Sam Altman isn’t coming back to OpenAI

After a weekend of negotiations to potentially bring back Sam Altman as OpenAI CEO following his shock firing, the company’s nonprofit board has gone another way entirely and named former Twitch CEO and co-founder Emmett Shear as interim CEO, according to a person familiar with the matter. He will take over as CEO from Mira Murati, who was publicly aligned with Altman.

That’s three CEOs in three days, if you’re keeping track.

Shear’s surprise appointment comes after OpenAI’s four-person board refused to step down and let Altman return, according to multiple sources. The news was first reported by *The Information*, which said that employees were told Sunday that removing Altman was the “only path” to achieving the company’s mission of “broadly beneficial” artificial general intelligence. Spokespeople for OpenAI didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Microsoft, which is OpenAI’s largest investor, seems to have made the best of the situation. In a statement Sunday evening, CEO Satya Nadella said that “we remain committed to our partnership with OpenAI and have confidence in our product roadmap.” Meanwhile, Altman and former president Greg Brockman are joining Microsoft “with colleagues” to “lead a new advanced AI research team.”

“We look forward to moving quickly to provide them with the resources needed for their success,” Nadella said.

OpenAI’s four-person board refused to step down

Altman’s sudden exit at OpenAI came after the board said he had not been “consistently candid in his communications.” As we reported Saturday, the board quickly began discussing his return under pressure from investors and the threat of a mass employee walkout.

On Saturday, the remaining board members missed a 5PM PT deadline set by Altman’s camp to resign and reinstate him alongside fellow co-founder Greg Brockman, or face a slew of staff resignations. After the deadline passed, droves of OpenAI employees started posting their support for Altman on social media.

Altman returned to OpenAI’s office on Sunday saying it would be the “first and last time” he wore a guest badge, implying that he would either return as CEO or not set foot in the building again. Another deadline to reach a truce by 5 PM on Sunday was missed.

OpenAI’s board, which oversees the nonprofit parent company, consists of chief scientist Ilya Sutskever, Quora CEO Adam D’Angelo, former GeoSim Systems CEO Tasha McCauley, and Helen Toner, the director of strategy at Georgetown’s Center for Security and Emerging Technology. Sutskever, a leading researcher in the field who reportedly set a wooden effigy representing “unaligned” AI on fire at a company offsite, played the leading role in ousting Altman.

a:hover]:text-gray-63 [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63 dark:[&>a]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray”>Photo by Eoin Noonan /Web Summit via Getty Images
Naming Shear as the CEO of the most high-profile AI company in the world is a surprise, given that he isn’t seen as a leader in the space. Back in March, he left Twitch right before a significant round of layoffs. It saw another round of layoffs in October. Amazon bought the live streaming service for $1

billion in 2014.

“Today I got a call inviting me to consider a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: to become the interim CEO of @OpenAI,” Shear wrote on X. “After consulting with my family and reflecting on it for just a few hours, I accepted.”

“I’m not crazy enough to take this job without board support for commercializing our awesome models.”

“OpenAI employees are extremely impressive, as you might have guessed, and mission-driven in the extreme,” he continued. “And it’s clear that the process and communications around Sam’s removal has been handled very badly, which has seriously damaged our trust.” He went on to say that the board didn’t fire Altman “over any specific disagreement on safety, their reasoning was completely different from that. I’m not crazy enough to take this job without board support for commercializing our awesome models.”

OpenAI’s profile has skyrocketed since the launch of ChatGPT barely a year ago. Earlier this month, Altman announced that it has over 100 million weekly users, making it one of the fastest growing services of all time.

https://www.theverge.com/2023/11/20/23967515/sam-altman-openai-board-fired-new-ceo