

Look what we did

by Jason Cohen on January 2, 2017

“How does it feel to have created two unicorns?” I don’t know; I only know what it feels like to start them, and then work with amazing people who collectively create the result.



“You must be so proud of what you created”—the reflexive conclusion delivered by visitors to [our building at WP Engine](#), struck by a beautiful place teeming with energy and activity, when they happen upon the little office of the founder.

“What *we* created,” I always respond. It’s not false humility. I *didn’t* create this. There are over four hundred people creating it even as we speak. [As of 2024, it’s now 1,200]. I haven’t even been the CEO for [2024: more than a decade].

“WP Engine is an oak tree,” I explain. “I was the seed. The tree wouldn’t exist without the seed, so the seed *was* important, and holds a special and permanent place in the history of the tree. But nothing you see today is the seed. The tree is a network of branches and cells and leaves and roots. Things externally obvious, and things not obvious until you are part of the tree yourself.

“Things you can see are sales-calls and trade-show booths and product launches and an incredible tech support experience; things you cannot are the 3am security upgrade and the start of a long-term new product category and brand strategy and collecting accounts receivable

and quarterly financial reporting and a wide-spread but unreproducible bug that was caught before it was ever deployed because of a mature quality practice.

“It is all vital to the life of the tree.”

What I don’t usually do is talk about the future. Not with strangers, at least.

In the future, the oak tree drops acorns for decades if not centuries, but eventually is wholly returned to the soil.

Similarly, each person at WP Engine will eventually leave. I hope not for years to come—we have so much more to do—but it is inevitable. They are the acorns, sometimes birthing their own trees, more often joining another to strengthen and grow in symbiosis.

Some already have. Some started their own companies—not just in tech, but in salsas and comic books and consulting. Some joined others, from niche wonderful small companies to the largest resume-enhancing AlphaMicroMetaFlixZons of the world.

Some used their success to be the first of their family to buy a house. Some were the first of their family to travel internationally. Some were the first of their family to attend college. Some arrived with one career and left with another, with more responsibility and making 10x more money than they ever thought possible.

It’s up to all of us to make sure each person will look back on their time at WP Engine as well-spent. Were they proud of the work they did? Did they grow as a person, as well as professionally? Did they have an impact on others’ lives, where they helped the next generation thrive as they have? Were they gratified by how they played an important role in the lives of our customers?

Did any of it matter?

If we can answer in the affirmative, it was all worth it. All mighty trees inevitably dissolve into their base elements, to be recombined by and for the next generation. The purpose of a company—or a life—resides in the journey, not in the end.

Seeds, branches, leaves, roots, cells, and all.

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