

How to Improve Collaboration When Your Company is Growing Fast



[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](#).

They are also growing quickly. With roughly 50 employees only four years ago, they now have almost 500.

This rapid growth makes maintaining their culture a top priority. WP Engine has found that systematizing connections between teams helps dramatically improve collaboration and, consequently, business results. A future blog post will describe a few ways they've systematized connections. This post will focus on one in particular: the Ambassadors Program.

Two Teams, One Customer

WP Engine has two teams that support the same customers in different ways. Although they work with the same clients, the teams often have different needs and distinctive philosophies

about how to serve those clients. These differences can provide very helpful checks and balances on the relationship, contributing to their world-class Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 72.

When the company was small, friction between these teams was easily remedied. Everyone knew each other well and could simply lean over the aisle or walk down the hall to gain clarity or pose a question.

As WP Engine and their teams grew, however, these human connections took increased discipline to maintain. Staff thought it was very important to sustain the company's "start-up style" collaboration and not fall into silos.

An Opportunity to Help Things go Right

To address this issue, the teams' two leaders met with their internal Arbinger facilitator to design a path that would allow their teams to work in a way that was not only mutually beneficial but also advanced their customers' needs. They wanted to be sure that WP Engine didn't develop one of those cultures that tends to ignore, avoid, or abandon the potentially valuable learning opportunities that enable growth and innovation.

The leaders decided to bring the teams together for a series of activities, with the goal of working with an outward mindset. After a brief introduction to inward and outward mindsets, the teams broke into small groups to conduct "Meet-to-Learn" sessions with one another. In these sessions, they told one another about their needs, challenges, and objectives. They talked about the metrics they tracked, as metrics were driving some of the teams' differing priorities and decisions. And they considered how they might be adding to one another's challenges.

Then each team thought about how they might do their own work in a way that would be more helpful to the other.

The teams found this initial Meet-to-Learn very helpful, but wanted more. They wanted to develop the Meet-to-Learn into a way of working rather than a one-and-done event.

So they developed the Ambassadors Program.

Sustaining the Change

In the Ambassadors 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 seek to help their own team understand the other team's projects, goals, and pain points.

The Results

The Ambassadors Program has helped strengthen the human element between the two teams. When a problem arises related to the other team, ambassadors can provide context or a balancing perspective. They can speak to the intent behind actions that might be perceived negatively. They can acknowledge the other team's creativity and effort in trying to do their jobs better.

These perspectives have significantly improved how the teams see and work with each other. One team member said, "[Before this program], there were a few times when I simply could not get on the same page as my coworkers from another team. But, in seeing their metrics, what they care about, and how they're working to protect our business...I saw that despite our differences my coworkers were very much in alignment with our

team and our goal of having the customer's best interest at heart."

In addition to these relational benefits, the Ambassadors Program has generated improvements in team performance. Because ambassadors attend both teams' meetings, they can highlight opportunities to collaborate rather than duplicate effort. Both teams save time and effort. Win-win.

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.