

Rivian accused of 'toxic bro culture' in gender discrimination lawsuit

EV startup Rivian's former sales and marketing vice president has sued the Amazon-backed company for discrimination, claiming it has a "toxic bro culture that marginalizes women." The suit, first reported by *The Wall Street Journal*, comes just days before Rivian is set to become a publicly traded company, and a few weeks after it started delivering its first electric vehicles to customers.

Laura Schwab, the former VP, says she was fired last month after alerting a human resources executive about discrimination. She sued the company Thursday in Orange County Superior Court, according to the *WSJ*, though the complaint was not publicly available at the time this article was published. Schwab also published a blog post Thursday titled "Life Outside the Boys Club: Why I Spoke Up About Rivian's Toxic Bro Culture (and Got Fired)."

A spokesperson for Rivian declined to comment, citing the mandatory quiet period in the run-up to the IPO.

Schwab has spent two decades in the automotive industry and joined Rivian in November 2020. She says in the blog post that she was "excited to join a company that was building a brand and its planet-minded vehicles from the ground up *and* that led every conversation with the importance of company culture." But while Rivian "publicly boasts about [that] culture," Schwab writes that "it was a crushing blow when I joined the company and almost immediately experienced a toxic bro culture that marginalizes women and contributes to the company making

mistakes.”

“dominated by men at the top”

Scwab says she “raised concerns to HR about the gender discrimination from my manager, the ‘boys club’ culture, and the impact it was having on me, my team, and the company.” She was fired two days later.

Rivian is “dominated by men at the top,” and CEO RJ Scaringe “surrounded himself with a tight knit group of men who constantly had his ear,” Scwhab says. She says she made suggestions about the company’s business plan that got shot down, only to watch the men at the top ultimately accept the same ideas pitched by male colleagues. “Never in my years in the auto industry had I experienced such blatant marginalization,” she writes.

Schwab said she tried to raise these issues with her boss, Rivian’s chief commercial officer, but that she was unable to schedule a meeting with him. She also says she was starting to get left out of other planning meetings. When she asked another female senior executive to help include her, her colleague “informed me that she *was also excluded* from these meetings.”

“It is unbelievable that two high-level female executives would be left out of these meetings directly impacting their work,” she writes. “This was not the culture that Rivian prided itself on, and I realized that to change it I needed to raise my voice.” After speaking to HR, Schwab says the chief commercial officer finally scheduled a meeting with her, only to fire her. He claimed it was part of a “reorganization.”

Scwhab’s account of her time with Rivian comes as employees across the tech industry have been speaking out with greater volume and frequency. Apple employees have spent the last few months organizing and bringing to light stories about harassment and discrimination. A whistleblower at Facebook

recently gave documents to reporters around the world, and to Congress, after speaking up internally.

Former Pinterest employee Ifeoma Ozoma kicked off a reckoning within that company in 2020 by sharing her own experience with racial discrimination and has since launched the Tech Worker Handbook, which is meant to guide employees who want to speak out about wrongdoing. Pinterest also settled a gender discrimination suit with its former chief operating officer in late 2020. That former executive was represented by the same firm that has taken up Scwhab's case, the *WSJ* notes.

<https://www.theverge.com/2021/11/4/22764212/rivian-discrimination-lawsuit-toxic-bro-culture-rj-scaringe-ipo>