

August 16, 2021

Kelly Sims

Re: [Inform] New York Times story on company shift

To: Peiter Mudge Zatkan [REDACTED]

So jealous. I miss humans.

On Mon, Aug 16, 2021 at 10:03 AM Peiter "Mudge" Zatkan [REDACTED] wrote:

I have an in-person 1:1 with Leslie on Thursday - Let's tag up Friday or else next week.

Looking forward to it!

On Mon, Aug 16, 2021 at 12:49 PM Kelly Sims [REDACTED] wrote:

Never a dull moment. I'll get on your calendar.

On Mon, Aug 16, 2021 at 9:35 AM Peiter "Mudge" Zatkan [REDACTED] wrote:

There are some big things brewing under the surface on which you'll need to be brought up to speed. Let's catch up soon!

So happy to have you here :)

On Mon, Aug 16, 2021 at 12:16 PM Kelly Sims [REDACTED] wrote:

Preach!

Also, hi! Let's catch up soon?

On Mon, Aug 16, 2021 at 9:05 AM Peiter "Mudge" Zatkan [REDACTED] wrote:

Dantley, I've seen nothing but honor and strong execution in your work here. We are here for you.

Regarding yourself and the others mentioned in the article, we have increased our monitoring and are prepared to action any targeted harassment.

Everyone,

I'd like to point out another part of the culture which is problematic and explain some of the less obvious problems with it:

"Fourteen current and former Twitter employees, who were not authorized to speak publicly, spoke with unusual candor to The New York Times about the last two years working with Mr. Davis and the changes he brought to their workplace."

The statement above is a green-light for insider threat targeting and recruitment. This announces that:

- a) we have disgruntled employees
- b) even non-disgruntled employees do not fear repercussions for sharing company private information
- c) our employees are approachable on topics (a) and (b)

From an adversary point of view when such a statement was/is observed it is inferred that the company in question generally lacks mature data protection and data tracking. Otherwise, people would generally be more reluctant to share any information. This inference was/is almost always correct and when such leaks as this scale are observed the adversary defines the company as a high yield, low cost, target.

This leaky-culture is problem. Not just a problem for each individual leak.

kindest,

Mudge Zatko

On Mon, Aug 16, 2021 at 9:48 AM Dantley Davis [REDACTED] wrote:
Thanks everyone for your support and guidance through this. I've given my directs a heads up and will be sending out an email to me team so they are aware. I'll follow up with folks individually if they have questions or concerns.

On Mon, Aug 16, 2021 at 6:08 AM Liz Kelley [REDACTED] wrote:
Sharing the full story that was published today below. We're working on a few minor corrections, but overall, this landed as we expected. To note, we did not comment on the record regarding any individual employee situations; you'll see two included here.

The reporter picked up on how this is an intentional shift we've been working to drive, and how Dantley was brought in to help lead the transformation. Across the 14 current and employees that served as sources for the story, we also see a balance in both criticism of this approach as well as people who welcome the shift as a refreshing change. From both leaked emails and Dantley's interview, we're grateful that his voice is consistent and present in acknowledging opportunity to do better while still holding each other accountable.

We'll continue to monitor internal and external conversation to support our team and handle additional questions.

Culture Change and Conflict at Twitter

Two years ago, the company brought in a blunt executive to make things move faster and to promote diversity. Then the problems began.

By Kate Conger

Aug. 16, 2021, 5:00 a.m. ET

SAN FRANCISCO — Soon after joining Twitter in 2019, Dantley Davis gathered his staff in a conference room at the company's San Francisco headquarters. Twitter was too nice, he told the group, and he was there to change it.

Mr. Davis, the company's new vice president of design, asked employees to go around the room, complimenting and critiquing one another. Tough criticism would help Twitter improve, he said. The barbs soon flew. Several attendees cried during the two-hour meeting, said three people who were there.

Mr. Davis, 43, has played a key role in a behind-the-scenes effort over the past two years to remake Twitter's culture. The company had long been slow to build products, and under pressure from investors and users, executives landed on a diagnosis: Twitter's collaborative environment had calcified, making workers reluctant to criticize one another. Mr. Davis, the company believed, was one of the answers to that problem.

The turmoil that followed revealed the trade-offs and conflicts that arise when companies attempt dramatic cultural shifts and put the onus on hard-nosed managers to make that change happen.

Mr. Davis repeatedly clashed with employees because of his blunt style. His treatment of workers was also the subject of several investigations by Twitter's employee relations department, and of complaints to Jack Dorsey, the chief executive, that too many people were leaving.

