

Report on 'bruising' Amazon workplace sparks debate

August 17 2015

Is online giant Amazon a bruising and uncaring workplace or a hub for innovation that pushes its employees to reach their potential?

The question was hotly debated Monday after a New York Times report based on interviews with more than 100 current and former employees of the US online giant.

Its conclusion: Amazon is conducting "an experiment in how far it can push white-collar workers."

The lengthy report described an environment which pitted employees against each other in an effort to boost productivity, and quoted one as saying "nearly every person I worked with, I saw cry at their desk."

Amazon founder and chief executive Jeff Bezos swiftly sought to rebut the claims, saying the article "doesn't describe the Amazon I know or the caring Amazonians I work with every day."

In a memo to staff published on several websites, Bezos said the Times "claims that our intentional approach is to create a soulless, dystopian workplace where no fun is had and no laughter heard."

Bezos added: "I don't recognize this Amazon and I very much hope you don't, either. More broadly, I don't think any company adopting the approach portrayed could survive, much less thrive, in today's highly competitive tech hiring market."

The article also provoked heated responses from Silicon Valley leaders and Amazon employees, and generated over 3,600 reader comments at the New York Times.

Dick Costolo, the former Twitter CEO, tweeted of the article: "This has 'taken out of context' stamped all over it and symptomatic of a growing reliance on hyperbole to score points."

Marc Andreessen, a well-known Silicon Valley equity investor, said on Twitter: "I've talked with hundreds of Amazon vets, men and women, over 20 years. Not one didn't think it's a good place to work."

Josh Elman of the investment firm Greylock Partners tweeted that "this Amazon article seems to critique a culture that is in many ways winning and innovating."

The article comes with Amazon and Bezos enjoying huge success as the company has expanded from retail sales to cloud computing, online video, grocery delivery and a range of other services.

Amazon shares have nearly doubled from lows last year, and Bezos has become one of the world's wealthiest individuals with a fortune estimated at \$47 billion.

'Work hard, have fun'

Amazon employee Nick Ciubotariu, in a LinkedIn blog post that was approvingly cited by his boss Bezos, also disputed the claims in the article.

"We work hard, and have fun," he said. "We have Nerf wars, almost daily, that often get a bit out of hand. We go out after work... we're vocal about our employee happiness."

Ciubotariu said he had "heard all the horror stories from the past" but defended the company culture.

"During my 18 months at Amazon, I've never worked a single weekend when I didn't want to," he said. "No one tells me to work nights. No one makes me answer emails at night. No one texts me to ask me why emails aren't answered."

But some consumers found the New York Times report convincing and disturbing.

John Green, an author of young adult books, said the article "made me cancel my Amazon Prime subscription" and said it showed Amazon as the "worst cult ever."

New York Times readers also joined the debate.

"I cancelled my Audible membership, deleted my Kindle app, and will no longer be shopping from Amazon," said one reader using the handle Katie.

"I cannot support a company that so purposefully creates a negative environment for its employees. It's disgusting, it's immoral, and I hope others feel the same after reading this article."

Another reader using the name KGurl was shocked, saying: "Obviously Bezos doesn't care as long as the money keeps piling up for himself and his shareholders."

Others defended the company.

"Work is not daycare for adults," a reader using the name "Seattle Guy" wrote.

"This country was not built on 40 hour work weeks and treating the office like a social club. America needs more companies like Amazon that demand more from employees and rewards them accordingly."

© 2015 AFP

Citation: Report on 'bruising' Amazon workplace sparks debate (2015, August 17) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-08-amazon-workplace-debate.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.