Harry Potter and the Mediocre Manager

Julie Todaro

When I was told I was getting a certificate at the ALA Annual Conference in Orlando honoring my *LA&M* columns, I was very flattered but the honor *is* truly mine. I love writing the column. I get to express angst and criticism in public. I get to talk about people I know (and some I don't) in thinly veiled attempts at keeping nonfiction fiction. I get to sound bitter and cute (*I* think), and no one gets the opportunity to comment back. (Immediately anyway, although I do get your e-mails later.) I have fun and the columns mark the years in my life, and–looking back– it's fun to remember "where I was when . . ."

So when I got the call, the first thought was, "Do I get to make a brief speech?" And my second thought was, "Oh, God, I get to make a brief speech. I'm going to have to be witty and brief and not look stupid or forced." So I set about to come up with a perfect acceptance speech given that "you like me, you really like me" had already been taken. I decided to say thank you, it has been a wonderful experience, *and* announce that I had come to the realization that I had traded on popular culture too long (TV, trendy publications, etc.) and that I was committed to publishing serious work. I decided I would then close my certificate acceptance with the announcement of the title to my next column, "Harry Potter and the Mediocre Manager." So that was my speech; it was brief, people laughed, I got my great plaque, and I went back to work at another ALA committee meeting at a hotel (in Orlando, remember) far, far away.

Cut to last month. I return to Texas and, having read 1.5 Harry Potter (HP) books, decide to look up "Harry Potter" on the Web. My thought was to see what others were saying, locate any lists of Potter terms that might be floating around out there and liken them to management words and phrases if possible. I casually Google "Harry Potter" and sit back astounded. In .39 seconds, 6,190,000 hits are identified. And what hits they are. While browsing I find out there are literally hundreds of Web sites devoted to HP and all aspects of HP, including a great site to tell you about all the other sites! In this Potter world I find one official site (as one might imagine) and dozens of other quality and less-than-quality sites that are designed to critique, analyze, sell, and discuss every aspect and then some. There are:

- glossaries (general and specific to type of word discussed; twenty-six at last count);
- an automatic news aggregator;
- gossip about the books;
- gossip about the author;
- gossip about the characters (and the actors who play characters);
- gossip about the movie;
- gossip about future media;
- movie information;
- lesson plans;
- teacher-designed games;
- games designed by all ages of readers and enthusiasts;
- character information;
- book information;
- information about like or similar books;
- speculation about future work;
- sites in a myriad of other languages;
- sales, sales, and more sales;
- and so on and so on.

My point of comparison became measuring the HP Web phenomenon against my bookclub's list of authors and books and the Web information I prepare for them. I was astounded to see more than 200,000 hits for Ayn Rand (the club read *We the Living*) and more than 100,000 hits for *The Scarlet Letter*. Then I thought I would search a variety of popular titles through the years and came up with:

- *Charlotte's Web*, 86,600
- *Cat in the Hat*, 406,000
- *Gone with the Wind*, 471,000
- *In Search of Excellence*, 29,900
- *The Bible* (with quotes 3,340,000; adding "holy" *The Holy Bible*, 235,000; and the *Bible* without quotes is more than 21,000,000)
- *The Thorn Birds*, 3,300

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In addition, I did a search for best-selling books of all times to find out that way too many books identify themselves in this category including the Atkins' diet books and *Interview with a Vampire*. Now obviously Web searches turn up much, much more than specific Web sites devoted to the topics, books, or authors. One of the greatest strengths and one of the greatest weaknesses of the Web is the hit could be the topic or any one of a wide variety of comments, uses of the title inappropriately, or any small mention of the search term in any Web discussion. The main point here, though, is that–exclusive of *The Bible*– Harry Potter is the most mentioned work these days and, in addition,–I am forced to say this–there are many people out there with *way* too much time on their hands.

Anyhoo, I think I can safely say, Potter's world has been dissected with as much detail as the world of management although no one seems to have made the leap to mixing the two worlds and, for example, matching HP words and phrases to management terms. In reviewing HP's twenty-six Web glossaries and the more than one hundred management glossaries out there, however, it's more than possible. One Potter Web site alone (the Harry Potter Lexicon 2000–2004, www.hp-lexicon.org) categorizes and defines the Potter world in a similar way to identifying aspects in a management text:

■   Spell Encyclopedia–management tools and techniques
■   Magic and Magical Theory–management and leadership theory
■   A Wizard's Atlas–geographic and cultural look at management and leadership
■   The Bestiary–major problems and issues in the management world
■   A Who's Who of the Wizarding World–who's who in management
■   Potion Encyclopedia–management techniques and tools
■   A "Sports" Encyclopedia–focuses on Quidditch the game of management
■   Items and Devices of Magic–management systems
■   Wizarding through the Ages–the history of management
■   Lexicon Forum–management definitions
■   Recommended Reading–recommended management reading

So why not a mix of the HP world and the management world? In the HP world is there a management style assessment? Is there an organizational culture? Are management gurus matching individuals to be dealt with in workplaces to Harry Potter characters? And beings? And creatures? Let's take a look.

