



## WP Engine's Employee Experience (HR) Team uses 15Five to enhance employee communication and performance



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*Not only from a product perspective, but having a philosophical alignment around transparency is why we believed 15Five would be a great partner. Their commitment to an open dialogue, to having us be able to influence the product roadmap, and grow together distinguishes them in the industry.”*

Erin Barber  
Vice President of Employee Experience

WP Engine's mission is to help its customers win online. Its digital experience platform for WordPress gives companies of all sizes the agility, performance, integrations and intelligence tools they need to drive their business forward faster. And when your product is responsible for powering half a million digital experiences across the globe, you need a workforce that's as confident and motivated as it is skilled.

Erin Barber, Vice President of Employee Experience, and Sarah Randall, People Operations Manager, are directly responsible for this mandate. That's why their



### ABOUT

WP Engine offers the leading digital experiences platform for WordPress, the world's most popular content management system. WP Engine serves more than 85,000 customers across over 140 countries. Five percent of the web visits a WP Engine-powered site every day.

### INDUSTRY

Information technology and services

### BENEFITS

- Increases communication frequency and effectiveness.
- Manages expectations around individual performance and growth.
- Reorients review process from retrospective to forward-looking.
- Modernizes employee-management tools and processes.

team convinced Senior Leadership to break from the traditional performance review cycle in late 2015. Though they acknowledged the risk in dropping this ingrained HR “safety net,” its challenges clearly outweighed the benefits:

1. Despite the level of effort, traditional reviews were not an effective tool for managing performance in a timely fashion.
2. Performance ratings hindered meaningful conversations.
3. Employees wanted to talk about development and growth, not just past performance.

Quite simply, traditional reviews weren't getting the job done. Managers needed a better way to invest their time when it came to assessing their employees' performance. Relying on them to reactively adjust their communications on their own wouldn't work, and Erin and Sarah realized they needed to provide them with proactive tools to improve this dynamic.

## RESETTING DIRECTION

The answer to their challenge wasn't more reviews. Rather, it involved more clarity around roles, expectations, and goal-setting, which required an adjustment to HR's entire approach to performance.

Erin and Sarah therefore put the entire strategy planning process under the microscope. This involved mapping out exactly how they wanted employees and managers to feel about their performance and development opportunities,

and what they wanted their impact on the company to be. Four core components emerged to serve as the basis for the criteria driving their evaluation of HR software solutions that would help them accomplish these things:

- Ongoing feedback
- Peer feedback
- Developmental feedback (self & manager reviews)
- Objective setting

Using this framework to review their options, it became clear that 15Five most closely aligned with their updated priorities. WP Engine had already trialed 15Five's Weekly Check-In and Objectives (OKRs), so Erin and Sarah were familiar with its philosophy in this area:

- Traditional performance reviews are primarily retrospective
- Looking backward and recapping are not as effective as looking ahead
- Self-Reviews emphasize how employees want to grow and what they should focus on going forward

Based on this synergy, the positive experience with their trial, and their

appreciation of 15Five's strong principles and transparency with its clients, they knew they'd found the right Performance Management partner.

## LAUNCHING A NEW SOLUTION

Erin and Sarah eased into this new era of performance management for WP Engine. Rather than jumping in with full reviews right away, they began with regular check-ins. This gave the organization time to develop new habits and incorporate 15Five into their regular cadence of work, which built trust when it came time to begin reviews. It also built trust in 15Five throughout the organization so that, when reviews did begin, employees knew what to expect during those conversations.

Over time, WP Engine established a regular cadence of individual and group communications that have led to more productive discussions throughout the year. As Sarah expressed, "It's one thing for a company to say you should always be having ongoing conversations and give that feedback in the moment, but this really was a tool to help facilitate that." Such communications included:

**TOWN HALL:** Takes place every Thursday and includes HR-related updates, reminders about their core pillars, and reinforcement of their new culture of 2-way feedback.

**CHECK-INS:** While check-ins every 2 weeks are the expectation, some groups have started doing them even more often.

**1-ON-1S:** Although not initially required, manager adoption occurred organically as they recognized the positive impact on communications with their employees.

**BEST-SELF REVIEWS:** Full reviews occur every 6 months and have become more efficient as a result of ongoing dialog about critical issues throughout the year.

**HIGH FIVES:** Continued celebration of coworkers through digital high fives, recognizing global counterparts for their impact on the organization.

## ENJOYING POSITIVE CHANGE

WP Engine began seeing results in the first year of implementation. Not only have Erin, Sarah, and their team successfully drawn people into the new system, they've achieved true staying power. The numbers so far bear this out:

- 65% ongoing Check-In utilization
- 91% Self-Review completion
- Overwhelming majority vote to adopt digital High Fives
- Improved survey metrics in areas such as, "I know how my performance is measured"



Time savings has also been part of the net effect. The Employee Experience team specifically discouraged managers from writing more than a few bullets or paragraphs coming out of reviews. Since they're flagging and addressing issues as they arise through regular Check-Ins and 1-on-1s, there's no need for lengthy reviews, instead, this gives managers the ability to focus on meaningful conversations related to development.

later experienced the difference for herself. "I love it! I've been able to let go of my old processes I used to do in Google, and I do all my 1-on-1 notes through 15Five." Hearing this was music to HR's ears given how instant adoption by engineering and product teams is rare, with full-on adoration even rarer.

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*The core essence of the check-in process has been very sticky with employees.”*

Erin Barber  
Vice President of Employee Experience

Feedback from newly hired employees is another unofficial barometer for program success. Since launching, WP Engine's workforce has grown by 25% to 530 employees. As Erin has noticed, 15Five's platform consistently makes an instant impression. "I hear all the time from new employees 'That's awesome, I wish we had something like this at my previous company.'"

Excitement is spreading to other areas of the organization as well. Director of Software Engineering Jessica Underbrink didn't participate in the pilot, but ultimately went all-in when she

## ABOUT 15FIVE

15Five is a continuous performance management solution that helps employees grow and develop, in just 15 minutes each week. Through a lightweight weekly check-in, 15Five delivers everything a manager needs to impact employee performance, including continuous feedback, objectives (OKR) tracking, recognition, 1-on-1s, and 360° reviews.

To learn more, visit

[www.15Five.com](http://www.15Five.com)