

After election rupture, CEOs seek unity for staff, customers

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In this April 12, 2016, file photo, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg speaks during the keynote address at the F8 Facebook Developer Conference in San Francisco. CEOs of major companies are taking stands about the results of the November 2016 U.S. election, a departure from the traditional model of not mixing politics with business that the major brands have long espoused. Zuckerberg said "progress does not move in a straight line." (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

Apple CEO Tim Cook is telling his employees to "keep moving forward." Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg is saying "progress does not move in a straight line." T-Mobile's CEO John Legere tweeted "let's see what an out of the box, non-typical, non-politician can do for America!"

CEOs of major companies are taking stands about the results of the election—a departure from the traditional model of not mixing politics with business that major brands have long espoused.

Some are using it as an opportunity to bring their employees together following a divisive election campaign. Others are using it as an opportunity to stress their companies' values and mission, or an opportunity to make nice with Trump, who many CEOs were publicly against during the campaign.

The men and women who head the nation's biggest companies know that having a hostile relationship with the Trump administration could make doing business difficult. They also know that they operate in liberal bastions like New York and San Francisco just as much as in Trump-leaning places like Fort Wayne, Indiana, or Charleston, West Virginia.

"Neutral is the best policy," says John Challenger, CEO of workplace consultant Challenger, Gray & Christmas.

T-Mobile's Legere, who long was vocally opposed to Trump, congratulated the president-elect on Twitter for his victory last week, while holding off on judging the president-elect's policies. Meanwhile another telecommunications executive, Sprint CEO Marcelo Claure, himself an immigrant and personally opposed to Trump, sent an email to employees saying that "it's our obligation to accept the will of our fellow Americans and respect the new leader."



In this April 30, 2015, file photo, Apple CEO Tim Cook responds to a question during a news conference at IBM Watson headquarters, in New York. CEOs of major companies are taking stands about the results of the November 2016 U.S. election, a departure from the traditional model of not mixing politics with business that the major brands have long espoused. Cook is telling his employees to "keep moving forward." (AP Photo/Richard Drew, File)

It's possible that Legere and Claire made nice because the president appoints the chairman and commissioners of the Federal Communications Commission, an agency that holds enormous influence over the telecommunications industry. All five FCC commissioners will see their terms expire during Trump's first term.

CEOs of automakers, including Ford's Mark Fields, have also struck a conciliatory tone, partly because Trump has called for the repeal or renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which has allowed the automakers to set up shop in Mexico tariff-free.

Many CEOs publicly expressed hope that the tensions dividing the country will diminish, and that American consumers will set aside their fears and get back to what they do best: shop.

"We are hoping that in the postelection we are just going to see people ready to spend," said Marvin Ellison, CEO of JCPenney.

CEOs and companies that try to bring people together are "going to be the winners," says Dr. Larry Chiagouris, a marketing professor at Pace University's Lubin School of Business. "That always works better from a brand perspective," he says.

Wall Street, which donated heavily to Hillary Clinton, also now faces an administration that could provide both profit and peril.



In this Nov. 9, 2016, file photo, President-elect Donald Trump speaks during a rally in New York. CEOs of major companies are taking stands about the results

of the November 2016 U.S. election, a departure from the traditional model of not mixing politics with business that the major brands have long espoused. The men and woman who head the nation's biggest companies know that having a hostile relationship with the incoming Trump Administration could make doing business difficult. (AP Photo/ Evan Vucci, File)

Trump has said he wants to roll back some of the regulations in the Dodd-Frank law that was passed after the financial crisis, a move that would benefit big Wall Street banks. But the Republican Party's platform also contains a provision calling for the return of the Glass-Steagall Act, a Great Depression-era law that broke up big banks.

There's talk of a massive, \$1 trillion infrastructure program that could rely on tax credits to private funding sources. Many of those programs will require Wall Street's army of investment bankers and lawyers to help underwrite and finance.

"The president-elect's commitment to infrastructure spending, government reform and tax reform—among other things—will be good for growth and, therefore, will be good for our clients and for our firm," said Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein, according to a transcript of a voicemail he sent companywide.

In an email to his employees, JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon said the election of Trump shows "the frustration that so many people have with the lack of economic opportunity and the challenges they face."

Trump's victory drew a range of responses from CEOs in Silicon Valley, where popular sentiment had tilted strongly against Trump because of his statements on immigrants, women, overseas manufacturing and the use of encryption in consumer products like Apple's iPhones.

In a postelection email to employees, Apple CEO Cook didn't mention Trump by name but acknowledged that many people had strong feelings about the outcome of the vote. Cook had let it be known during the campaign that he didn't support Trump, although he generally avoided taking a public stance on the candidates. In his email, Cook said Apple would continue to support diversity.



In this Wednesday, July 10, 2013, file photo, T-Mobile CEO John Legere speaks during a news conference, in New York. CEOs of major companies are taking stands about the results of the November 2016 U.S. election, a departure from the traditional model of not mixing politics with business that the major brands have long espoused. Legere tweeted "let's see what an out of the box, non-typical, non-politician can do for America!" (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File)

Cook didn't mention encryption, which he has previously argued is essential to protect consumers' privacy. But he added, "While there is discussion today about uncertainties ahead, you can be confident that Apple's North Star hasn't changed."

Microsoft's chief executive was more conciliatory. In a post on LinkedIn, the social networking site that Microsoft is buying, Satya Nadella wrote: "We congratulate the president-elect, and look forward to working with all those elected yesterday." But Nadella added that Microsoft is committed to "fostering a diverse and inclusive culture."

Facebook's Zuckerberg, who had previously criticized Trump's call for building a wall on the Mexican border, sounded subdued in a post on his own social network.

"I thought about all the work ahead of us to create the world we want for our children," he wrote. "This work is bigger than any presidency and progress does not move in a straight line."

The most combative response came from the CEO at Grubhub, an online food delivery service based in Chicago. Matt Maloney said in an email to employees that he rejects Trump's "nationalist, anti-immigrant and hateful politics," adding that anyone who disagrees should immediately resign "because you have no place here."

Maloney later backtracked in a tweet that said "Grubhub does not tolerate hate and we are proud of all our employees—even those who voted for Trump."

Other companies have taken the election and its aftermath as a marketing opportunity, most notably airlines. British Airways ran ads on Facebook urging people to visit London, using the tag line "had enough of this house?" under a photo of the White House. Air New Zealand ran

ads on Instagram and elsewhere highlighting the results of the election and inviting people to visit New Zealand. Spirit Airlines promoted a 75 percent off sale for flights to Canada.

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