Company officials acknowledge that Mr. Davis may have gone too far at times, and he has promised to tone down the way he criticizes people. But they make no apologies and have even given him a promotion. Employee dissatisfaction, they said, is sometimes the cost of shaking things up.

"This is actually a Twitter culture change that we've been trying to drive," Jennifer Christie, Twitter's head of human resources, said in an interview.

A former Facebook and Netflix executive, Mr. Davis, who is now the company's chief design officer, reports directly to Mr. Dorsey. When hired, he was told to revamp Twitter's design team and make it more diverse. His work was considered a model for other Twitter executives, and the company believes the diversity of his department improved under his leadership. Twitter reports its diversity statistics annually but does not break out numbers for specific parts of the company.

"This was a turnaround role, and that meant changes to staff, changes to our work, changes to how we collaborate," Mr. Davis said in a recent interview.

He frequently spoke with his staff about challenges he faced as a Black and Korean man in the technology industry, and won accolades for his design work. He spearheaded forays into new media, like audio tweets and chats, and championed efforts to clean up the conversation on Twitter, including prompts that encourage people to read articles before sharing them.

But Mr. Davis's management style was a bracing shift for employees at Twitter, which has not usually offered the astronomical salaries that are normal at other social media outfits. Instead, the company has tried to attract workers with a welcoming culture typified in a hashtag, #LoveWhereYouWork. Fourteen current and former Twitter employees, who were not authorized to speak publicly, spoke with unusual candor to The New

York Times about the last two years working with Mr. Davis and the changes he brought to their workplace.

As Twitter executives have driven toward a feistier version of their company, tension has not been limited to the design department and its adjoining research group. Workers have complained, sometimes bitterly, about being demoralized.

“We’ve got teams across the board that are reporting things like, ‘We’re concerned about our future,’” Ms. Christie said. “They talk about fear or psychological unsafety.”

The conflicts at Twitter have been echoed at other tech companies where executives are taking a harder line with employees who had grown accustomed to accommodating workplaces. Coinbase, a cryptocurrency company that went public this year, banned political discussions at work and offered exit packages to employees who disagreed with the rule. And this month, Google faces a trial before an administrative law judge after the National Labor Relations Board accused it of wrongfully firing employees who protested company decisions.

“Any kind of major change in blueprint comes with a risk,” said Robert Sutton, a professor of organizational behavior at Stanford University.

Cultural shifts rile employees and sometimes cause financial instability, he said. “There is always this balance between: Do we do it by socialization and having a strong culture, or do we do it with money and cracking down on people?”

Although some Twitter design employees were rattled by the meeting in which they were required to critique one another, Mr. Davis said several had thanked him for the candid feedback.

“We’re kind to one another,” he said. “But also being nice means that you might shy away from saying the thing that needs to be said for us to move forward together.”

Mr. Davis told his staff that he would push for improved performance, and he quickly criticized, demoted or cut workers, more than a dozen workers said.

When employees were let go, he and other managers sometimes followed their departures with emails to the staff remarking on their poor work.

Many employees feared they would be next on the chopping block. Although Mr. Davis, who manages 200 people, stressed the importance of giving critical feedback, he sometimes lashed out at workers who criticized him, employees said.

But others believed Mr. Davis's changes were essential to Twitter's survival. The company needed to toughen up, one employee said.

By late 2019, complaints surfaced to Twitter's employee relations unit, which is staffed by lawyers who investigate workplace issues. The unit looked into accusations that Mr. Davis had created a culture of fear. Among the concerns was that he had made a biased remark to another executive.

The comment occurred during a meeting in which Liz Ferrall-Nunge, who led Twitter's research team, shared concerns about diversity at Twitter and referred to her experience as a woman of color. Mr. Davis seemed to dismiss her, telling Ms. Ferrall-Nunge, who is Asian American, that if she wore sunglasses, she would pass as white, three people familiar with the investigation said.

Ms. Ferrall-Nunge, who left Twitter in 2020, declined to comment. Twitter declined to comment on the record about the episode, citing employee privacy.

Twitter employees who were aware of the episode said they expected better from Mr. Davis because of his outspokenness about diversity. Others defended his track record on diversity, noting that white executives were given more slack while making less effort on diversity issues.

In a lengthy Google document sent in February 2020, Mr. Davis praised Twitter's friendly culture. But he criticized the quality of design and argued that employees were too quick to say yes to projects when they should instead provide criticism. The overly kind atmosphere stifled honest feedback, he argued.

