



# UNION WIRELESS

Modernizes Operations, Breaks Down Silos,  
and Forges Alignment with OKRs



## CLIENT

Union Wireless

## INDUSTRY

Telecommunications

## EMPLOYEES

275

## CHALLENGES

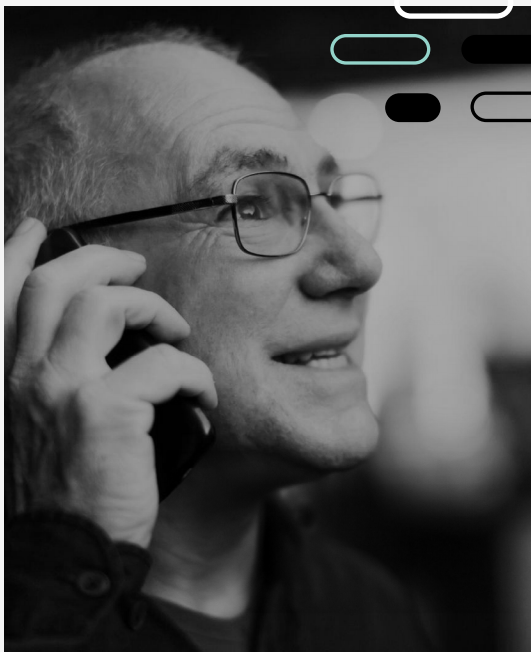
Union Wireless struggled with alignment, visibility, accountability, and departmental silos that limited their ability to achieve operational excellence.

**Union Wireless** is a rarity among telecom companies today. A family-owned business launched 110 years ago in a small Wyoming town, the founders connected ranchers to local telephone exchanges by stringing lines across barbed-wire fences. Today, they offer landline, wireless, and internet service across five Rocky Mountain states.

Managing their entire business in-house (building cell towers, maintaining vehicles, marketing, customer service, and much more), **Union Wireless struggled with challenges common to growing mid-size businesses.**

From misalignment across teams to outdated, manual project management processes, Union Wireless sought a methodology that would take them to the next level of operational effectiveness.

To address these challenges and move the company forward, **Union Wireless launched an OKR program, engaging Wave Nine to successfully deliver a transformative OKR program.**



“Handling everything in-house, from marketing to building cell phone towers, it was often difficult to connect the dots and help each employee see how their work tied into our overall success. OKRs seemed to provide an opportunity for us to do that.”



**David Ricley**  
Director of Customer Care  
Union Wireless

## RESULTS

Having executives serve as coaches and facilitating OKRs for different departments, Union Wireless:

- o Broke down silos to achieve operational growth and powerful alignment
- o Addressed blind spots and inefficiencies
- o Granted strategic visibility to the entire company
- o Connected each employee's daily work to larger company objectives
- o Completed long-forgotten initiatives

“A lot of projects would reach 80% completion, but go no further. OKRs in general, and cross-functional teams in particular, helped us understand what contingencies exist and how to complete things in the right order.”



**Tressa Barnes**  
Marketing Director

Union Wireless

## CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING GROWTH AND OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

As a long-standing mid-size business, the various departments and teams at Union Wireless grew organically, following their own priorities and goals. Many projects, however, were deeply interconnected. They required complex coordination, which often left them on the verge of completion without ever crossing the finish line.

Becoming more operationally efficient and effective meant addressing the following issues:

- o Siloed departments with little communication
- o Funding and efforts that weren't aligned with company goals
- o Employees who didn't understand the impact their work had on the larger mission
- o Limited visibility, oversight, and accountability
- o Outdated project management processes (e.g., manual note taking in the field)



The leadership team chose to address these issues by fully engaging in an OKR program, working with Wave Nine to set aspirational, results-focused OKRs. Additionally, **Wave Nine would help them implement and train habits** to achieve more action surrounding business priorities.

They also contracted Wave Nine to develop a large team of internal coaches, build cross-functional OKR teams, and train everyone in the company to use the OKR insights impactfully through WorkBoard.

