting combative, when there’s a risk that other people join in and when you’re positive that nothing good is going to come from letting the conversation come to a natural conclusion. Also, another good time to do so is if something is getting a bit volatile and you (and any other officers/moderators) aren’t going to be around for a few hours. Pre-emptively warning people about behaviour or pre-emptively closing the thread isn’t a bad thing. Just don’t do it all the time.

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Something that can be tricky is if the conversation with the unwanted behaviour happens in a thread that has good information in it. For example, in a raiding guild, it’s not uncommon to ask your raiders to post their preferred loot lists. If an argument erupts in the loot list thread, what do you do? Well, assuming people saw the post and responded to it, I would close the thread. Then, depending on the tools available on the forum, I would copy the whole thread to a new thread in the same forum and delete the offensive posts. At that point, you would effectively have two loot list threads. I would keep the closed one (with the arguments) visible for a couple of days at most, to serve as an example of what not to do, at which point I would move that to the officer forum. If your forum software doesn’t allow for the copying of threads, start a new one up and remind people, in your initial thread, to remain respectful in the thread, as well as to keep their loot lists up to date.

3) On voice chat.

It’s difficult to judge exactly how you should handle a situation in which inappropriate behaviour is happening over voice chat. First of all, there’s rarely a record of it unless someone happens to be recording it or streaming your guild event. Second of all, things can be missed or misheard. Thirdly, you probably have an audience, so you kind of don’t want to make a huge deal if you’re unsure about what you heard, but at the same time, you want to make sure the person doesn’t make that same mistake again.

Luckily, I have a couple of examples about what to do with regards to people acting inappropriately in voice chat, based on my own experience.

a) The “That’s so gay!” Hyjal Raid.

Apotheosis, both incarnations of it, had a strict policy of not using the word “gay” in a pejorative way. That’s to say, no equating “gay” with “stupid”. We rarely had to enforce this kind of a language rule,

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as the vast majority of our guild members were mature enough to not resort to that kind of ignorant, juvenile language.

So when we were running back to the Mount Hyjal raid after wiping on Archimonde for the umpteenth time that evening, I wasn't a hundred percent sure that I'd heard what I thought I had heard. I was in conversation with the officers and trying to figure out what had gone wrong that attempt while also running my character back to the raid instance, so I was definitely distracted, but I thought I'd heard someone refer to one of Archimonde's raid mechanics as "gay". Still, I wasn't sure, so I kept my mouth shut.

A couple of wipes later, I *definitely* heard someone refer to a raid mechanic as "gay". I stopped what I was doing, including stopping my character's movement and keyed into our voice chat. This is paraphrased, of course, but here's the essence of what I said:

"No," I said, firmly, "that mechanic is not *gay*. It may be stupid, it may be ridiculous, it may be annoying, but it is *not* gay. If you want to continue to use language like that, you can just leave the guild right now. Any of you who think it's okay to equate gay and stupid can just leave. Right now. Go on."

There was silence. No one left the guild.

"All right. Let's get back in there and try Archimonde again."

I immediately got about four whispers for people thanking me for jumping on that as hard as I did. Then the raid resumed.

b) The "raping the ice blocks" drop-in.

During the last nine months or so of Cataclysm in particular, I personally spent a lot of time examining our applicants' performances during their trials and then sending them feedback. One such applicant was Stormy. (Yes, the same one who had been spamming Trade.) So I took a couple of hours and went over his

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raid performance and wrote him a lengthy private message detailing the issues we saw.

One of the fights he’d been in for was Heroic Hagara the Stormbinder. Over the course of the encounter, people will occasionally be trapped in ice blocks. It was pretty imperative for the raiders to swap their focus from Hagara herself to the ice blocks, though everything was positioned closely enough that Hagara would get some splash damage from the destruction of the ice blocks.

Stormy basically didn’t do that. He did a quarter of the damage to the tombs that his role lead did. Further, he disregarded several other assignments he was given. Honestly, it’s a miracle we downed the boss.

I wrote up a list of things he needed to fix on a Friday. I ended it a bit harshly, I admit, but this wasn’t the first note I’d sent to him about these *exact* issues. Here’s how it ended:

All of this stuff needs to improve. If you have questions about assignments, please make sure to ask (your role lead/your role channel) before the pulls, read our strats, watch our videos. If we see repeated disregard for assignments, you simply won't be promoted and we'll end your trial, it's that simple.

On the Sunday, during my office hours, he dropped in (as many people tended to do) and asked me if I was (and I’m quoting) “serious” about the notes I’d sent him. He actually said “are those messages to me, like, serious?”

When I assured him that yes, they were quite serious, he tried to tell me that his ice block damage done was fine.

“There were some attempts where I completely raped the ice blocks,” he said to me, in all sincerity.

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Given the respectful language clause in the Apotheosis policies, I immediately retorted, “LANGUAGE. We do NOT use that term casually in this guild!”

“Sorry,” he said. “Okay, I completely *wrecked* the ice blocks.”

Not only was he wrong about the ice block damage, which kind of made me want to punch him in the face, but then he broke one of our behavioural policies. Even though it was just the two of us in the voice channel, I wasn’t going to let that fly.

It’s actually one of the more difficult things about being an officer or a guild master. Constantly needing to moderate the conversation and maintain standards, even if it’s just you and one other person chatting privately, can be tiring. But if I’d let Stormy’s inappropriate use of the word “rape” slide, who’s to say he wouldn’t have gone out there and felt free to break our other policies? This is the sort of thing that needs to be nipped in the bud, based on your own social policies.

