

How Three Teams Prepared for Major Change...and Thrived



WP Engine, the world's leading WordPress digital experience platform, has an amazing organizational culture. Based in Texas, the company received over 10 awards in 2017 and was recently named [company of the year](#), [one of the best places to work in Austin](#), and [one of the best workplaces for millennials](#). It's this magical ingredient that contributed to WP Engine securing \$250M in funding from the global leader in technology investing, Silver Lake. In the future, this will help WP Engine further accelerate its investment as a workplace of choice for its employees.

Recently, WP Engine shared the story of three managers who recognized that their teams were about to go through some organizational changes and that their responsibility was to facilitate this change, in advance and in a way that was most helpful to their teams.

The story was so powerful that we wanted to share their experience and success with the broader Arbinger community.

Foundation: The Managers' Outward

Mindsets

The managers knew that to effectively facilitate change in their teams, they needed to have an outward mindset themselves. They needed to see their team members as people and, from this perspective, really get curious about their teams' needs, challenges, and objectives.

So the managers got together and thought about the ways they could help their teams. They wondered about what challenges this change could cause and what their teams might need from them and each other.

Here's What They Came Up With

The Nature of Our Work

The managers brought their teams together—about 10 people in total—and together reviewed two main concepts:

1. The nature of our work is to *help others through our work*. The impact on others of what we do and what we produce matters more than anything else.
2. We want to have a positive impact in all directions: toward our customers, peers, co-workers, managers, and direct reports.

Meeting to Learn

After this review, the teams organized to learn more about those impacted by their work. The teams gathered in one group, and their managers in another. Each group spent about 30 minutes *just learning* about the other group's work, challenges, measures of success, goals, and needs.

Meeting to Give

As often is the case, when we listen deeply to others, we find ways to help. We find opportunities that we were not previously alive to. And these opportunities to help are often different in key ways from the “help” we might be accustomed to. Because it is borne from responsiveness to a deep understanding of another person’s (or group of people’s) needs, our help doesn’t feel like extra work or a burden to us. Rather, it’s enlivening and engaging—sometimes even exciting.

“Helpfulness isn’t a formula. It is instead borne from a commitment to be both open and responsive to the needs of others. There is not a formula but there is a discipline.” – Hans Armknecht, WP Engine Manager of Performance and Leadership Development

This was exactly what happened for these three managers’ teams.

The Short Term Impact

From the brief time these teams spent together, they developed several concrete ways to accomplish their own goals while also being more helpful to those who depend on them. The most important change was a joint monthly meeting dedicated to helping the other teams.

This meeting is a monthly and structured continuation of the work done in the Meet to Learn/Meet to Give session. During the meeting, each team focuses on the others, asking questions like:

1. What is happening that we should know about?
2. What about your role is difficult today?
3. Is our help truly helpful?
4. How can we be even more helpful to you?

In another example, one employee created a brown bag training for one of the other teams. This happened without manager intervention: managers were out for a bit, and the employee simply developed the training because he thought it would be helpful.

The Lasting Effects

One of the three managers reported, “The impact of holding these meetings on a regular basis has been transformative. The whole mindset of the team has changed. And it’s showing up on a daily basis and in ways that we didn’t expect. It’s still evolving. We’re excited to see how this happens with our teams and what happens next.’

Other effects the managers have seen include:

1. Outward mindset is becoming part of the teams’ DNA, allowing them to maintain momentum. Mindset is becoming part of the team culture.
2. The teams have created and reinforced a safe space to talk about what is hard. They have become better at talking about what they need and providing critiques without causing resistance or defensiveness. Even better, people engage in these conversations proactively, not reactively or after the fact.
3. Team members are now talking with each other first rather than immediately approaching their managers to fix things and deal with issues that arise.

[Hans Armknecht](#) leads Leadership Development and Performance Management at WP Engine, voted one of the best places to work in Austin 4 years in a row. At the heart of his work building WP Engine’s culture is a commitment to community, connection, and understanding that unlocks new approaches and opportunities for employees to thrive. Learn more and connect with Hans [here](#).