

81. “Let that sink in”

Let that sink in: In October 2022, as Elon Musk prepared for his highly anticipated and dramatic takeover of Twitter, his emotions oscillated between excitement about transforming the platform and deep concerns about the complexities ahead. Musk envisioned Twitter evolving into an integrated platform that combined elements of a social network with the capabilities of a financial service, a concept he had previously pursued with his company, X.com. However, as the actual takeover loomed closer, Musk's concerns grew about how deeply involved he would need to be at Twitter's headquarters to bring his vision to life. When he arrived at Twitter's San Francisco headquarters, carrying a sink as a symbolic gesture (a move that later became a viral moment), Musk was greeted by CEO Parag Agrawal and CFO Ned Segal, who both displayed mixed reactions. While some of Twitter's leadership appeared optimistic about the changes Musk envisioned, others expressed doubts about the drastic shifts Musk planned. This moment encapsulated a growing tension between Musk's bold, transformative ideas and Twitter's long-standing corporate culture centered around inclusivity, work-life balance, and psychological safety.

This clash of values became even more pronounced as Musk began questioning Twitter's emphasis on psychological safety, which had become a hallmark of the company's internal culture. Musk, known for his preference for intense, high-pressure work environments, advocated for a “hardcore” approach where discomfort, urgency, and speed in execution would take precedence over comfort and caution. His public statements about transforming Twitter into the world's leading payment system revealed his ambition to make Twitter not just a social media platform, but an integral part of financial transactions and content monetization on a global scale. Musk's interactions during his visit were a mix of informal, open dialogues and direct interventions, where he communicated his strategic ideas while also addressing immediate operational concerns, like his need to heat his coffee rather than drink it quickly—a symbol of his desire for constant momentum and an unwillingness to pause. His deep involvement with product engineers and key leadership suggested that his vision for Twitter wasn't simply about content moderation or user engagement, but about evolving the platform into a highly functional, integrated service that blurred the lines between social media, financial services, and global commerce.

As the narrative unfolded, it became evident that Musk's takeover would fundamentally shift the trajectory of Twitter's culture, operations, and future business model. His vision of Twitter was one of extreme change, emphasizing rapid innovation and disruption in ways that clashed with the company's previously established ethos. Where Twitter's culture had prioritized inclusivity and employee well-being, Musk's vision was centered around urgency, discomfort, and the relentless pursuit of technological and business growth. He saw no room for slowing down, aiming to push Twitter into new realms of possibility, such as financial services and digital commerce, at an accelerated pace. This strategy, however, sparked friction, as it called for major changes to the company's operational framework, forcing employees to adapt quickly to a new way of thinking, working, and innovating. Musk's ambitious goals set the stage for a massive restructuring of Twitter, driven by a singular focus on redefining the platform's purpose in the digital world. This stark contrast between the old and new Twitter cultures created both excitement and trepidation within the company, signaling that Musk's leadership would be defined not just by his ideas but by his willingness to challenge conventional norms in order to make them a reality.

Musk's takeover of Twitter ultimately created an environment that was ripe for rapid transformation but fraught with challenges. His focus on integrating financial services and accelerating innovation through aggressive policies was a calculated move that could either propel Twitter to new heights or create significant internal and external backlash. Musk's management style, which emphasized quick decisions, bold actions, and constant innovation, clashed with the more established culture of Twitter, which had relied on collaboration, inclusivity, and balanced decision-making. As Musk continued to reshape the platform, it became clear that his leadership would be marked by this tension, with employees and leadership alike forced

to adapt to a new vision of what Twitter could become. This chapter of Twitter's history was not just about a change in ownership, but about a fundamental shift in how the platform would operate and what it would strive to achieve in the future. Musk's ambitions were vast, but so were the obstacles, as he sought to balance technological innovation with the need to maintain a viable, sustainable business model in the face of intense scrutiny.