4) Social Media, Subtweets and Blogs

I toyed with the idea of creating a policy regarding social media platform behaviour. That’s to say if you had a public twitter or blog or something along those lines, you were expected to act in a certain manner on it. Essentially, how I tended to act on my blog: discussing things in more vague terms, not showing too much anger or frustration, not getting into arguments or large-scale disagreements with others...

In the end, I let it drop. There was no good way to “police” people’s social media accounts and blogs. Plus, I didn’t really want to do it anyway! I blame the sociologist in me who believes that the public sphere is integral to societal freedoms. (Damn you, Jurgen Habermas. Damn you.)

But sometimes, I think I probably should have done up a *basic* social media policy to prevent these fine examples of behaviour.

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Why? Because I don't really like seeing tweets from my guildies that go along these lines. (These are all made up but accurately express the several dozen tweets I would see on a regular basis.)

- OMG, I cannot believe how dumb some people are.
- JFC. Just... JFC.
- I don't have words. I really don't.
- WHY YES THAT IS A BRILLIANT IDEA.
- No, no, no. You're wrong. That's all.
- Why can't this guy figure out this mechanic????
- LOL this app is the funniest thing I've read all week.
- L2R logs before you make a fool of yourself with your BAD INTERPRETATIONS.
- GTFO.
- /facepalm
- /headdesk

So we had some people in the guild who would basically take to Twitter to vent their complaints. Sometimes the complaints would be easily linked to an issue in-guild or something that happened during a raid that virtually anyone in the guild would understand. Essentially, a few people in the guild used this method to complain to the officers (many of whom were on Twitter) and other guildies without *actually* complaining and still retaining plausible deniability. This happens frequently on Twitter and is known as "subtweeting". Subtweets are generally negative in nature (complaints, insults and the like) and rarely address the person or people they're actually intended for. It's a strange behaviour, but due to the fact that most Twitter accounts are public, even if you don't follow someone, you can still read their tweets by looking up their user account. Lo and behold, they may be subtweeting *directly at you*.

Sadly, this phenomenon happened a lot in Apotheosis during the last year of Cataclysm, which really makes me regret not having enacted a wide-reaching, almost draconian social media policy...

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The same sort of behaviour can happen on blogs. Certainly, I was guilty of this during Wrath of the Lich King. Here's something I actually posted publicly on my blog:

UGH. I don't know why this asshat is being such an asshat. It's like, way to engender a feeling of teamwork, douchebag. It's really unpleasant in general and I'm gonna be writing a letter to the acting GM and my class officer about this. Just as soon as I stop wanting to throttle the guy. :)

Granted, I didn't name names, and I *did* write that private message to the acting GM and my class officer, so it wasn't just complaining or venting without trying to change the situation. On the surface, however, this is about as bad as subtweeting. There are some key differences, mind you, the primary one being that my blog was private, in the sense that I didn't advertise it and didn't expect anyone with whom I was raiding to read it, plus I was blogging as "Kurn" and raiding as "Madrana". Twitter, however, is a social media network and you're expected to follow people you know and that sort of thing, so the chances of someone reading an unexpected subtweet about themselves is much higher than the asshat to whom I referred in my blog coming across the blog in the first place, much less the entry in which I describe him as such.

Even so, the act of venting in public (and perhaps gaining sympathy from the public) was something that I had basically done throughout Wrath of the Lich King. Whether it's via Twitter or a mostly-anonymous (at the time) blog, it is essentially the same behaviour. That's what caused my hesitation in writing up a social media policy, which was quickly followed by my lack of desire to enforce it.

If I could go back and do it over again, here's what I would institute in an effort to minimize negativity and perhaps eliminate some of the problematic behaviour we occasionally saw and *definitely* worried about happening. (Again, this was never a policy in Apotheosis and I only use the guild name as it was my previous guild.)

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Social Media Policy

As a member of Apotheosis, you are expected to maintain a certain level of decorum as you are a representative of the guild both in and out of the game. If you have a blog, Twitter or other social media presence that is directly, publicly affiliated with your in-game character(s) or the guild, the officers reserve the right to ask you to remove or modify tweets or posts that potentially discuss guild-related matters. As tracking people's use of social media is a huge undertaking, we will generally not intervene, but we do reserve the right to do so if we feel that you are not representing Apotheosis or the members of Apotheosis in a good light. Refusal to adhere to this policy may result in various guild-related actions including, but not limited to: written warnings, suspensions from guild activities, removal from the guild or any other action deemed fit by the officers, depending on the severity of the content of the message on the social media platform.

If your blog or Twitter or other social media platform is not directly affiliated with your in-game character(s) or the guild, nor is it linked to by the guild website, or if it is a blog or account which is protected or the contents of which are behind a password, this policy may not apply, at the discretion of the officers.

This is what I call a wide-reaching policy that basically doesn't force the officers to do anything. If we were aware of something and we felt it crossed the line, we could tell them to delete the tweet or edit the blog or whatever. If we weren't aware of something and it was later brought to our attention, we could tell them to get rid of it. But it doesn't require us to actively patrol all the guild twitters or blogs, which is a full-time job alone.

The bonus here is that just the *presence* of such a policy can lead to fewer subtweets and fewer accusatory blog posts.

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The downside is that people may be more reluctant to share their twitters or blogs with the guild, so that they may remain somewhat anonymous and continue their behaviour. But if they're not naming names *and* people aren't associating them with your guild... is that a huge problem? That's your call.