

SOCIAL MEDIA

'Musk behaves like a drunk': inside the chaos at Twitter

Leader likened to Wile E Coyote running off a cliff edge. By **Chris Stokel-Walker**

Twitter is a shell of its former self – literally. The company, which once had more than 8,000 staff, is down to fewer than 2,000. And those who are left are having to more than meet the “hardcore” working environment that enigmatic entrepreneur Elon Musk demanded of his staff shortly after he took over in an infamous email: those few remaining on the infrastructure team are working 11- or 12-hour days just to keep the platform online.

Not that it works all that well. It has been a torrid few weeks for Twitter, with a change to the computer code that keeps the app running ensuring last week that images wouldn't load and links would lead to nowhere.

The reason? An overworked, under-motivated, single engineer had been asked to make a change without any oversight from his colleagues. When things went wrong, the remaining staff had to scramble to try to fix things.

It was emblematic of the issues Twitter faces. Staff are expected to make unrealistic numbers of changes to key features in next to no time, all while lacking the support

of colleagues who just a few months ago had been on the platform. Getting things wrong risks the ire of your boss, who publicly criticised a disabled employee this week.

“It's a pressure cooker,” says one remaining staff member, speaking on condition of anonymity. “There are no guidelines. There's no respect. There's absolutely zero transparency. It's awful.”

Twitter did not respond to a request to comment for this story made through their press office, which may no longer exist.

No one knows who's next for the chop. Managers were recently told to provide a list of people who ought to be promoted, says one former staff member still in touch with some who remain working. Little did they realise they were signing their own death warrant: many of those managers were subsequently fired and replaced by those they recommended, as part of a cost-cutting drive.

That tanked morale, which was already sub-zero. “A big part of the way we think about our jobs is having a sense of pride about the job we do and where we work,” says Bruce Daisley, former vice president of Twitter in Europe,



Elon Musk at the opening of a Tesla factory in Germany last year. Tesla staff have been moved across to Twitter roles, say workers PATRICK PLEUL/REUTERS

the Middle East and Africa, who left the company before Musk took over. “The more Musk behaves like the local drunk – getting into slanging matches with disabled ex-employees – the less current employees will be proud to say they work there.”

Whether the platform will even stay online is, in part, out of Twitter's hands. It is reportedly in \$70m (£58.7m) of debt to Amazon for cloud hosting services. Amazon so far has used its own advertising spend on Twitter as a bargaining

chip designed to make sure the company pays its bills. But that could change.

The idea of career progression has gone out the window. Mentorship programmes have been waylaid by the realities of trying to accommodate Musk's constantly changing demands.

An employee says mentorship meetings don't take place because staff have been told Musk doesn't see the point in them, and would rather they spend time enacting his requests for changes.

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One former worker receives messages from American Express, which provided their Twitter corporate credit card, chasing unpaid debt totalling thousands of dollars.

The worker, like many, has raised it with remaining Twitter staff, who are unable to approve the payment because it requires the approval of the former employee's manager.

But that person also no longer works for Twitter.

Those who do work there are also, increasingly, not actually Twitter employees. Staff at the social media platform grouse that they're asked to take orders from workers who have been moved into Twitter's ranks from Tesla and SpaceX, Musk's other companies.

“It's a disaster,” says one former employee. “It looks like the owner is just throwing people into positions hoping they work out.” Another called the arrivals “clueless” about how to run a social media platform.

The little that can be gleaned about Twitter – from its frequent outages, slowdowns, bugs and the precious little its owner shares publicly – suggests things are heading in the wrong direction. Twitter lost 40 per cent of its revenue in December 2022 compared with a year earlier, it has sheepishly admitted.

“It's a little bit like the character in the cartoon who runs off the cliff but doesn't fall straight away,” says Daisley.

“Initially, a lot of commentators were willing to say that the Twitter business was full of slackers, Elon had fired 75 per cent of the employees and it was still running. Well now Wile E Coyote has looked down and realised gravity does apply to him, too.”