Reengineering Consultant As Acromantula

HP's Acromantula's is an enormous black spider, capable of human speech. Although it is technically a spider, it is classified as a beast due to its violent nature. It was created through the HP Experimental Breeding program, and its job is to guard a sacred cup. The management consultant who specializes in reengineering is strikingly similar to the Acromantula. And although reengineering is not the term in vogue these days, there are consultants who are brought in to downsize or "right size." Their goal is to guard the sacred budget.

Boggart As a Dictatorial Manager

Dictatorial managers manage primarily through fear. Although the style is often necessary for a very short-term, time-sensitive, and possible staffing-confidential-issue situation with a you-need-to-do-what-I-say approach, no one feels the full-time dictatorial manager or a full-time dictatorial management style is successful. Using only a management style of fear of reprisal is inappropriate, and employees and interview teams should beware: often managers interview as another style of manager and revert to the dictatorial style. A good comparison is the Boggart, a shape shifter who takes the form of the thing most feared by the person it encounters. They aren't easy to identify since they are shape-shifting constantly and they feed on other beings' fears as well as on the fear they deliver. Sadly, often dictatorial managers are clever in their use of fear and also–as the Boggart–use the specific fear that they sense in the individual.

Centaur As the Typical Reclusive or Passive-Aggressive Employee

There are employees who, very much like the mysterious Centaur, move through the work place avoiding all other employees. (Centaurs avoid Muggles and Wizards alike.) These employees know what's going on and what might happen but do not take sides in any issue. They don't want to take part in management issues–even if it involves them–and have no intention of being managers at any time. (Not that there's anything wrong with that!) Centaurs see into the future by reading the skies, do not take any part in the events around them, and want no part in governing. They have chosen to be categorized as beasts who do not govern.

Fluffy As Your "In Your Own World" Employee

Long an issue in libraries, many managers are at odds with employees who have to have music playing during the work day. A simple issue? No. Are they doing their job? Are they keeping other people from doing their job? What music do they listen to? How loud should it be? And so on. Fluffy is

a three-headed dog who is dangerous but is subdued from dangerous behavior by playing constant music.

Fwooper As the Constantly Talking Employee

There are many people (some of whom may be your employees) who—as we like to say—do *not* have an unexpressed thought. No *constant* discussion, no matter how relevant, can be withstood in any locale, much less the captive-audience environment of the workplace. Fwoopers are brightly colored birds whose constant song drives anyone around them insane. These birds are sold, in HP's world, with a Silencing Charm. 'Nuff said.

Glumbumble As I'm-Sad-and-You-Should-Be-Too Employee

Sometimes it's not enough that someone is sad or depressed. They must make those around them sad and depressed as well. The Glumbumble is a insect who is furry and magical and produces a fluid that causes sadness and melancholy in all around them. Granted, Glumbumble fluid is an antidote to hysteria in HP land . . . but now I'm beginning to sound like them!

Niffler As Info-Tech Staff Person

Having one or more Niffler's on staff is never a bad thing. This "employee" is attracted to things that are shiny, and they are also used to find treasure in unlikely places. That's the way I think of my info-tech people. They love the shiny metal object and—if talented in this direction—can be the invaluable staff person who finds (and typically maintains) the treasures in hardware and software.

In reviewing Harry Potter potions there are several I want for the workplace as well.

- Beautifying Potion—selfish thoughts only on this one
- Aging Potion—that's what the workplace does for me
- Cleaning Solutions—seem to work on a variety of things . . . would that we had that one!
- Confusing Concoction—have that one already . . . it's called budget time and not to be confused with "strategic planning concoction" but more similar to the Confusing and Befuddlement Draught
- Elixir of Life—similar to latte at my place or my favorite: TAB!
- Although HP also has Exploding Fluid, I need non-exploding fluid and choose instead to focus on either the HP Forgetfulness Potion or the more popular Draft of Peace.

Spells I think would be amusing and also necessary for a variety of reasons include:

- The Canary Transfiguration Hex—although temporary, what a wonderful message to send to those who annoy you
- Conjured Items or Conjuring Spells is an interesting spell (creates objects out of thin air) and is absolutely critical to supplement my professional development budget, among other things
- Magical Contracts are a wonderful thing. Just think! You make a bargain to spread support for [insert here: increased e-resource budget, new furniture, print budget] over three years and the powers that be can't break the deal! It will be a first.

Finally, HP-ville had a feather-light spell I would like for my briefcase, my purse, and my thighs . . . and a nice gripping spell I need for my grasp on reality and so many more. What fun!