

LET'S BREAK DOWN OUR ORGANIZATIONAL SILOS

A COLLECTION OF INSIGHTS
FROM **SURGE 2017**



SURGE
2017

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INTRODUCTION



What you're about to read is the result of an experiment in virtual collaboration. **SURGE 2017** assembled association professionals from across the globe to harness collective knowledge within a virtual summit of a completely new model.

Attendees could not only hear from speakers, but converse with them in real time and contribute their own ideas. We have now assembled some of the best insights from these conversations into a body of knowledge for the benefit of the entire association community.

This eBook, one of the 12-part SURGE series, delves into the session, ***Let's Break Down Our Organizational Silos***. It includes themes from the speakers' conversation, snapshots of ideas from guest speakers, contributions from attendees, links to further resources, and more.

Thank you to all who participated – and if you missed it, go to the SURGE 2017 [event page](#) to watch all the sessions for free, at your leisure!

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01

FEATURED SPEAKERS

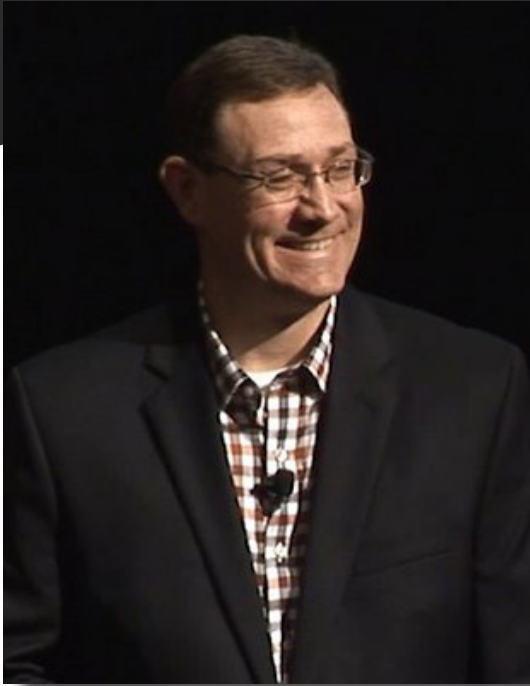


Beth Burchill

**Meetings and Exhibits
Coordinator at American
Counseling Association**

Beth Burchill is a Penn State graduate with a BS degree in Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management and returns every year for Penn State's Alumni in the Classroom program. She started her career at the Lancaster Marriott and Convention Center then spent 5 years at the world's largest wholly owned DMC, Kuoni Destination Management, in their Washington DC office servicing the Northeast. She is currently the Meetings Coordinator at the American Counseling Association in Alexandria, VA and loves living close to the US capital.





Sean Glaze

Author and Speaker at Great Results Team Building

Sean Glaze is an engaging keynote speaker, event facilitator, and the founder of Great Results Teambuilding - a company that specializes helping smart leaders transform employees into winning teammates. His three books, *The Unexpected Leader*, *Rapid Teamwork*, and *The 10 Commandments of Winning Teammates* are powerful parables for building and leading great teams. Sean is a member of both the South East Association of Facilitators and the National Speakers Association, where he earned the distinction of "Member of the Year" for 2015. He has a B.A. in English from Georgia Southern University, and both a M.A. and Ed. S. in education from Jacksonville State University. Sean lives just outside Atlanta, GA with his wife, their three children, and a very lazy dog.





Christopher Hunter
IT Manager at CPA Manitoba

Chris Hunter has been working in the association space for ten years now, and has been an IT Manager since January 2017. He currently works at the Chartered Professional Accountants of Manitoba. His specialties are in vb.net, asp.net, web development and Aptify's AMS. He has spent years doing trial and error programming to teach himself everything he knows today. He loves discussing all things tech, the success of associations, and anything Aptify related.

