

# **WordPress Leader Mullenweg Silences Joost De Valk via @sejournal, @martinibuster**

Matt Mullenweg, co-creator of WordPress, posted a statement on X (formerly Twitter) announcing that Joost de Valk was no longer speaking at WordCamp Asia and was persona non grata for having “stabbed” him when he was vulnerable and betraying his confidence. Mullenweg cited statements by de Valk to prove his point, but those statements were presented without their full context, which significantly altered their meaning.

## **Joost de Valk Removed From WordCamp Asia**

Joost de Valk, creator of the Yoast SEO plugin was scheduled to speak at WordCamp Asia on February 21st but was removed from the schedule. He had been scheduled to speak on the topic of marketing WordPress products. A post on X by Matt Mullenweg explaining why he was removed suggests that de Valk was removed on orders by Mullenweg.

## **Screenshot Of Joost De Valk's WordCamp Asia Speaker Agenda**

## **Mullenweg: Joost “Stabbed Me When I Was Down”**

Matt Mullenweg posted an explanation of why Joost was removed from the WordCamp Asia schedule, with his motivation being to get ahead of any “drama” stirred up by de Valk, although at the time of writing Joost has been silent about the removal on both X and his blog.

Mullenweg posted:

*“Before he tries to make more drama about not being at WordCamp Asia, I just wanted to say that I feel @jdevalk stabbed me when I was down, betrayed confidence, tried to take advantage of a situation for personal clout and influence.*

*I have given him hundreds of hours of my time and more access than almost anyone in the WP community, including admin access on Google Analytics, a marketing leadership position, and more. This trust was betrayed.*

*His previous contributions do not “make up” for this behavior, nor has he apologized or taken any conciliatory action. This deeply saddens me.*

*Because of this, I will not interact with him any further or participate with anything he’s involved with, he’s persona non grata.”*

The term persona non grata means that a person is unwelcome. It’s use originated in diplomatic contexts but is now used for any situation where a person is no longer welcome.

## **Out Of Context Citations**

Mullenweg followed up with another post with citations of statements published by Joost de Valk that Mullenweg characterize de Valk is trying to “stage a coup” of WordPress.

He continued:

*“He’s trying to claim he didn’t want to fork or stage a coup, but wrote:*

*‘I think it’s time to let go of the cult and change project leadership.’*

*‘But it’s clear now, that we can no longer have him be our sole leader’*

*'I'm already talking to several hosts about this, and would welcome anyone who wants to join these conversations, so we're not duplicating work.'*

*'I'm here, and willing to lead through this transition. I do have the time, the energy and the money needed to fund myself doing it.'*

X is a micro-blogging format that limited how much context Mullenweg could post. It's helpful to see those statements in context in order to fully understand them.

For example, the quote in which Joost references the "cult" nature of WordPress leadership takes on a different meaning when viewed in its full context.

*Here's the out of context version:*

*"I think it's time to let go of the cult and change project leadership."*

The full version of the passage makes it clear that de Valk is merely suggesting the creation of a board (later on detailing that it's a board with Matt involved in a leadership position).

*The full statement:*

*"I've spoken to many slightly outside of our industry over the past months about what was happening and several people, independent of each other, described WordPress as 'a cult' to me. And I understand why.*

*I think it's time to let go of the cult and change project leadership. I've said it before: we need a 'board'. "*

Joost later explains that he isn't advocating for removal of Matt from leadership but rather giving a voice to all

stakeholders, including Matt's.

He wrote:

*"I'm still, to this day, very thankful for what Matt has created. I would love to work with him to fix all this. But it's clear now, that we can no longer have him be our sole leader, although I'd love it if we could get him to be among the leaders."*

The reality is that Joost was never arguing for a change in leadership. From September to December Joost had largely limited his opinion to suggesting that there should be more transparency about how much of the trademark licensing fee goes to support the WordPress project. Rather than stabbing Mullenweg when he was down and calling for a coup, Joost was more cautious and circumspect in his public remarks.

It was only in December that he published his "Breaking the Status Quo" blog post where he openly advocated that Mullenweg consider a change in governance that reflected the voices of more than one stakeholder, with Mullenweg still in a position of control. Joost was not leading the call for change, others had already been doing that for months. Joost was lending his (considerable) voice to a movement that was already asking for change in *how* the WordPress project is governed.

## Response To Mullenweg's Post

Responses to his post were muted because the ability to respond was limited to those he mentions or is following. @arniepalmer responded by explaining that events look far differently from his perspective, pointing out that de Valk was not trying to seize leadership of WordPress away from Mullenweg but discussing a way to expand leadership beyond just one person.

He wrote:

*“Matt, I can see how you could be offended by someone who has an opinion on how things in WordPress leadership could be improved and mention that project leadership needs a change. Especially when you have led the project for so many years. However, in my opinion, @jdevalk was engaging in a discussion for a wider solution, not a fork, not a takeover, just a start over with you still being A leader – which is again, in my opinion, essential.*

*I am saddened that Joost has been excluded from @wcasia2025 as it could have been an opportunity for you and him to discuss options in person. An opportunity to build bridges and even if no solution is reached, the effort has been seen to be made to not exclude those that have differing opinions on how this community driven project moves forward. Criticism of leadership is never a pleasant situation for anyone. I believe a walk back on this is possible and as tickets (including airline and hotels) are already booked for all concerned, booking a meeting room is the smallest of concerns here.”*

## **Joost de Valk Is Ousted And Silenced?**

Some time ago, I asked someone how a civil war in his country started. His nutshell explanation was that for decades, citizens, students, and unions had demanded change, but one by one, the government sealed off every avenue for dialogue. Rather than gaining control, it built pressure to the breaking point, leaving no other outlet for change, which eventually came.

Joost de Valk has not made a statement (or drama) about his ouster from WordCamp or his new “persona non grata” status with Mullenweg. It’s unclear what attempting to silence de Valk has accomplished.

*Featured Image by Shutterstock/Ollyy*

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/wordpress-leader-mullenweg-silences-joost-de-valk/539387/>