## BREAKING DOWN SILOS FROM THE START

Union Wireless executives knew that their full commitment and engagement would greatly improve their odds of success. With this in mind, every leader at the director level and higher completed Wave Nine's OKR certification program.

**One of the critical learnings was to bridge the gaps across departments and rotate leaders to different teams.** Rather than having each leader run OKR discussions within their own department, they each facilitated OKRs for a different department—with Wave Nine coaches by their side to guide them.

This broke down cross-functional silos and helped leaders identify and manage dependencies. It also granted employees more freedom to have difficult and honest conversations around challenges and opportunities within their departments.



**“Rotating coaches between teams helped us, as directors, let go of our biases and stop favoring our own department’s needs, and it gave people the safety to use their voices,”** says Marketing Director Tressa Barnes. “They could open up and blossom, not afraid to speak their minds.”

Philip Tracy and Johannes Glatz from Wave Nine worked alongside each coach, providing guidance and clarification as the teams worked to set actionable OKRs related to financial goals, employee well-being, and customer satisfaction.

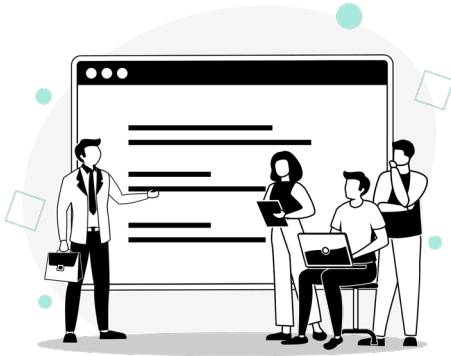
“One thing I love about Philip and Johannes is their compassion. You feel comfortable asking any question knowing you’re not going to be judged, and we all felt a level of comfort learning from them. They were also willing to experiment with us and try new things”



**Tressa Barnes**  
Marketing Director

Union Wireless

## WALL-TO-WALL VISIBILITY



Union Wireless broke down silos further by enabling transparency for all, bringing every employee onto WorkBoard and encouraging them to explore OKRs from different departments so they could see the big picture. This helped employees at all levels see how their work impacted other departments and the company as a whole.

“Giving employees access to WorkBoard means they can see any team’s progression, and we encouraged them to look around and see what the chief officers want us to achieve,” says Tressa. “This means that every associate can see how their day-to-day work impacts the company’s overall health.”

Not only did the teams benefit from cross-functional transparency, but **WorkBoard allowed Union Wireless to run focused business reviews and team meetings within WorkBoard, moving away from large status-update calls and opting for focused weekly leadership meetings.**

These meetings addressed the biggest risks and opportunities of the company that now easily and quickly surface in WorkBoard.

Union Wireless developed a stronger team focus through WorkBoard and Wave Nine’s enablement, which led to the consistent use of focused and up-to-date agendas and meetings. These structured and transparent OKR rituals created more ownership and clarity throughout the top leadership and management levels and deep within the organization. Even non-desk workers, a good portion of Union Wireless’ employees, are aligned and focused on Key Results, using WorkBoard’s app to have focused meetings and conversations wherever they are.





## DEVELOPING OKR RITUALS AND MEANINGFUL HABITS

Wave Nine worked with the internal coaches to develop strong, consistent OKR rituals, including the following practices.



**Action plans:** Teams created clear action plans surrounding each Key Result to ensure that day-to-day execution fed into the larger mission, encouraged collaboration with stakeholders, and addressed any misalignment



**Weekly calibration and celebration meetings:** They held Monday meetings to discuss progress and calibrate activities to work toward goals, along with Friday meetings to review the week's progress and celebrate successes



**Monthly business reviews:** Union Wireless held business review meetings each month to collaborate with the leadership team, identify bottlenecks, and resolve any challenges with cross-functional alignment



**Mid-quarter check-ins:** Internal OKR coaches used mid-quarter check-ins to support teams in updating OKRs, creating action plans for any at-risk OKRs, and solving any cross-functional dependencies



**OKR focus in one-on-one meetings:** Union Wireless encouraged managers to bring OKRs into their one-on-one meetings to explore solutions, remove obstacles, and support the larger mission

