COMMUNITY Management

Lessons learned when balancing
community concerns and a united vision

Background

- Community is an offshoot of two other communities

- Wanted to avoid the same mistakes as the previous ones

- Wanted a shared setting with different ongoing narratives that all contributed to one, overarching narrative

I had a friend named dumont who was a great RPer, beloved by the community, and a good friend. She was threatened with Doxxing by neo-nazi players from the site we were on at the time. She reasonably thought that she could go to the site's administration for help with this and brought plenty of screenshots. Their response was to inform the neo-nazis that a complaint had been filed against them by Dumont, and then they proceeded to take no action for a week. It wasn't until the end of that week that I finally heard about what had happened and by then it was way too late. Dumont basically fled the internet, and the community broke up.

Here is an example of a site staff that has failed to be good site leaders and failed to be good human beings. It is an unfortunate story because it didn't have to happen, but every step along the way was badly handled.

1) Have a process
2) Have the right people
3) Act on your process
4) Be willing to ban people

Written Rules

And why written rules are important: We've found players get nervous when they don't know what to expect. If you report a problem you want to know something is being done about it. Letting players stew in silence when something is going on that they really care about can lead to players getting mad, leaving, or continually reaching out to check which can be distracting.

Foundations

- Vision statement: The desired future position of an organization
  - "We want to build a community that inspires its members through the power of fiction and create a positive and enjoyable environment."
- Mission statement: More concrete objectives and how to achieve them
  - "To provide a science-fantasy role-playing platform and coordinate efforts of game-masters to build a cohesive narrative in one shared-setting."
- Combined, the two should inform every administrative decision
  - Vision statement example: banning political discussion beyond the necessities of worldbuilding to avoid unproductive conflicts. Politics isn't what we do on THIS server, so we guide that discussion to other locations.
  - Mission statement example: creating a clear separation between hard and soft canon to maintain setting cohesion

buildDEAN a foundation for our community

Here is what we came up with to manage our site. Keep in mind this is just our example of what works for us. You can imagine we're about 5-6 ships in size so we are trying to manage a small fleet. This means our staff can't be expected to remember everything, and not everyone has a close relationship with each player.

The first thing we want to do is get our staff all on the same page with our goals. Constant talking with one another helps, but we also wanted to have something concrete and that comes in the form of a Vision and Mission statement. (READ STATEMENTS)

How does this help bring our staff together?

Politics example: This is probably a super thorny question for everyone and you can easily see how talking politics can cause people to blow up at one another. Even banning politics is itself a political statement. So what do we do? We can look back at our vision statement and say "Hey, IRL politics is out of scope for what we're trying to do". Our staff don't want to burn all their energy trying to moderate those discussions. Instead we found the most productive thing we can do is guide people to servers where they can discuss this stuff freely. Other topics that are a bit less volatile and more fit the sci-fi goal of our site end up getting places on our discord to discuss.

Rules for Making Rules

- We use a top-down approach: rules drafted from the highest echelons of leadership, sent down to game masters, ending at the community at large for review and approval
- Such a process instills confidence in both the rules that govern and the leadership that enforces it

Why Y tho?

This works for us because of our community's size. We have too many people to have an open door policy on rules, rules discussions can quickly get bogged down in what-if scenarios and the discussion quickly gets away from whatever problem we're trying to solve. We found this gives us that focused burst we need to create a solution to a problem, and also lets the community get a say so we can get feedback on the rule before it gets put into play.

"But what about people who want to write rules who aren't staff" You might say? Well these people tend to make themselves known, and are usually great candidates to bring on board with more authority.

Topics We Addressed

- Basic code of conduct
- Clear definitions of staff roles
- Punishment for violation of rules
- Setting element creation rules and guidelines

We spent a year figuring out what rules needed to be written. Here's a list of topics we've addressed. In no way is this cumulative; we're still finding out new items that need to be addressed, and you should have processes to accommodate implementing new rules.

Don't worry about getting the rules right the first time. You can always change your rules. What we are seeking to develop for our community is consistency. We've found that one of the major complaints brought forward in the communities we've been a part of is that staff don't do what they say they are going to do. This very quickly destroys trust, which in turn leads to people leaving.
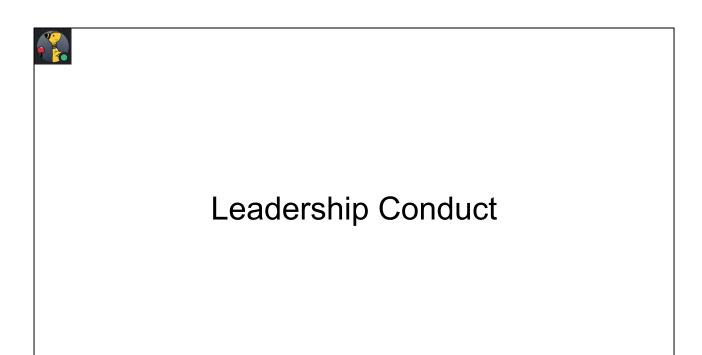
Example: Species Creation Requirement

- The rule claimed: sentient species created must all be humanoid
- The issue: such a rule was never properly documented and was born out of a staff call, and was informed to the community in a simple discord text message, in conversation

Ultimately this was an example of us doing everything wrong.

