

## - The Right Fit

In the seven years that I played *World of Warcraft* on a regular basis, I was everything from “that new player” to “the guild master”. I’ve been in my fair share of guilds and, possibly more importantly, I’ve *applied* to my fair share of guilds, too.

What does this have to do with being a kick-ass raider? Good question.

I have never been a better raider than I was during a 9-month period in *Wrath of the Lich King*. Seriously, after that period of time, I was just not as good as I had once been and, leading up to it, I was nowhere near as good before that period as I was during it.

Why?

I was challenged.

I left a guild that was struggling, after losing both its raid leader and guild master, because I had an opportunity fall into my lap. It was an opportunity I had been waiting for since I discovered one of my oldest and dearest “real-life” friends played *WoW* seriously, which was a little while after Black Temple opened up during *Burning Crusade*. That was back in 2007. I had the opportunity to join my friend’s guild shortly after Tier 9 launched, with the ridiculously awful Trial of the Crusader raid. That tier dropped in August of 2009 and I transferred to join my friend (henceforth known as my RL Friend the Resto Druid) in mid-September of 2009.

The guild I joined was the guild my RL Friend the Resto Druid had been in since Vanilla, since before I even knew she played. Once we realized we both played the game, she would tell me stories about how they won an *epic* race to clear Black Temple first, against a guild that had taken every other server-first boss kill in Black Temple, a guild that raided almost twice as much as they did. This was the guild that I heard stories about from her, as they wiped constantly on M’uru in Sunwell Plateau. I had a character over on that server and would hop on after my raids (they raided from 8pm-12am Pacific, while mine were 8:30pm-11:30pm Eastern) and run around Nagrand in circles, mining and collecting Volatile Air, while chatting with her in a custom chat channel between wipes. By the time I had the opportunity to join the guild, I felt as though I knew half the members.

I also knew from my RL Friend the Resto Druid that they were extremely unforgiving of mistakes, general unpreparedness and poor play. Still, she was the healing lead and, as such, she was in charge of me. She promised to help

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guide me through the minefield of possible errors that could result in a failed application or, worse, a /gkick in the middle of the raid.

The biggest difference was that they didn't use voice chat. No TeamSpeak, no Ventrilo, no Mumble, no Skype. At all. Everything was communicated via text-based chat in various custom channels. Macros were used to communicate things like heroism or taunts. Boss mod /say options were explicitly turned on so that people knew if you were targeted by something.

It was eerie. I was wholly unprepared for the silence of raiding, having spent my entire raiding career, to that point, in guilds using TeamSpeak or Vent. I had no idea how much I *relied* on those audio cues from our tanks about pulling, about taunting, warnings from raid leaders reminding us of incoming danger... Well, I learned quickly that no one was going to warn me about anything and that's when I realized just how useful boss mods and their timers were. No one *really* needs a call-out on a voice chat to indicate something is happening if *everyone* is reading their timers. People who rely on call-outs get lazy about their timers. Sorry, but it's true. I can attest to it personally.

After nine months of extremely little voice communication (they introduced Vent towards the end of my stay, but it was optional except for the Lich King fight, by and large), let me tell you what – I paid attention to my timers. I changed various alert sounds on a fight-by-fight basis. I learned how to set up my timers so that I wouldn't get notified when I was *targeted* by something but when something was *spawning* so I could take a look and, if needed, run in the opposite direction, just in case.

So I became a raider who was much more aware than, say, the average raider.

I also learned how to do my job and then some. As a paladin healer, I was always assigned to tanks or other single-targets (such as the Marked targets on Deathbringer Saurfang or on Valithria Dreamwalker on that fight, obviously). However, that didn't mean I didn't have other stuff to do. My healing output wasn't the most important thing, although my RL Friend the Resto Druid did get me to improve that substantially. The most important thing, apart from not letting the main tank (who was also the raid leader and guild master) die, was making use of my utility spells as needed. We're talking about Hand of Protection, Hand of Sacrifice, Hand of Salvation, proper Beacon of Light usage, Lay on Hands and even Divine Intervention. We kited Heroic 25m Anub'Arak during his submerged phases by using Hand of Protection frequently, even making sure our talents allowed us to cast it every three minutes instead of every five. One missed cast meant a death, which almost certainly meant a wipe instead of a kill.

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For the first time in my *WoW* career, I was raiding at the peak of my ability. We cleared Icecrown Citadel on normal and went right into heroics and got 11/12 hard modes and our meta achievements in May of 2010. In terms of in-game accomplishments and, obviously, achievements, I had never before experienced anything like the efficiency with which this guild cleared content. I had become a better player, I had become more reliant on myself and my abilities, I'd refined my skills, I'd reaped the rewards.

The only trouble was, I was absolutely miserable.

I hated raiding with these people, which became apparent somewhere in the middle of heroic Icecrown Citadel progression. My RL Friend the Resto Druid had stepped down temporarily due to real-life issues that couldn't be avoided and so I became the temporary healing lead and, as such, got all the complaints from the healers and all the crap from the guild master/raid leader who was, and let's be fair to him, a complete jackass.

