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Leadership interview: Spike Flail

By Gravity | 7 comments

The raid leadership interview series

I'm pleased to present the next in my series of **interviews** with guild leaders on the management of progression guilds, which will be jointly published on wowraid and pwnwear. I'll interview guilds you can relate to, in the top 250 worldwide, taking my perspective of a raider with an MBA.

Today I've an interview with the guild Spike Flail. You'll read about:

- the value of logic and looking below the surface
 - the GM's view on leadership
 - how they treat players
- how poor performance is managed without drama.

Guild snapshot

- **Spike Flail** (USA-Ner'zhul [guild website](#))
- Ranked 24 in USA, 59 in world [wowprogress](#)
- Achievements include Alone in the Darkness (20th in the USA to accomplish), and of course Lord Jaraxxus is dead too
 - Recruitment status on [wowraid.com](#)

I talked with **Ushas**, the GM of Spike Flail. He has the cool flying head mount!

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The previous two interviews have covered the recruitment methods and raid attitudes of these world-top guilds, so with Spike Flail I wanted to dig into people management. They're the highest-ranked guild I've interviewed, so by no means do I want to disregard their impressive raid accomplishments.

In fact, I think this is an inspiring article because it shows the calibre of leadership that Spike Flail has.

How to treat players

Firstly I wanted to know about the kind of players they have and how they're treated. Ushas answers.

“One of the most fundamental parts of our recruitment is the attitude and personality fit with us as a guild. We tell our Trials before they transfer over that their Trial will not be judged solely on just performance and numbers, but also overall attitude and how well we fill they mesh with our guild,” said Ushas.

So do they really follow through on that principle? “Just recently for example, we ended up failing the Trial of a great Feral Druid with amazing in-raid performance, simply because we didn't feel he had the attitude we look for in people we add to our guild.” That's a big yes, then he continues.

Personal qualities

“There's a lot of criteria we look for in our players. Maturity and intelligence are huge. But being a cry-baby about the game, QQing about your class, constantly complaining, or feeling the need to boost your own esteem by putting others down in a video game are things we do not like to see in our members. Bragging in trade chat or realm forums is something we don't condone either. We don't like to flaunt ourselves or act conceded and egotistical, and because of that we were relatively unknown on our server for most of TBC. But if you asked people what they thought of us, no one had bad things to say, because we try to be respectful and mature to other players.”

I ask Ushas about egotistical retards, and he says they're kept out through the Application and Trial process.

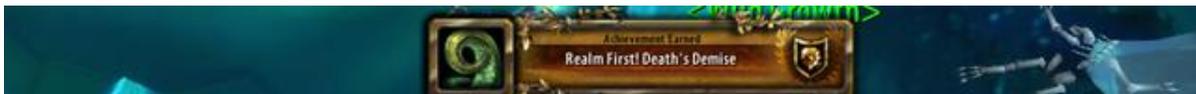
“We’re not a very uptight guild. A lot of top progressed guilds are very ruthless in how they handle their members. One mistake from a new Trial and they’re gkicked with no second chance. We’ve never had the ability to be so cutthroat with our weeding-out process, but more so I don’t feel it’s the right way to handle things. A lot of times it takes a bit for new recruits to get in line with the fights we’re doing or how we run as a guild. Sometimes even older members have off-nights where they just aren’t performing.”

That’s reassuring for me, because I too sometimes have bad nights too and wonder whether I just suck or it’s just a passing evening of the suck. Ushas continues, “Often times you have nights where nothing goes right. In these situations it’s important to handle it correctly.”

Herd problems

I ask Ushas if he’s had any problems with players leaving the guild when you kick someone, like a herd mentality.

“Doesn’t apply,” says Ushas. “All our Trial decisions are member-included. Our Trials have a discussion thread that every member gets a chance to input on, and we come up with a decision together. I often lead and spearhead Trial discussions but I never make a call that the guild doesn’t agree with. So when a player gets gkicked, it’s usually with the blessing of the guild as a whole.”



Problem management

We then go onto problem-management, and he describes what I think is ideal leadership:

“We don’t yell and scream. We don’t berate. Vent is kept professional and generally quiet during focused encounters. If someone screws up, we first make a general correction for everyone to here, instead of calling them out by name. Even if only one person stood in a fire, instead of calling that person out and putting them on the spot, we’ll say something like ‘Let’s keep an eye out on those void zones guys’ or ‘remember to kill Roots first priority when they come out.’ We then usually try to add a suggestion to help with avoiding that problem in the future, such as ‘watch your Bossmod timer and be ready for them a few seconds before they pop.’”

“Also being able to include one’s self in the criticism is paramount as well, so it doesn’t feel like you’re raining down judgements from a throne.”

That is what I find missing in so many raid leaders, the willingness to be gentle even when it’s a serious problem, and to have humility. The ability to judge when to be hard or soft. What I like is that a US-ranked 24th guild can do that, so anyone could. Yet, they don’t let progression stall if the problems continue, and Ushas explains how they handle it.