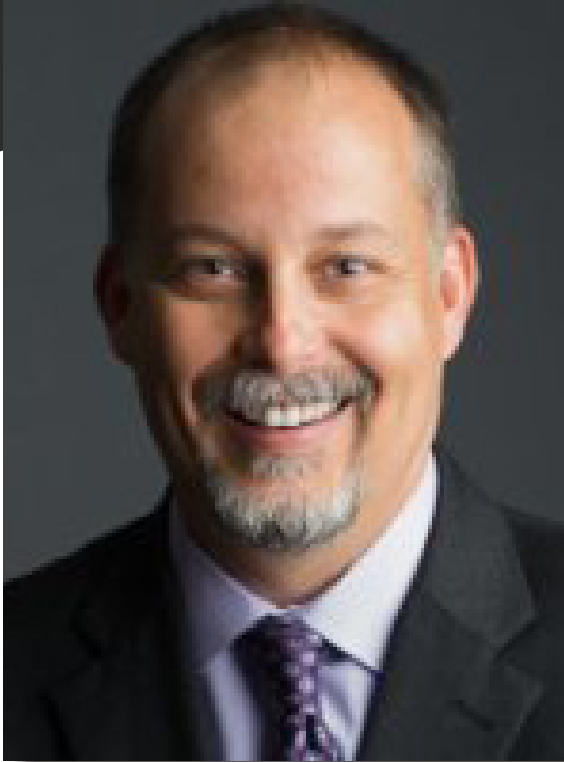




Aldo Maragoni
Communications Manager at
California Society of CPAs

Aldo Maragoni has been working in communications for more than 20 years, having started his career as a newspaper reporter before moving into editing and design. For more than 10 years he has been communications manager at the California Society of CPAs, where he oversees the organization's social media strategy and content, monthly magazine, various e-communications and web content. Aldo earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from San Jose State University.





Mike Moss

President at Society for College and University Planning

Mike Moss, CAE, is the president of the Ann Arbor based Society for College and University Planning (SCUP). In collaboration with the Board of Directors, he is responsible for providing leadership and vision for the organization and guiding the development and implementation of the strategic plan, programs, policies, and practices of the society. Prior to SCUP, Mike served as chief operating officer for the International Facility Management Association and senior director of operations and education at NACE International.





GUEST SPEAKERS



Debra BenAvram
CEO at American Society
for Parenteral and Enteral
Nutrition

Debra BenAvram is a transformative association executive with more than 16 years of experience effectively growing and leading associations and professional societies. She has a strong passion for the design of strong organizational cultures to optimize value to stakeholders. She earned Fellow designation in 2016, and Certified Association Executive certification in 2005. She was recognized as a Forty Under 40 Business Leader in 2015 by Washington Business Journal; and in 2013 as a Top CEO by CEO Update. In 2010, she was recognized with ASAE's Emerging Leader Award, Women Who Promote Excellence in Associations.





Jamie Notter
Partner at WorkXO Solutions

Jamie Notter is a founding partner of WorkXO Solutions. He began his career in the international conflict resolution field, running training programs in areas of ethnic conflict in the 1990s. He transitioned into organizational work, initially as a diversity trainer and consultant, and later leading his own management consulting practice, where he specialized in helping systems work through their most difficult conversations. His specialties include corporate culture, conflict resolution and negotiation, team performance and development, retreat facilitation, training design and delivery, leadership development, strategy development, and social media.



03

SILOS: WHAT ARE THEY AND HOW DO WE TACKLE THEM?

Silo mentality: (noun) A mind-set present in some companies when certain departments or sectors do not wish to share information with others in the same company.

Silo mentality runs rife in organizations, creating insular departments, missed connections and stifling collective progress. Compartmentalizing the various workloads of an organization is a natural process, but the overall impact of silo mentality is a loss if communication breaks down altogether. So what can we do in our workplaces to encourage efficient information sharing and authentic collaboration?

Let's hear Beth Burchill's quickfire tips on unlearning silo mentality:

Identify the root

Take the time to figure out why silos exist in the first place. It could be a defense mechanism for people who don't trust outsiders to be responsible for their workload. It could be that no one socializes beyond their silos. It could be as simple a problem as your physical office layout.

A common root cause I've seen is job insecurity. **People want to feel in control of a project to make themselves indispensable.** If only one person or team knows how to carry out a task, they own that task, and a ripple effect can happen where everyone throughout the organization or team feels as if they must own a task so that they can prove their worth and keep their job.

If you are in any sort of leadership role, make sure people feel comfortable enough that they can expand a little bit. Even if you are not in a powerful position, encouraging your peers and recognizing their work can boost confidence. Bringing

a variety of people into a project widens the scope for creativity. The tunnel of ideas gets narrow because people feel insecure in their value as an employee, but showing staff they are valued gives flexibility for them to zoom out their focus and include others in their work.

Get People Talking

It's basic human nature to enjoy talking to people you already like. If work situations can be discussed in friendly conversations, that's a big bonus. Never underestimate the interpersonal repercussions of silo culture.

Get everybody from different departments in a room together, from marketing to IT to events, whether via a company social, an all staff meeting, or video calls. Give people a face instead of just an email signature. **A personal touch makes the team-building process tangible to people:** it means that if you don't reach out to this person or complete this task on time, you will be letting down an acquaintance who you know personally, not a faceless stranger. Empathy motivates people.

