

The Workplace Wisdom Retreat

Gerald R. Wagner, PhD.

The [Workplace Wisdom Retreat](#) is a one-of-a-kind opportunity to lean back, network, and share stories about the why-and-how of creating and maintaining great workplace cultures. An intimate event with 65 total people including speakers and session moderators, this year's retreat will take place from October 1-3 in lovely Manitou Springs, Colorado.

The retreat is intentionally restricted in size for *serious minded culture ambassadors* who are there to make connections, form meaningful friendships, and learn. It's not designed for business development, or as a place to party. All speakers and agenda moderators stay with the group the entire time, creating a 2:1 ratio of participants to speakers and moderators. The retreats are held in small artistic towns such as Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Manitou Springs, Colorado.

The meeting format allows for a lot of interaction. The cycle works this way: two speakers have 20-minute segments followed by 10 minutes of table talk and 30 minutes of speaker interaction with the audience. Speakers are encouraged to have few if any PowerPoint slides. Presentations are structured like conversations with the audience -- not lectures. We don't want nodding heads, we want engagement.

There are no vendor presentations or on-site product displays. Speakers are asked to sparsely, if ever, refer to any books or materials they've published.

Program content is more than simple case studies relaying "how we did it" (although we have those too). Examples of this year's variety includes Selia Wood discussing How Southwest Airlines Employees Connect Through Memorable Moments; Michael Radke talking about A Culture of Ubuntu: A Systemic Humanist Approach to Inclusion and Participation; and Dan Ralphs presenting on how Every Company Needs a Dream Manager. Every presentation is expected to give the audience ideas to take back home and try out.

The retreat ends with a panel of seven people each taking eight minutes to respond to a specific, targeted question. The question for 2019 is "What are the two most successful steps, processes or tools for culture advice that you have given or know about and what were the results?" The panel is followed by Q&A time.

Starting this year there will be a free [pre-retreat workshop](#) for registrants only. In 2019 it's focused on sustainability as a core value and will be presented by the City of Fort Collins, Colorado. This interactive workshop covers the use and application of the City's "Triple Bottom Line Scan" tool, also known as the TBL Scan. The TBL Scan informs decision makers and empowers project managers to think critically through 33 questions on a project's magnitude and impact on the environment, economy and social health.

To get some views about the retreat I asked a few alumni to describe the "retreat brand" in their own words. These also demonstrate the diversity of backgrounds of people that attend.

- An OD consultant said "It is a place to connect with innovators from many fields and industries that are creating healthier work environments".

- An HR project manager at a large engineering company said “The retreat is personal with deep connections including daily interaction with the presenters who are in the audience too.”
- An attorney said “Speakers are very close to everyone, approachable, and fully included in the entire group.”
- A well-known keynote speaker and author said “It is a small and intimate gathering of the brightest minds and pioneers committed to the advancement of company culture”.
- The CEO of a marketing firm said "The retreat is a fantastic group of people who come together and share stories for bringing better culture practices to life.”
- The CEO of a large family services nonprofit said “National and international experts share their time and expertise in an intimate setting”.

If you're interested in attending, set aside time in your calendar from October 1-3, 2019 – and check out travel options to Manitou Springs, Colorado. Participants might want to come a day or so early for hiking, biking and experiencing the grand color change of the Aspen trees. It's an unforgettable weekend that will provide committed culture ambassadors with the tools they need to upgrade their efforts.

Gerald R. Wagner, PhD. started the [Academy of Culture Ambassadors](#), which hosts the retreat. After graduating from Iowa State University, Jerry's career started as a research statistician at a [Fortune 50 company in Chicago](#). Soon after he became Head of [Operations Research/Industrial Engineering](#) at UT Austin. From there he and some of his students started Execucom Systems Corp. one of Austin's early software success stories, followed by two more software companies in Austin. Then he returned to his home state and the University of Nebraska at Omaha to start up a BSc. Degree in [Information Technology Innovation](#) and to be a [Senior Scientist](#) at the Gallup Organization. From there he went to Bellevue University to start up the [Institute for Employee Wellbeing](#) which evolved into the Academy of Culture Ambassadors. Jerry is now designing a process with software for a new way to measure employee engagement. He can be reached at wagnergeraldr@cultureambassadors.org.