

## ***Star Wars Day and Leadership Lessons for the Compliance Professional***

Last Friday, May 4 was Star Wars Day. According to Wikipedia, “May 4 is called Star Wars Day because of the popularity of a common pun spoken on this day. Since the phrase “*May the Force be with you*” is a famous quote often spoken in the Star Wars films, fans commonly say “May the **fourth** be with you” on this day.” So if you are like me and still consider “*Star Wars IV-A New Hope*” to be the first Star Wars movie or if you are of a different age as is my 15 year old daughter who says that the first Star Wars movie was “*Star Wars I-The Phantom Menace*”, I hope the force was with you last Friday.

I thought about this generational dispute in the context of leadership when I read an article in the ***Corner Office Section*** of the Sunday New York Times (NYT), entitled “*How to Adopt Mentors Without Really Asking*”. In the article reporter Adam Bryant interviewed Shellye Archambeau, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of MetricStream, which presented some of the leadership lessons that Archambeau has learned in her business career. I found that some of her points could be used by a compliance professional not only for his or her career but to further the goal of compliance leadership in your company.

### ***Mentoring***

Archambeau related that she had “a lot of mentors, and I just adopted them.” Rather than making a formal request for a person to be her mentor, she began to treat people like her mentors and she said that “it worked very well for me.” To begin such a relationship, she said that she would end a conversation with something along the lines of “I’ve just got a quick question for you. Any thoughts on how...” But the key is to use the information that is presented to you and then to acknowledge the assistance. By telling the person you are trying to recruit as a mentor that the advice was helpful, it gives the mentor a sense of the positive impact of their role and it is more likely that they will be open to having a more formal mentoring relationship.

Luke Skywalker may not have sought out Obi-Wan but he certainly sought out Master Yoda.

### ***Leadership***

Archambeau provided some examples of her leadership style which you may find useful to incorporate into her ideas about leadership into your company’s compliance program. The first is hire the right team but even with the right personnel in place, there must still be an emphasis on leadership. Archambeau discusses a leadership topic at the regular meetings of her senior staff. She stated that “it makes a difference, because through these leadership topics, I get to reinforce our culture, the style and what’s expected.”

She provided two examples of leadership challenges that she has addressed. The first is “don’t be a mama bear.” She explained that, “when people come to you with problems or challenges, don’t automatically solve them. As a mama bear, you want to take care of your cubs, so you tend to be

protective and insulate them against all those things.” However, Archambeau does not believe that such an approach is helpful for an employee because if “you keep solving problems for your people, they don’t learn how to actually solve problems for themselves.” To remedy this ‘mama bear’ tendency, she tries to ask the question or present the issue back to them, saying: “What do you think we should do about it? How do you think we should approach this?”

The second leadership issue that she discussed was one that she called “who’s got the ball?” Archambeau explained “that in sports, and the ball is thrown to you, then you’ve got the ball, and you’re now in control of what happens next. “ This means that not only are you in charge but you own it as well. It is important to establish “who’s got the ball. If you’re in a meeting and you’ve had a great conversation and then everybody leaves, who has the ball? It becomes a very visible concept for making sure that there’s actually ownership to make sure things get done.” However, as important as it is to know who has the ball it is equally as important how you got the ball in the first place? Because it is “one thing if you always catch the ball if people toss it to you. It’s another thing if you are proactively going after that ball. As leaders, you’ve got to make sure that you’re actually going after that ball.”

**(SPOILER ALERT)** Luke and Han Solo may not have initially sought out to destroy the Empire but by the end of the series they certainly were the ones ‘asking for the ball’ when it came to attacking the Death Star.

### ***Leading by Fear***

Archambeau ended by noting that she does not believe that employees do well if the company environment is too harsh. She does not believe that people “when there’s fear. Maybe people aren’t physically afraid, but they feel fear. And when people are afraid, the whole chemistry in their body changes. You just can’t be as successful in that kind of environment. I think the best environments are when you enable people to actually perform their best, but you’re still clear about what’s expected.”

That sounds very much like the Darth Vader School of Leadership where each failure, *ahem*, ‘ended poorly’ for his direct report.

So depending on what generation you are, you may have a different idea about the lessons you might learn from the Star Wars series. For my money, Episodes IV-VI is what Star Wars is all about. But as my 15 year old daughter might say, “Dad, you are just too retro.”

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