Whatever the context, when people get together they will talk about work. It need not be a formal thing. People ask each other about work and talk about projects, and about where they are stuck. Two people who have never met before might find a solution or a more creative process or a whole new idea. Inspiration between people creates space for this. **Creating space for your team to be inspired is one of the biggest benefits of breaking down silos.**

Be Persistent

This work takes time and ongoing effort. Persistence will mean you see results. Even if no one else is buying into your ideas, you can still make time to chat with people outside of your immediate professional circle and build new relationships. Even if you are the only one trying, keep doing the work. **Be your own example in fostering collaboration and connection. Everyone else will see the results and catch up in due course.**

... And Beware of Bullies

A cautionary tale from Mike Moss

"In my career, I've experienced intellectual bullying. Maybe someone in the organization plays a competitive title game, or they are the best read person in the room, so they dominate the conversation and speak over or silence others. Over time, they become the owner of a 'thought silo' because they own the intellectual property of their ideas. It is a very subtle type of intellectual dominance with a damaging impact."

From the Chat: Resisting the Silo Mentality

I've seen organizations set departmental goals tied to variable compensation where one department's goals are in conflict with another. This is the quickest way to create silos.

- Alex -

We should never compete against each other internally. We should only compete externally with those trying to reach the same markets; even then, we can often partner to achieve common goals within our sphere of the profession or industry we represent. What if organizations adopted the founding principle of the Internet, that information must be free to move? What if no one withheld information or hid it behind their self-made silo? Imagine the possibilities to let knowledge run free internally.

- Cecilia -

What makes people resist breaking down silos? The fear of change, the fear of giving up control and full ownership of knowledge, the fear of job insecurity.

- Chris Hunter -

Removing silos allows an organization to get a holistic view of the member, which is the ultimate goal - to work collaboratively internally so we can provide an improved member experience.

- Jena Hoffman -

04

**CASE STUDY:
THE SHARED
MISSION OF EVENTS
PLANNING**

When everyone at an organization is focused on their individual daily tasks, how do we cross-pollinate between distinct departments? Debra BenAvram shares her experience of bringing people together through events planning.



At ASPEN, we work towards a shared vision. Breaking down silos is ingrained in our culture. We live and breathe without silos, but if we stopped paying attention to our collaborative efforts, they would build up. So how do we maintain such a culture?

Working towards organization-wide annual events brings people together. For example, our Malnutrition Awareness Week draws attention to the idea that feeding sick people is a good idea. Everyone can get behind that concept. It's critical that we get the outcomes we want for patients around the world from this event, so every single staff member must be invested in success. We educate the staff about what it means to be involved in Malnutrition Awareness Week and what makes ASPEN the industry leader. The content for this event is very clinical, but we ensure that not only our clinical staff care about it. We take small steps towards creating a buzz, like sending out emails every time an organization signs up to support the event. **Every win is celebrated, no matter the size.**

People beyond the lead event team become invested. One such staff member calculated that our reach for last year's program was 600,000 clinicians around the world, primarily in the US. That fact bolstered our efforts when we shared it with the whole staff. Telling each individual team how they contribute has helped get staff across the board, from publications to marketing and everyone in between, involved in this part of our organization's mission. If these events are not successful, we won't have an organization that can support the staff as we know it, so it's important that staff don't see it as somebody else's job. Instead, they view it as a part of their work and the reason their job exists.

Beyond events, throughout the year we have teams give presentations to other segments of the staff in which they talk about their high priority items. What's next on their horizon? What are their pain points in the organization? **Discussing our roles has helped chip away at silo culture.** We also put forth discussion questions to their audience, like: Where do you see yourself intersecting with this staff member now that you've heard what they have to say? What could you do differently to support this team member?

To create a strong culture, it matters what values you put into it, how you treat those values, and how you interact with them. Your culture won't look the same as my culture, which won't look the same as someone else's culture. But if you don't design that culture carefully, you're going to end up with silos. **Culture happens by design or default - you pick which one it is.** I want to design the culture that works best for my organization, its employees, volunteer staff, and stakeholders. Do you?

Want to learn how to host your own virtual event, much like **SURGE 2017 ?**

AssociationSuccess.org is in the process of creating an online course that will walk you through the steps involved in putting on your own interactive virtual summit.

Want to be notified when the course is available?

SIGN UP HERE



TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION

What role does technology, and the IT department itself, play in upholding or dismantling silo culture? Let's hear from self-declared techy, Christopher Hunter.

