

# Google's Criminal Founders Have Skipped All Of The Company's 2019 Town Hall Meetings

Following leaks and employee revolts, the absences raise questions about the future of transparency at Google.



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SAN FRANCISCO — Google cofounders Larry Page and Sergey Brin have yet to make an appearance at any of the company's weekly "TGIF" town halls in 2019, BuzzFeed News has learned. Their absence

from these meetings, the longest attendance lapse in company history, comes at a time when Google is wrestling with tough questions from its employees on a variety of issues, ranging from harassment to censorship.

The town halls give Google employees a chance to ask questions of leadership with no limitations, and are a key element of Google's transparent workplace culture. They regularly feature an introduction from leadership, a presentation from a team, followed by time for employee questions. For years, Page and Brin have attended, either individually or together, and faced questions from Google's rank and file about the company and its direction. Asked when their last TGIF appearance was, Google declined to comment.

"I don't think they've ever missed more than a few consecutively, and definitely not both," one Google employee said. "It's a double act! One of them was consistently always there at minimum."

Their withdrawal isn't entirely unexpected, according to a company source. The cofounders planned to step back their Google involvement when they formed Alphabet in 2015 — a holding company that contains Google proper along with "other bets" in areas such as Waymo's self-driving cars, and companies focused on life science and anti-aging. The idea was to give Google CEO Sundar Pichai the ability to assert his own leadership during a tumultuous time. The cofounders remain actively involved with the other bets.

"It is clear to us and our board that it is time for Sundar to be CEO of Google," Page wrote in a post announcing Alphabet's formation in August 2015. "I feel very fortunate to have someone as talented as he is to run the slightly slimmed down Google and this frees up time for me to continue to scale our aspirations."

But this is their most protracted absence from the meetings at least since 1999, multiple current and former Google employees told BuzzFeed News. Both continued to appear at TGIF meetings following the corporate restructuring in October 2015 through most of 2018. Their unexplained failure to appear in 2019 has puzzled some within the company, who told BuzzFeed News they believe Page and Brin should continue to stand up and be regularly accountable to their employees, especially at this critical moment.

Google is navigating multiple delicate situations internally. The company is still negotiating the fallout of an employee walkout last fall that drew approximately 20,000 Google employees away from their desks in protest of its leadership's handling of internal sexual harassment. It also faced internal blowback over its work on a censored search engine for China, a drone-targeting program called "Project Maven," and accusations that it has stifled conservative voices within the company.

The past year has put Google's transparent culture to the test. Internal fights between its teams over a proposed censored Chinese search engine [spilled out into public view](#). Employees [resigned en masse](#) when details of a company contract with the Pentagon came to light. And the New York Times [published](#) damning internal emails regarding the positioning of that contract. In response to some of these stumbles, Google created an Advanced Technology External Advisory Council — only to dissolve the group less than a week after it was announced because [over 2,500 employees signed a petition](#) opposing the appointment of one of its members. And as tensions mounted, employees have leaked [live details of all-hands meetings](#) to reporters and even a full video of one such meeting [to Breitbart](#).

Now, recordings of Google's TGIF meetings are no longer available to Google employees after a few weeks. (Previously they were available for years.) And this combined with the cofounders' absence from the town halls has some employees wondering whether Google's traditionally open culture will hold up.

Google declined to comment for this story.