

Systematizing Human Connections to Maintain Culture



This month, we're celebrating and learning from global technology and services company [WP Engine](#). Based in Texas, the company was recently named [one of the best places to work in Austin](#) and [one of the best workplaces for millennials](#).

In our [first post](#), we wrote about one way WP Engine has built human connectivity into their systems, bringing understanding and collaboration to the business even as they rapidly grow.

And rapidly growing they are. With roughly 50 employees only four years ago, they now have almost 500 spread across six offices in four countries around the world.

WP Engine has found that systematizing connections between teams helps dramatically improve collaboration. Here, we highlight three of these systems.

Interestingly, because WP Engine's philosophy is to empower its people to generate their own ideas about what will work best for their teams, the systems have shown up in different ways across the company.

System 1: Lunchmeets

The first system we're highlighting, the Lunchmeet program, makes it easy for employees to meet new people and build stronger networks across the company.

The program started when computer engineers at WP Engine got together for a two-day "hackathon" to build an app to allow co-workers who may not interact very often to have lunch with one another. Employees sign up in the app, which then runs in the background, pulls from the employee database, and pairs people for lunch. Once people are paired, they email back and forth to schedule lunch at their convenience.

So far, more than 80 employees have opted into the program. They meet at their own preferred cadence, from weekly to monthly, and have held 210 Lunchmeets!

The networking effect of this program is remarkable, as more and more people get to know one another:



System 2: Meet-to-Learn with External Partners

Maintaining strong relationships with external partners is critical to WP Engine's business. One key partner has offices just down the street from WP Engine's headquarters.

To get to know its partners better, one WP Engine team invited three of the partner's higher-level staff members to their office for an afternoon "Meet-to-Learn" session. In a Meet-to-Learn, as the name suggests, people meet with the single goal of learning as much as possible about one another. To do this, they get really curious about the other people's objectives, challenges, needs, and headaches.

The WP Engine team recognized that many departments across the company—sales, IT, marketing, and more—worked closely with these external partners. Working with an outward mindset, they saw it would be far more helpful to include these other departments in the Meet-to-Learn rather than meet with the external partners alone. So they invited the other departments, for a total of about 30 people!

A few weeks later, the WP Engine teams reconvened without the external partner for a follow-up conversation. Everyone shared their takeaways and learnings, then described how they would change their work to be more helpful to the partner agency. All the WP Engine teams said the experience was helpful and would allow them to do their work more effectively.

Importantly, just because we change our way of working does not mean we are doing more work, or that we're putting forward more effort. (Sometimes this is the case, but not always.) From this Meet-to-Learn, WP Engine discovered they were about to start a project for the external partner that the partner did not want! As one WP Engine employee said, "We were working on creating a custom online training program when what the

partner really wanted was for us just to walk down the street to talk to them. We were about to put all this energy into developing a solution they didn't really want, and we were able to stop it."

System 3: Ambassadors Program

This program arose from WP Engine's commitment to maintaining its culture and staff cohesiveness as teams grew and their work evolved. As with any organization, the larger the teams and the more complex the work, the more important it became to dedicate time to cultivating and maintaining cross-team relationships and to align on goals and objectives. For the full Ambassadors Program story, please read [this post](#).

To improve their communication and collaboration, two WP Engine teams held a Meet-to-Learn as described above, then designed the Ambassadors program to sustain the momentum gained from the session. In the program, one person from each team (the ambassador) attends the other team's weekly meeting for one month. The ambassador's role is *not* to represent their own team, but to listen and learn about the other team so they can represent that perspective in their own team's meetings. They do not aim to influence the other team or justify their own team's actions. Instead, they aim to help their own team understand the other team's projects, goals, and pain points.

Summary

Through these three (and other) programs, WP Engine has discovered that there is both a spirit to an outward mindset and a discipline. In these instances, the discipline comes from creating opportunities for people, teams, and partners to join together, learn from each other, and become more alive to the ways they can help others through their own work.

What ways do you and your organization create opportunities

for these kinds of connections?

About WP Engine

WP Engine is the world's leading WordPress digital experience platform that gives enterprises and agencies the agility, performance, intelligence, and integrations they need to drive their business forward faster. WP Engine's combination of tech innovation and an award-winning team of WordPress experts are trusted by over 70,000 companies across 130 countries to provide counsel and support, helping brands create world-class digital experiences. Founded in 2010, WP Engine is headquartered in Austin, Texas, and has offices in San Francisco, California; San Antonio, Texas; London, England; and Limerick, Ireland.