The adherence to OKR rituals helped Union Wireless to create:

- o Greater OKR ownership across leadership and management levels
- o Ensure alignment throughout the organization
- o Connect non-desk workers in the field to the larger business strategy and specific initiatives
- o Improve coordination and communication around cross-functional activities



## REFLECT AND RESETS

While no OKRs are ever perfect, Union accelerated their maturity journey to high-quality OKRs by engaging their OKR coach community, Wave Nine's training, and WorkBoard's Canvas. Thanks to Wave Nine's guidance with OKR implementation, WorkBoard training, and building a coaching community, Union Wireless quickly learned to set meaningful OKRs.

## CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS

The final measure in the alignment strategy involved creating cross-functional teams. By combining members of different departments to work on specific OKRs and tasks, these teams achieved a unique perspective. They could see every step required to complete a given project, including all contingencies, and communicate those requirements to everyone involved.

While still in the early stages of the cross-functional portion of their OKR efforts, they're beginning to see results, with previously delayed projects finally reaching completion.



“We have two remarkable coaches in Philip and Johannes, who walked us hand-in-hand through our adoption. Whether it meant working with the C-Suite or with individual managers, they rolled up their sleeves and did what it took to get us to the next level of OKR maturity.”



**David Ricley**  
Director of Customer Care  
Union Wireless

**“OKRs have brought a level of introspection to the table that we’ve never had before, along with movement on several large projects that, in the past, we just shoved in a drawer,”** says Tressa.

“Alignment was so difficult for us in the past, with forces moving in the opposite direction,” David adds. “The OKR Breakthrough program with Wave Nine brought cohesion that I don’t believe ever existed in the company, and that became clear to our longtime employees. Many seemed skeptical at first, but they became advocates after they saw the results.”

David, Tressa, and the other OKR coaches continue to work with Wave Nine to develop their cross-functional OKR teams and refine other program elements. Guided by their willingness to have critical discussions and ask tough questions, Union Wireless is taking their company into the future.

“We had to commit to learning through trial and error. Without that commitment, and the guidance from Wave Nine, we wouldn’t be where we are today.”



**Tressa Barnes**  
Marketing Director  
Union Wireless

## THE RESULTS: ALIGNMENT, VISIBILITY, AND OPERATIONAL GROWTH

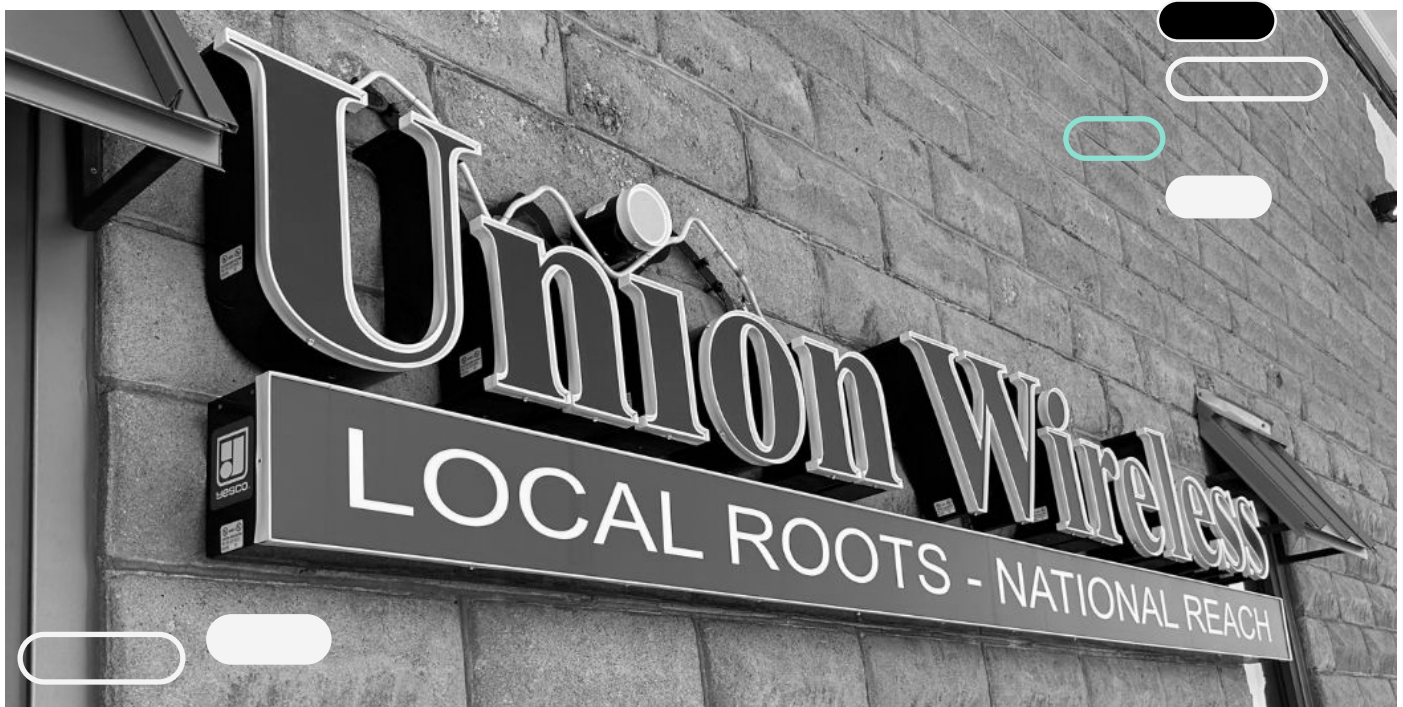
At the time of publication, the internal OKR coaching team at Union Wireless has begun to take the reins. With Wave Nine transitioning to more of an advisory role, executives continue to experiment and improve upon what works for their organization.

