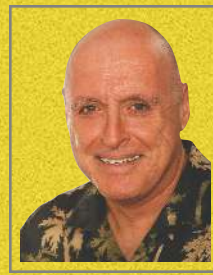


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



815 No More Talking Politics at Work?

Companies like Basecamp and Coinbase have told employees that talking politics on the job is forbidden. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I'm Jerry Roberts and today, let's look at this issue a couple of ways, next, on The Extra Point.

Basecamp, out of Chicago, and San Francisco's Coinbase have taken a stand against talking politics in the workplace, saying that it is a distraction from the basic mission of their respective organizations.

Many employees have left these companies, and liberal media has ripped them for their decisions. So, who's right and who's wrong here?

Basecamp's leadership told employees to avoid discussing political issues because they distract workers from getting work done. Do the owners and leaders of a company have the right to do that, and what's your opinion of why that company exists in the first place?

Can you imagine Guam employers placing a rigid ban on political chatter — and enforcing it?

Generally, people invest in creating a business because they see an opportunity for that investment to multiply for them. I'm sure some businesses are formed to deal directly with social need, but without a way to pay the bills, it doesn't stay in business long.

Basecamp makes software that helps employees communicate, collaborate, and get projects done. I've used it and it was effective. They were one of the first companies to build software for that purpose, and now there are dozens or companies that compete, maybe hundreds. I don't know their market share or financial position.

Many of their employees were outraged over

the decision. They quit and hit Twitter to rip Basecamp leaders. How dare they put grimy profits before the real important stuff — social and political conversations, and arguments.

Let's lift the hood and see where it leads. Last September, Coinbase CEO Brian Armstrong told employees to stop bringing their politics and causes to work, and announced that the company would not take political stances unrelated to its core mission.

The announcement went against the concept that public companies must weigh the interests of multiple stakeholders. That includes not just the profit-minded, but also the politically-minded employees or victims (and perceived victims) of social injustice.

Tech companies have traditionally led the way on encouraging such openness on popular issues. They attracted young talent by saying a company should wear its morality on their sleeves, and indulge their socially conscious workers with safe spaces and lots of perks. Now, big firms like American Airlines, Nike, and Major League Baseball feel compelled to show their explicit support for progressive causes.

Here's where it gets a little complicated. Basecamp and Coinbase were right there, leading the charge. One of the charges against Basecamp is that its co-founder, David Heinemeier Hansson, developed a reputation for calling out the unethical practices of other tech companies — supposedly taking the moral high ground in his industry.

By doing so, he likely made himself — and Basecamp — heroic in the eyes of tech-savvy young folks looking for a work home they felt matched their beliefs. Now, many of those employees feel they were misled, brought in to toil for grimy profit alone. (Con't.)

So, what's the primary purpose of a business? To create a profit and return that to its investors. Unless otherwise stated to those who put the money up in the first place, that's probably the reality in most cases.

It's unlikely that job descriptions at Basecamp and Coinbase mentioned among the tasks and responsibilities of the position, that spending a fair amount of time to chew on political and social issues was a major focus.

Is there a right and a wrong here? I've just scratched the surface, but it comes down to the fact that things change, and we have to roll with those changes if we stay, or leave if we decide we can't tolerate them.

Even if the leadership of those businesses allowed politics and social discussions to take place for years, it's in their right to stop that practice if they feel overall productivity and profitability is threatened.

Both companies opened the door and offered generous severance packages to those who chose to leave. In so doing, they are changing the culture of their organization to one where they feel they can get more work done. They will also now attract replacement talent that understands what the priorities are when they sign on.

I think this is only the beginning for this kind of workplace upheaval. We'll see much more of this in the future.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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