Former Google exec Anthony Levandowski sentenced to 18 months for stealing self-driving car secrets

Controversial engineer Anthony Levandowski, who worked for the Google division that would become Waymo before founding trucking company Otto and selling it to Uber, has been sentenced to 18 months in prison for trade secret theft during his various stints in the self-driving industry. His sentencing closes the book on a multi-year legal saga stemming from Levandowski's high-rising and equally fast-falling career in Silicon Valley spanning much of the past decade.

Levandowski was initially sentenced back in March, when the US District Attorney's office recommended a 27-month sentence. Judge William Alsup on Wednesday sentenced Levandowski to 18 months in prison, to be served at a later date due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to *TechCrunch*.

"The last three and a half years have forced me to come to terms with what I did. I want to take this time to apologize to my colleagues at Google for betraying their trust, and to my entire family for the price they have paid and will continue to pay for my actions," Levandowski said in a statement.

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"Anthony Levandowski's theft of autonomous technology trade secrets has been enormously disruptive and harmful to Waymo, constituted a betrayal, and the effects would likely have been

even more severe had it gone undetected," a Waymo spokesperson tells The Verge. "We echo Assistant U.S. Attorney Katherine Wawrzyniak's sentiment that this theft '*erases the contributions of many, many other people that have also put their blood, sweat and tears into this project that makes a safer self-driving car*.' Judge Alsup's decision today to sentence Levandowski to 18 months in prison for stealing trade secrets from us represents a win for trade secret laws that promote cutting-edge technology development."

Levandowski was once a superstar engineer in the fast-growing world of self-driving cars who helped jumpstart a Google division dedicated to the technology. He was later accused of stealing documents from his time at Google before founding Otto, a self-driving truck company. He would go on to sell Otto to Uber in 2016, which allowed him to join the ride-hailing company as a high-ranking executive in its self-driving division.

Shortly after the sale, Google's self-driving unit, then called Waymo, filed a lawsuit against Uber for trade secret theft, alleging its acquisition of Otto allowed the company to gain access to sensitive and confidential Waymo technology Levandowski illegally took with him on his way out.

Uber and Waymo settled the lawsuit, but Levandowski was still on the hook for criminal charges of trade secret theft brought by the US Attorney's Office of the Northern District of California after he refused to hand over any documents during the court case. Levandowski ultimately reached a plea deal, and as part of today's sentencing he will pay nearly $757 million in restitution to Google and a fine of $95,000, *TechCrunch* reports.

In addition to those fines, Levandowski was forced to declare bankruptcy after a separate court ruling found he illegally poached Waymo engineers and was ordered to pay Waymo $179 million, which he could not afford.

According to *TechCrunch,* Levandowski isn’t done in the legal department. He filed another lawsuit last month alleging Uber owes him money as part of its agreement to acquire Otto that it never paid, because the trade secret showdown with Waymo effectively killed the deal’s prospects and the financial rewards it would have given Levandowski. It’s not clear how that will play out, but he’s asking for at least $4.1 billion, which is roughly equivalent to the last reported valuation of Uber Freight, the self-driving trucking business the company salvaged from its Otto acquisition.

Update August 4th, 10:45PM ET: *Added statement from Waymo*.

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