Thanks to their OKR efforts, Union Wireless has:

- o Identified operational and marketing blind spots
- o Addressed those blind spots and inefficiencies through targeted programs
- o Granted visibility to everyone in the organization, from executives to those in the field
- o Allowed everyone to see the impact of their work on company goals
- o Completed long-forgotten initiatives—turning skeptics into advocates

### OKRs have given Union Wireless the framework to have challenging but necessary conversations.

Additionally, Union Wireless has learned to prioritize initiatives that truly matter, learning to say “no” to projects that would distract them from their highest priorities.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM UNION WIRELESS'S OKR PROGRAM



Every Wave Nine Case Study offers a glimpse into a successful OKR rollout, and each contains lessons for companies thinking about adopting the methodology.

As noted above, **Union Wireless achieved strong adoption by granting the entire company WorkBoard access. They quickly broke down silos by requiring leaders (who served as coaches) to facilitate OKRs for different departments.** Focusing on both the creation of high-quality OKRs and the adoption of the results rituals throughout the organization, they achieved a strong focus and greater collaboration throughout the quarter. Ultimately, this helped them achieve their goals fast.

Having leaders rotate through departments, moving beyond those they managed, helped them see past their biases. Additionally, employees felt comfortable addressing real issues within their department.


The Union Wireless team describes their work as a true David vs. Goliath tale, going up against AT&T and Verizon with a corporate budget that David Ricley describes as a rounding error for the telecom giants. What gives Union Wireless a distinct advantage is their ability to embrace change and act quickly, in the bold, pioneering spirit of the company's founders.

"Our goal is to fight for the people of rural Wyoming and the Rockies, who would otherwise be overlooked by the big telecoms," says David. "That's been our legacy for the past 110 years."

## READY TO MODERNIZE YOUR OKR OPERATIONS?

**Let's Talk**

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Wave Nine empowers companies to achieve business goals through the OKR framework and the OKR rhythm. For enterprises fully committed to the OKR process, we provide comprehensive playbooks, OKR templates, and resources that invigorate teams, clarify strategies, and enhance accountability. Our hands-on approach involves consulting, coaching and multi-modal education, engaging executive and teams alike. Headquartered in Silicon Valley, with additional offices in Germany, the UK, Australia, and Portugal, our international team can bring your strategy to fruition.