"As a systems developer for 10+ years, a manager for a year, and a huge techy, I believe in the importance of technology for building bridges and opening communications between people. Communication is the golden ticket to fixing a siloed culture, improving connections, and fostering transparency across an organization. The skills of an IT department or consultant play a crucial role in the process of breaking them down.

"A prime example of how problems manifest between silos is when different departments use overlapping and incompatible technologies while still expecting them to work together. Often, departments go out and find a technology that will fix their issue without consulting an IT professional, because IT staff are shut out from the workings of the rest of the organization. This ignores the fact that IT is the backbone of your organization in a world where everything requires technology. IT departments need to know the entire picture so they can offer support.

"I would recommend someone from IT becoming part of your leadership team, to bridge the business-IT gap and keep up with the startling advances being made every day. Lack of mutual understanding is probably the most significant silo issue that today's organizations face. The organizations that can resolve this are the ones that will succeed and prosper in this fast-changing world.

“IT has the power to drive widespread cultural change. An IT professional can see a project coming down the line and notice how it might fit together with something in the works elsewhere in the association. We can drop hints to bring silos together. IT departments can be the perfect place to start for this kind of internal networking, because an IT project is very rarely devoted to only one silo.

“How this sharing model is executed on a wider level brings us full circle back to the communication issue. **Define what communication means to you and how you like to communicate.** Now do the same for the organization. For some people, an email thread might be enough, while others will prefer face to face interactions. Technology can be instrumental in physical and virtual workplaces, especially applications like Slack, Yammer, Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams, SharePoint and Facebook for Work. These online platforms come cheap and provide user-friendly communication platforms. Having platforms like these that everyone can tap into comes in handy when information needs to be distributed widely throughout every department.

“An environment that encourages collaboration and communication can reap many benefits from the all-seeing eye of IT – if the organizational structure allows it.”

From the Chat

When using a centralized communication platform, have some rules that govern it. We ran into an issue when so many messages were flying through Slack that it was driving people crazy. One thing we learned was the reason why they started using Slack: it was for URGENT information. Well, everything was urgent!

- Adrienne Bryant -

Be wary of overuse within the social spaces of event apps. I attended a conference where a few attendees wanted so badly to "win" the leaderboard that they posted way too often, including sharing irrelevant photos and comments that added no value to the collective attendee experience. Standards or rules of engagement for shared platforms are highly recommended to keep it from getting out of hand.

- Tracy Vanneman -

I always encourage people with an event app leaderboard to have daily caps on points for each day so that this doesn't happen. Otherwise, people who are far behind are discouraged from participating which is the point in the first place! Daily caps at least help level the field a bit.

- Beth Burchill -

To help increase our internal communications, we added an additional step. On top of our monthly all-staff meetings, we get a report each week from the senior management team meeting via our respective vice presidents.

- Susan Noell -

06

MEETINGS OF COLLEAGUES, MEETINGS OF MINDS

Aldo Maragoni's association uses a diversity of tactics to bring staff together.

At the California Society of CPAs, we have weekly traffic meetings where various departments are represented. We meet to talk about what's going on and find out what everybody's up to. We also have managerial meetings, as well as all-staff meetings once a month where we can share information and trainings. A good opportunity for bonding is our days of service, when we do work outside the office. We're removed from the usual office rut and focused on whatever our service is, so relationships have space to form and grow when you get to know the person you're sitting across from.

Our office recently converted to an open office concept, so employees work in pods and shared desks. Conversation flows more than in separate offices and cubicles. Through a variety of means, we're fostering strong working relationships. We don't all have to be best friends, but to move towards our common goal for our organization there needs to be a foundation of trust.

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Our free, innovative virtual summit for association professionals is coming back from **MAY 2ND-4TH.**

Do you want to attend or get involved in building **#SURGEspring?**

PRE-REGISTER NOW



NOT ALL BAD: THE POSITIVE SIDE OF SILOS

Sean Glaze provides a positive defence of silos.

“Silo” has become a bad word in the association space. But what about the role silos can play in team-building? Let’s consider the importance of fostering connections within an organization. Should we, in fact, be asking different questions to increase communication and overcome divisions in the workplace?

Silos are connections - they forge links between people based upon shared challenges, values, and contexts. We compartmentalize not just to divide between, but also to unite amongst, each other. When we are frustrated by unnecessary, duplicate tasks, or our efforts to communicate are thwarted by blocked channels, silos have a negative effect on efficiency. **But when people ask me, “can you help us break down silos?”, my response is always the same: “you just need to create more connections.”**

Whether it’s inter-departmental or within a department, silos occur because people make connections and stick to them. People need to be more connected to each other and to a compelling common goal, so that silos are smaller parts of, and contribute to, a larger whole. I worked as an athletics coach before venturing into [team building events](#) and speaking. Everyone has heard the phrase, “there’s no I in team”, but every athlete I ever coached was an individual first, just like each person in your office.