Employees who received the memo noticed that, in the margins, they were able to view comments from human resources representatives and managers

who had edited the document. They were asking Mr. Davis to tone it down. He said other people had told him that it had the proper balance of “tough love.”

That summer, Mr. Davis became the target of online harassment. Extremist groups believed he was involved in kicking them off Twitter, he said. He received death threats, and his personal information was published online.

“I would get a death threat at 12 o’clock, and then at 12:05 I would have a meeting,” Mr. Davis said.

By early 2021, another employee relations investigation into his behavior was underway, in response to complaints that the culture of fear persisted. Ms. Christie said that employee relations looked into every employee complaint and that Mr. Davis was trying to change his behavior.

“We’ve got to find our own Twitter way of direct feedback that’s still empathetic, that’s still respectful,” she said. “That’s not an easy combination.” Mr. Davis was “heartbroken” by the employee complaints, she added.

Company data was beginning to reveal widespread discontent on the design and research teams. Attrition under Mr. Davis had risen and was about double the rate of overall attrition at Twitter, employees said. In annual surveys, employees who worked for Mr. Davis consistently said at a higher rate than other Twitter employees that they felt “psychologically unsafe.”

“I’ve been hearing and absorbing feedback about the culture and morale,” Mr. Davis wrote in a note shared with his management team that was seen by The Times. “I love and deeply respect this team, it’s the strongest team I’ve ever worked with, and yet it’s clear that many of you aren’t feeling that from me. I’m taking a step back to think about my style and approach.”

In March, after a year of battling election and coronavirus misinformation, many employees struggled with burnout. Mr. Davis announced that he planned to move away from the performance culture that had been his mandate.

“My goal is for us to transition to a team of belonging, which is less transactional and more focused on care and support,” Mr. Davis wrote in an

email to employees. He cited the harassment he had received, and asked employees to be patient if they felt he had not done enough to support them.

“I was not celebrating wins, I was focused entirely on what was wrong,” Mr. Davis said, describing feedback he received from his staff. “Since then, I spent some time working on this. We have been celebrating wins, we have been finding ways for the team to come together.”

Current employees said sudden firings and harsh feedback continued. They found evidence for their concerns in Nikkia Reveillac, the head of Twitter’s research department.

Ms. Reveillac told Mr. Davis and other employees that his defensiveness made it intimidating for employees to offer him feedback. In May, she went to Mr. Dorsey. In a message she described to her co-workers, she told him that the culture under Mr. Davis was toxic and causing untenable attrition. Mr. Dorsey did not respond.

Weeks later, Ms. Reveillac was abruptly pushed out of the company and locked out of her work accounts. “Team, I didn’t get to say a proper goodbye. I love and miss you,” she tweeted. Ms. Reveillac and Twitter declined to comment on her departure.

In a staff meeting shortly after, two people who attended said, Mr. Davis told employees that they should not assume Ms. Reveillac had left the company because of conflicts with him. But without a clear explanation, employees were left wondering about whether her sudden departure was a response to going to Mr. Dorsey with her concerns.

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On Tue, Aug 10, 2021 at 4:40 PM Liz Kelley [REDACTED] wrote:

Hi all,

This week, the New York Times will publish a fairly critical story on our shift to a more performance-focused culture. This story is unprecedented for us. Many current and former employees anonymously spoke with The Times and leaked many internal emails, documents, and conversations – specifically about Dantley and D&R – dating back to 2019 up to present day.

We expect not-so-flattering examples of missteps will be included throughout.

For context, the story started in a much more contentious position. Given the overwhelming amount of leaked information, and in addition to hours spent on background, we put Jennifer and Kayvon on the record with the reporter. This helped cement that this is an intentional shift, and broadened the story from anonymous sources criticising Dantley's leadership, to a story focused on our journey to become more goals-oriented. We are optimistic that the story will be less "toxic culture and management" and more "company undergoing intentional change while trying to still keep its caring culture intact" than it otherwise would have been.

Given Dantley and D&R sits at the center of this story, we're preparing a note for him to send to his team, but not sending proactive comms to all Tweeps at this time. We'll closely monitor internal sentiment and adjust if things start to skew very negatively. We will also share reactive TPs for D&R and other leaders as needed.

We're grateful for the support of many people throughout this process copied here. We'll flag the story as soon as it's live.

Liz on behalf of comms

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Liz Kelley | Twitter Communications | [REDACTED]

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Liz Kelley | Twitter Communications | [REDACTED]