Shopify Reportedly Appoints ‘Channel Champions’ and Shuts Down Slack Channels When Conversations Get Heated

When the Slack chats at Shopify get contentious, the company sometimes shuts them down — and employs “channel champions” to keep an eye on employee Slack channels, Insider reported Tuesday.

The outlet spoke with eight people who still work at Shopify or had in the past, all of whom were cited anonymously.

Shopify laid off 10% of its workforce in July, saying that its bet COVID-19-era e-commerce activity would continue “didn’t pay off.” The company hosts online commerce websites for businesses.

“What we see now is the mix reverting to roughly where pre-Covid data would have suggested it should be at this point,” Shopify CEO Tobias Lütke wrote at the time.

But, in the months before the layoffs, employees began to feel an increasing cloak-and-dagger sense at the company, which had previously been known for having a more information-sharing, relaxed culture, Insider reported.

Shopify told *Entrepreneur* via email that Slack is “a tool to help us facilitate asynchronous decision making, establish community and, most importantly, accomplish the work we do on behalf of our millions of merchants.”

“Given our large, distributed workforce, we have policies to

ensure our Slack remains a productive tool for sharing information, collaborating, and building a healthy culture," the spokesperson added.

After the company went fully remote, it "implemented measures to discourage negative and off-topic discussions of the company and its plans," Insider reported, citing conversations with employees.

That also meant closing channels or threads that got headed, which reportedly happened when Shopify employees complained about employee stock packages after Shopify's stock went down in early 2022. (It was trading at $136 a share on January 3 and clocked in at about $32 today.)

"People were very bold in Slack," an employee who was laid off this summer told the outlet.

Something similar occurred when employees found a noose emoji in Slack in the summer of 2020, and, more recently, when employees were discussing an article from The Information from March 2022. After over 300 comments, a company executive, Farhan Thawar, VP of engineering, expressed gratitude for people's thoughts and then closed the thread, per screenshots Insider reviewed.

What's a channel champion?

After going remote, Shopify started to ask for people to be volunteer "channel champions," which is something that any channel over 100 people had to have, Insider reported.

These "channel champions" establish rules and report improper behavior and hate speech.

But, in practice, the champions often didn't make reports about "off-topic" conversations because they were worried about being seen as snitches, a former employee of Shopify told the outlet.

A Harvard Business Review study published in July found that some kinds of remote monitoring can make employees act out more and be less productive.

“That this effect was driven by a shift in employees’ sense of agency and personal responsibility: Monitoring employees led them to subconsciously feel less responsibility for their own conduct, ultimately making them more likely to act in ways that they would otherwise consider immoral,” the study wrote.

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