

88. Hardcore

In late November 2022, James Musk, amid the tumultuous atmosphere following his takeover of Twitter, made several high-profile account reinstatements, including those of Kathy Griffin, Jordan Peterson, and the Babylon Bee, while maintaining the ban on conspiracy theorist Alex Jones. Musk introduced a "visibility-filtering" policy, emphasizing Twitter's new approach: freedom of speech would not equate to freedom of reach, aiming to deboost and demonetize negative or hateful content. Despite these changes, Musk faced challenges with the account of Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, whose controversial tweets led to his suspension. Amidst these events, Musk contemplated the reinstatement of former President Donald Trump, ultimately leaving the decision to a public poll that favored Trump's return.

This period also saw significant tensions within Twitter's management, including the resignation of ad sales chief Robin Wheeler, and a pronounced shift towards a more engineering-driven culture under Musk's directive. Musk's hands-on approach extended to demanding code reviews from engineers in an effort to identify and retain top talent, reflecting his belief in a lean, highly capable team over a more extensive workforce. This lean approach resulted in a drastic reduction of Twitter's staff, with the workforce diminishing by approximately 75%, marking a stark transformation from a nurturing workplace to one characterized by a high-pressure, performance-driven environment.

Despite concerns and predictions of Twitter's imminent collapse, the platform managed to survive and adapt during this tumultuous period. Musk's risk-taking and iterative approach demonstrated resilience, even as Twitter faced potential stability issues. His aggressive management style and the sweeping layoffs sparked extensive discussions about the future of Twitter, its company culture, and its place in the social media landscape.

Amidst these internal upheavals, Musk publicly challenged Apple's reduction of advertising on Twitter, questioning its commitment to free speech. However, advised by Larry Ellison and considering the importance of maintaining a good relationship with Apple for Twitter's availability on the App Store, Musk sought to mitigate tensions. His visit to Apple's headquarters underscored a pragmatic approach to resolving potential conflicts, highlighting Musk's recognition of the strategic need to align with key industry players despite previous confrontations.