

In a Galaxy Far, Far Away...



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Each month I'm charged with writing a thought-provoking column on a PEO-related topic. Well, after reading my ramblings below, you might say to yourself, "What a stretch," and you might be right!

I recently had a heartwarming experience that actually renewed my faith in mankind. Now that I've got your attention, my son Zachary and I attended the Star Wars fan convention—"Celebration 2019"—in mid-April at McCormick Place in Chicago, Illinois.

Before you label me as a Star Wars fan, let me give you the back story. Star Wars was released in 1977 and I was 18 years old at the time.

Anyone from that era will remember that everywhere you looked, there were kids wielding toy light sabers above their heads as they battled their imaginary foes to defend the Rebellion. To top it off, in 1977 electronic technology was limited, therefore, realism was kid-powered. Each Jedi had to produce his or her own laser-like sounds to emulate a light saber moving through the air. I bet ChapStick sales went through the roof that year.

It was then I vowed that if I ever had kids, I would *never* buy them any of that Star Wars #*)%! Well, you know what happens next. Twelve years later, Zachary is born; five years after that, he sees his first Star Wars film, and two seconds later I'm standing in line at the toy store making George Lucas even richer than he already was.

Time Travel

Fast forward... Zack has always had on his bucket list for us to attend a Star Wars convention together. So, in 2019 he made it happen (I paid). Now, I thought I knew what to expect: A group of eccentric, self-declared geeks who for all intents and purposes would be described as needing to "get a life." If you didn't know better, and I didn't, you would assume that all these people come together in costume, much like a Halloween party, and the only difference is that it's all Star Wars themed. Further, you would assume that once you've seen one Darth Vader you've seen them all. The same would hold true for the Luke Skywalkers, Princess Leias, R2-D2s, C-3POs, and Storm Troopers of the world. Wow, was I ever wrong.

First of all, I have attended my share of mass-consciousness events like music festivals and rock concerts, but none compare to the pure joy I witnessed on the faces of these attendees. You might ask, what about people who go to sporting events like football or NASCAR—they're happy and don't tell me otherwise! The difference is, those events have a winner and a loser, and sometimes referees or fans who voice their displeasure. In the case of the Celebration attendees, they were all



Zack and Barron

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on the same team and celebrating their love for a common theme.

I consider myself a self-declared scholar of humanity and I was truly blown away by these people. Even the drudgery of standing in line was a pleasure because of the atmosphere of joy and comradery. You were encouraged to make friends with the person next to you and share your personal Star Wars story: Where are you from, when did you first become a fan, who is your favorite character, and did you make your costume? No one asked me the latter, as Levis and Nikes haven't yet appeared in any of the films.

As I wandered around the convention hall for two days, I overheard conversations of the other attendees congratulating one another on their costumes or spreading tips about how to make a certain accessory. No secrets, no jealousy or judgments—just enthusiasm for each other and being present in what had to be on that day the greatest and happiest place on earth.

A Lesson in Diversity

At first glance, it's a sea of 50,000 people, many of whom are dressed up like characters in the films. Once you look a little closer, you suddenly realize they are all the same, yet different. From Jabba the Hutt to Chewbacca, their differences are celebrated. I saw a very authentic group of Storm Troopers patrolling the convention center and suddenly standing out in the crowd was a Storm Trooper with feminine blue fur horns adorning her helmet. I always assumed that all Storm Troopers were males, but just as that stereotype was broken, I saw numerous transgender Princess Leia characters celebrating their individuality. Not only were all of



these characters confident in themselves, but people like me were stopping them to take their pictures. This is one of those times when a picture is worth a thousand words.

The Force and the PEO industry

The culture I witnessed firsthand could not have been artificially created.

It could only have been achieved by pure hearts

gathering together for the greater good of humankind. Like the Force, it comes from within. Our PEO community reminds me a lot of the Star Wars community, as we all have a joy and passion for the industry with a common goal of the greater good. Let me just come out and say it—and it was a surprise to me—but experiencing a Star Wars convention is to witness the best in humanity.

May the Force be with you. ●

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