TEACHING

Your Wi-Fi Is Slow Because Everyone Is Waiting

By **Keith Parsons, CWNE #3** · 2026-06-18 · originally on LinkedIn

Your Wi-Fi isn't slow because of weak signal. It's slow because every Access Point on the channel is waiting its turn.

That waiting has a name. Co-Channel Contention. It ruins more Wi-Fi than every other RF problem combined, and it almost never shows up on your dashboard.

Here is why it hides. Interference shows up as retries and corruption, things you can see. Contention shows up as silence. Your radio sits quiet because some other radio is talking, and your client patiently waits its turn. The heat map stays green. The throughput stays terrible.

I've spent 25 years inside production networks watching engineers chase the wrong problem. They add APs. They crank up power. They buy a new chipset generation. All three make contention worse, because more loud radios on shared channels means more waiting, not less.

6 GHz and Wi-Fi 7 do not save you here. The listen-before-you-talk rule behaves the same on every band and every generation. 320 MHz channels are wonderful right up until you need a second clean one next door, and the wider you bond, the faster you run out. New band, same discipline.

The fix has not changed in 20 years:

Look at airtime per channel, not signal per Access Point.

Fewer APs on shared channels. When you run out of channels, stop.

Stop chasing coverage. Look at airtime. Co-Channel Contention is the real killer.

What is the worst contention you have ever walked into, and what finally told you that airtime, not signal, was the problem?

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