Still progressing

“If we continue to have problems with a certain person specifically, we’ll talk to them in tells. Professionalism again is key for us, explaining to them logically what we need from them, where they can possibly improve, and letting them know we may have to put someone in who can perform better than they can on that given fight/night if it doesn’t improve. We’ll sub people in raids after that, again quietly. Usually we give those players another chance again another night, and usually being subbed/talked to is enough incentive for someone to improve on their own. We rarely have long-term problems that don’t get fixed through this method, and if we do, we go through other courses of actions, while remaining respectful and professional to the person we’re dealing with.”



On being a leader

Being respected and your game face

This takes me onto the next question, about the kind of “face” you show towards officers and regular members.

Ushas starts by describing what I think is a guild leadership doctrine, “This is very important. It is impossible to efficiently lead a raid without being respected, but at the same time, you have to be able to command that respect. Toward your regular members, you have to show that you’re intelligent and logical first and foremost.

“No one trusts a Raid leader who can’t play his own class. You have to show that you know how the encounters and logistics of this game work, not just doing things on the fly and winging it. You have to show you know the rationale behind what you do.”

Thinking and being logical are qualities I greatly respect, and Ushas just keeps nailing it. He says, “Knowing how to handle situations is important, and also knowing how to look at more than just the surface is as well.”

He goes on to say, “I’ve known a lot of raid leaders who just knee-jerk react to the first thing that looks like it’s wrong when a wipe occurs. ‘The Tank died, Healers you need to pick it up.’ When in reality, the melee may have been taking unnecessary damage, diverting heals. It’s important to be able to look under the surface of a given situation and find the true meaning, but it also requires strong knowledge of the games mechanics and logistics.”

Giving orders

I wonder does this focus on logic effect how you boss around people?

“Logic and making them understand the rationale behind everything is the most important. I try to never make a decision without explaining rationally why or why not to do it. Whether its a policy decision, a strategy decision, or a interpersonal decision-as long as you present your rationale in a clear defined argument, the only thing that people can disagree with you on is opinion.”

Being a human, even if you’re undead

“At the same time, you don’t want to be a machine,” continues Ushas. “You want people to know you’re a human, and be able to laugh and joke with them as well, especially on farm and other non-focus bosses. I try to be kind and just one of the guys with people on trash and other stuff, then buckle into leadership mode when we need to focus, then afterwards right back out. When going over a failed strat, remaining calm, professional, and logical are the most important things.”

The officer with a grudge

Lastly I ask if and how he has to deal with any fallout between guild leaders and regular members, which I notice in guilds when an officer just holds a grudge against a member.

“My Officers have a clear understanding of how I want them to handle personal relations. If they conduct themselves in a way I don’t agree with when raid leading or handling a conflict, I am very terse with them. If an Officer is yelling and screaming at members, they’re sternly reprimanded by me and removed if it continues. But if a member is just being butthurt when an Officer calls them out, I tell them to suck it up and fix the problems. It’s all situational judgement calls. In the end, the members have to respect the Officers, and the Officers have to respect the members.”

Video

Spike Flail versus **Algalon 25**, and **Alone in the Darkness**.

Thanks

My thanks to Ushas for investing his time in this interview and for patience over the summer holidays, meaning this was published a month after the interview.

This article is also published on **wowraid.com**.

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August 12th, 2009 |  By: Gravity |  From: Interviews

 Tags: guild, hard mode, hardcore, heroics, interview, leadership, performance, progression, raid, recruitment, situational awareness |

7 comments to Leadership interview: Spike Flail



- Dawg

August 12, 2009 at 4:22 pm · Reply

Absolutely brilliant, thank you both, the guy with the notebook and a pen and Ushas. This will help me out a lot when trying to school a new raidleader for my guild, having work/holiday timeoffs and can't keep up the steady flow of raids by myself. Best of luck for Spike Flail 😊



• Gravity

Twitter: gravitydk

August 12, 2009 at 5:34 pm · Reply

Having a succession plan for yourself is an important thing to do; good on you. Glad you enjoyed the read!



• RJK

August 13, 2009 at 1:47 pm · Reply

I love these interviews!! keep them going!!



• Struan

August 19, 2009 at 6:46 am · Reply

Interesting and concise interview, thanks! Makes me want to join that guild – where the management 'get it'.



• Gravity

Twitter: gravitydk

August 19, 2009 at 8:37 am · Reply

They're pretty impressive eh.

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August 12, 2009 at 5:31 pm · Reply

[...] out far better numbers than your Spriest on most fights. Not an in game accomplishment, but the interview I did for wowraids a month ago finally got posted. Pretty cool publicity!

_____ [...]

- **News pre-Blizzcon | DeathKnight.info**
August 19, 2009 at 5:26 pm · Reply

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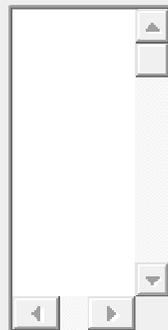
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