Leaders need to show employees that they are a part of something bigger. When we notice the ripple effect of individual actions, we understand who depends on who. Accountability grows from understanding the impact of your actions through these connections. Does your association have an organizational chart? Such a simple tool can facilitate defined communication of who's going to give what to who by when. Silos occur because of a lack of clarity in terms of expectations. If you set up those expectations, with an organizational chart that shows who everyone is responsible to, those relationships provide clarity and keep communication flowing.

We should focus on connecting silos together to form a strong network. Give people time and opportunity to form those connections and share ideas and learn each other's personalities and needs. For example, have assigned seats in meetings. People need to get to know each other but unless encouraged otherwise, they will stay in their silo. Managers reading this might think: "I've got enough on my plate and so do my team. Where will I find the time and resources to allow all this? What will it cost me to build connections?" That's a legitimate concern, but [a recent study](#) showed that organizations lose millions of dollars a year to poor communication. Think about the long-term benefits of these measures before you shy away from them.

From the Chat: Working remotely in a collaborative culture

Remote working is new for me and while I feel included when we are on a call, I still have a fear of missing out. If the organization does everything suggested, maybe it's on the remote worker to let someone know they don't fully feel in the loop.

- Adrienne Bryant -

We use Ryver and other collaboration tools like Slack to stay in contact between meetings with all staff - but with a specific focus for those who are remote.

- Mike Moss -

I've worked for companies that did remote working really well. The hiring process was the first piece of success. They were very intentional about hiring people who were okay collaborating and working remotely because some can and some can't. Then there was a combination of phone, in-person, and email communications which worked really well for that team. I don't always see value in Skype meetings. Between tech glitches, getting them sorted, people not being able to use video depending on where they are - sometimes phone, email or typed communications just work better. Every day we would have a Skype meeting and every day there were issues with people not being able to join. I personally hate phone, but it was an integral part of team building at a remote organization. We had a great mix of group calls and personal calls and to this day I feel connected to those people and the company.

- Maggie McGary -



CULTURES OF COLLABORATION

What does collaboration mean at your workplace? Jamie Notter wants you to take a long hard look at your internal culture to find out.



I am a co-founder of WorkXO Solutions, a workplace culture management firm specializing in using culture analytics to solve business problems. The core of our work starts revolves around the Workplace Genome, a culture assessment tool driven by data. In my job, I see close-up how the cultures of a huge array of organizations function - the overlapping pain points and unique bright spots. In the midst of conversations about breaking down silos in our organizations, I want to interject some counter-opinions to shine a light on **why silos might be more useful than you think.**

Sometimes, people who share deep expertise on a particular topic need to get together to solve problems. It makes sense for them to compartmentalize that work away from the rest of the organization in the form of a silo. Instead of focusing on the silo issue, we should be asking ourselves: **how does our culture foster collaboration?**

The data that comes through our Workplace Genome shows us that most cultures talk a good game around collaboration without investing in the processes, structures and technologies that allow it to flourish. We pitch in and help out on a human, peer-to-peer level, but do we build mechanisms that allow information to reach more people? Do we use the technology platforms at our disposal to ensure that information makes it over these silo walls when need be?

My advice is a starting point: create and invest in the processes and systems that facilitate collaboration. My prediction? If you do this effectively, the silo problem will disappear!



WORD CLOUD

What were the most discussed topics in the attendee chat? The more frequently a word was used, the larger it appears in this image!





FURTHER RESOURCES

During the live chat, speakers and attendees alike chipped in with their tips for further reading and resources about the future of learning. We've compiled them into a list here. Keep on learning!

- [The User is My Mom: UX advice website](#)
- [Article: The Word With the Bad Reputation](#)
- [Article: Practical Tips for Breaking Down Silos](#)
- [Article: On Miscommunication](#)
- [Article: Secretly Breaking Down Silos](#)
- [Forbes Article: How to Break Down the Barriers](#)
- [Book: Silos, Politics, and Turf Wars, by Patrick Lencioni](#)

Communication apps and tools recommended by the community:

- [Yammer](#)
- [Ryver](#)
- [Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Workplace for Facebook](#)
- [Slack](#)
- [Higher Logic](#)
- [Breezio](#)