1) We didn't follow our rules about making rules. This damaged the trust between our community and staff for a variety of reasons, the most clear one being the rule never got written down so everyone had their own idea of what the rule meant.

2) We didn't consider our mission statement. Players rightly said that this rule doesn't make a lot of sense for what we wanted to do.By trying to solve a not-problem we ended up creating one.

Leadership Conduct

Governing Philosophy

- Rule by democracy and law
  - Cannot trust staff to always make the right decision
  - Elections and documentation keep flawed leadership accountable for actions
- Maximize transparency
  - While private discussions are necessary, it's preferable to include as many people in the decision making process as possible

GovernDEAN philosophy

Don't cut corners just because it is expedient. It may be tempting to cut a vote short because it isn't getting a lot of activity but players need to trust that you will do what you say. If you commit to doing something on a particular day, stick by that commitment.

Traits of Good Day-to-Day Leadership

- Communication with the community at a peer-to-peer level
- Good, general learning and critical thinking skills
  - Willingness to listen and learn in the first place
  - Consider strong explanations for received information and provide the same with delivered information
- Participation in community activities
  - If IRL responsibilities prevent frequent involvement, consider passing leadership to someone else
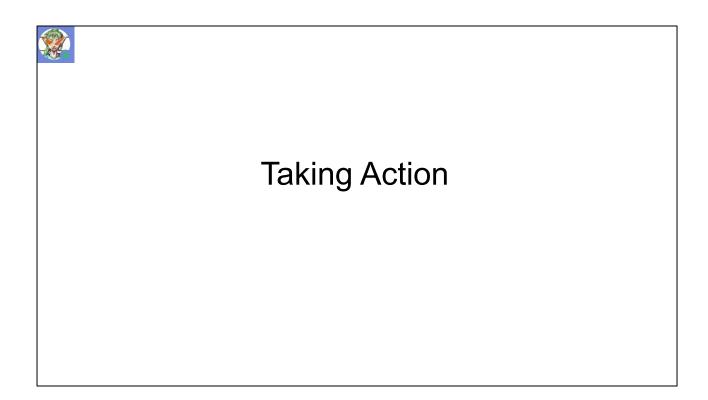
Example: Elections

- Background: Community managers are elected positions and a date and duration were set
- Said information was announced, drafted in the rules
- Turnout slowed down less than half way through duration, a person in leadership wanted to cut the election short
- Said person was denied, as leadership as a whole cited such action setting a dangerous precedent of bending the rules when convenient.

SOUTH PARK WINS!
END OF YEAR PICNIC, IMPLIES "WESTERN THEME

Taking Action

Rules don't help if you don't use them

- Set Expectations
- Don't leave players waiting forever
- Be willing to make the tough calls

Just like in life, you need to manage expectations. People don't like uncertainty, especially when it comes to something that they care a lot about. If someone comes to you with a problem and you can't solve it on the spot, at the very least let them know when you will get back to them. Even if you don't have an answer for them then, at the very least speak with them again and reset that expectation

For disciplinary actions, it is critical to take action. Ignoring something like doxxing threats is the same thing as supporting the people doing the Doxxing.

It is understandable that you might not want to ban someone who is an active player, but if you let bad players continue with their bad behavior then very soon all you will have is bad players. Most good players won't tell you that they hate something, you'll just see them post less often and eventually they won't post at all. Don't let one bad apple spoil the whole barrel.

How does this translate to Simming?

If everyone knows everyone in your group (about 6ish people) you might not need all these rules but it would be helpful to write down rulings.

A lot of the leadship traits apply as well. Good communication, a willingness to learn, and participation in what you're doing. This instills confidence and gives people who don't have leadership positions a sense of stability.

Q&A

Questions?

Answers!

Q: When you're in a small organization and there is someone above you who does something wrong (or in voloation of the rules/general bad thing), but you're not the person who's in power, how do you deal with that?

A: Try giving direct feedback on what problem you're having, and try to involve as many people in your group as possible in finding a solution. Consider using strategies for giving feedback like the compliment sandwhich