Of my nine months with that guild, the last four, in particular, were awful for me. I was constantly frustrated and being yelled at by those I was managing and those in charge. I even let my guild situation affect me outside of the game and was short and impatient with people in my everyday life.

Was I at my peak as a player? Absolutely. I was doing great in my raids, as much as I hated them. However, I was a terrible team player because I was filled with loathing for my fellow raiders. I didn't let it show, mind you, but I harboured resentment for each one of them, even my RL Friend the Resto Druid, for essentially abandoning me for three months, despite the fact it couldn't be helped.

I was burnt out. Luckily for me, my RL Friend the Resto Druid realized this and told me it was okay, I could leave. I wrestled with it for a while, but eventually I moved on. It was a relief and I fell in love with the game again as I joined a lesser-progressed guild elsewhere with a real need for a holy paladin. They were 7/12 in 25-man Heroic ICC and I was 11/12. I felt like I could help them. We got them up to 11/12 HM before the 4.0 pre-*Cataclysm* patch dropped and then I went on to reform my old guild, as I'd been planning to do, after having spent about four months there.

In the calendar year or so while guilded with these two (very different!) guilds, I realized two things:

- 1) Even though I was consistently challenged in the first guild, it wasn't a good fit, because I was constantly upset and angry. While my actual ability to play improved, everything else suffered, including my ability to be a good teammate, given that I pretty much hated almost the entire

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raid roster.

- 2) Even though I wasn't terribly challenged in the second guild, it was a *much better fit*, because Vent was filled with jokes and laughter, wipes were taken seriously, but no one was /gkicked for their mistakes. I was a much better team player and didn't hate anyone! I volunteered to help people out, I spent more time in-game just *playing to play* and I stopped being so cranky in general.

My ability to feel comfortable with the other members of the raid team had a major effect on my play. While in the first guild, I performed out of actual fear of being /gkicked (no, really), in the second guild, I performed because *I didn't want to let these people down*.

Maybe I wasn't quite as on top of things in the second guild as I'd been with the first, but I was still playing at a very high level for me, as compared to previous experiences. What's more, though, is that I wanted us to succeed – and not even for myself. I already *had* my meta achievement, I'd already gone 11/12 heroics. I just wanted to be a solid player for these people, who were smart, funny, decent players.

Playing for four months in the second guild recharged me and allowed me to reform my old, *Burning Crusade* era guild, Apotheosis, as I'd started planning midway through my time in the first guild. The second guild energized me and made me want to be reliable. It was a complete 180 from the first guild.

In order to be a kick-ass raider, you don't want to burn yourself out. Nothing says "unreliable" than someone who shows up, does a tier or a tier and a half of raiding and then stops playing for six months until the next raid tier comes out and then wants to come back.

You need to find the raid team that is the right fit **for you**. Having said that, it's not easy! Not only do you need to find a team that's recruiting your preferred class and spec combination, along with preferred faction (if that matters), but you also need to find one that raids on appropriate days and acceptable times for you. And THEN you have to ascertain whether or not these people are a good fit for you? Yikes. It's a daunting task!

Obviously, one of the things you'll want to look for in making your determination is, are these people *likeable* to you? If you're a woman and the guild seems to contain a few misogynists, that's not going to be a good fit. If you're gay and the guild frequently uses homophobic slurs, that's not going to be a good fit, either.

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Even if the guild seems to be a good fit, *socially* speaking, plus you've already determined the raid times are good for you, you might still be facing the problem of dedication.

How is that a problem? Isn't everyone dedicated to downing bosses in a raiding guild? Sure, but the difference is the lengths to which people will go in order to down a boss. I'm not even talking about time investment here, I'm talking about things like capping your Valor Points.

It's very important for you to get an idea of what people in that guild are willing to do to kill a boss. Are you willing to drop a gathering profession for the profession perks something like Blacksmithing can grant you, even if your armor class is cloth? What about dropping mining for Enchanting?

Do you show up for raids with all the flasks, food and potions you could possibly need? If so, that's great! But will your other raiders do that as well?

Everyone needs to be on the same page as everyone else. This is largely a management problem because I feel that a guild should be extremely clear about their requirements, but if they're not clear, it's up to you to figure out if you'd be happy in that environment. You should be asking questions about anything that isn't explicitly stated. Maybe they do loot council or EPGP loot, but you prefer rolling. Maybe they never start raids exactly on time and are always 20-30 minutes late to pull because they're waiting on a tank and two healers. You need to ask these questions and make those determinations before you join or else you're going to be filled with resentment for your fellow raiders.

As someone who's been there, who still remembers how much she wished she could throttle someone through her computer screen, I beg you to make an informed decision when choosing a raid group. Ultimately, the better a fit the team is, the better your attitude will be, the happier you'll be and the better you'll play for a longer period of time.

Sure, I was pushed to the peak of my playing potential in that first guild, but *I couldn't maintain it* without wanting to launch into a murderous rage. I was much happier playing at a slightly lower level of ability (because not as much was demanded from me) with a group of people I didn't loathe with every fibre of my being.

It's stunning to see how many people will forget that their own happiness has a huge effect on their play, their attitude and their ability to work as a member of a team. Don't be one of them!