Zoom’s CEO thinks Zoom sucks for building trust, leaked audio reveals

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Earlier this month, Zoom announced a surprising decision to require some of its employees to return to the office, where they were expected to work more effectively. Now, leaked audio from an internal Zoom meeting shared with Business Insider has revealed that Zoom CEO Eric Yuan called employees back to the office because he believes that “remote work didn’t allow people to build as much trust or be as innovative.”

None of this seems to jibe with Zoom’s brand, which provides video-conferencing technology that the company promises enables “immersive in-office collaboration right from home.”

Yuan’s comments came in a company meeting held on August 3, where he told employees that the top reason for the return-to-office mandate was to build more trust among employees.

“Over the past several years, we’ve hired so many new ‘Zoomies’ that it’s really hard to build trust,” Yuan said, describing a situation that many companies that continued hiring through the pandemic can likely find relatable. In 2022, Yuan told the Stanford Business School that Zoom’s employees tripled during the pandemic, from 2,000 to 6,000.

But Zoom is supposed to be the product that makes it possible

to build trust and relationships with remote employees. Its homepage boasts that Zoom helps teams become “more connected, more collaborative, more intelligent” and “do more.”

On a page promoting Zoom’s Meetings feature, the company said that 95 percent of “customers who switch to Zoom report an increase” in performance and trust among team members. Now it seems that Yuan has revealed that Zoom as a company found that that promise did not bear out.

“Trust is a foundation for everything,” Yuan said. “Without trust, we will be slow.”

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Another reason why Yuan wanted to get employees back together in the office was to drive innovation that he claimed results from having more heated conversations and debates that just don’t happen as often over Zoom. Yuan said that instead, to the seeming detriment of the company’s ability to generate new ideas, “everyone tends to be very friendly when you join a Zoom call.”

To remedy what Yuan described as a less desirable work environment for his team, Zoom is requiring employees who live within 50 miles of an office to show up in person at least two days a week. Any employees who are resistant to accepting the policy can apply for an exception, Insider reported.

For Zoom employees clinging to remote work, there may be reason to hold out hope that Yuan will be sympathetic. In 2022, Yuan told Stanford’s Business School students that after many of his engineers joined him in working late nights to keep Zoom operating while popularity peaked during the pandemic, his “No. 1 priority is to make sure Zoom employees are happy.”

But Yuan has big ideas about Zoom’s future, and it seems like he’s calling for all hands on deck to help him reimagine what video conferencing looks like and develop what he calls Zoom

2.0 in the next five years.

“From our perspective, we truly believe in the future, from a technology perspective, Zoom can deliver a much better experience,” Yuan told Stanford. “You and I can sit at home. I can sit anywhere. Let’s say at the local Starbucks coffee. I shake your hands. You feel my hand shaking. I give you a hug, and you feel my intimacy. And even if we speak a different language, we can understand each other. And get a cup of coffee, enjoy the smell remotely. All those technologies will be part of our offering in the future.”

Perhaps this futuristic version of Zoom would be better for building trust with remote workers than the current version? We’ll see if Yuan bringing his Zoom teams back to the office will allow new levels of creativity as Yuan strives to increase revenues during a challenging year, where Reuters reported that Zoom’s growth has slowed.

Zoom did not immediately respond to Ars’ request to comment.

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YouTube may face billions in fines if FTC confirms child privacy violations

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Four nonprofit groups seeking to protect kids' privacy online asked the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate YouTube today, after back-to-back reports allegedly showed that YouTube is still targeting personalized ads on videos "made for kids."

Now it has become urgent that the FTC probe YouTube's data and advertising practices, the groups' letter said, and potentially intervene. Otherwise, it's possible that YouTube could continue to allegedly harvest data on millions of kids, seemingly in violation of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) and the FTC Act.

The first report alleging YouTube's noncompliance with federal laws came last week from Adalytics and was quickly corroborated by research from Fairplay, one of the groups behind the FTC letter, The New York Times reported. Both groups ran ad campaigns to test if YouTube was really blocking all personalized ads from appearing in children's channels, as YouTube said it was. Both found that "Google and YouTube permit and report on behavioral ad targeting on 'made-for-kids' videos, even though neither should be possible under COPPA."

Google spokesperson Michael Aciman told The New York Times that these reports "point to a fundamental misunderstanding of how advertising works on made-for-kids content."

"We do not allow ads personalization on made-for-kids content, and we do not allow advertisers to target children with ads across any of our products," Aciman told The Times.

But in their letter, child advocates told FTC Chair Lina Khan that they have "serious questions" about whether Google is

being honest about ad targeting. After running targeted ad campaigns, Fairplay reported that YouTube placed its behavioral ads on children's channels 1,446 times. If YouTube was operating in compliance with COPPA as it claimed, Fairplay said that these campaigns would have resulted in zero ad placements.

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These impressions gleaned from Fairplay's ads represent only a small sliver of what groups—including Fairplay, the Center for Digital Democracy, Common Sense Media, and the Electronic Privacy Information Center—told the FTC that they see as a huge child privacy problem on YouTube in need of "robust remedies."

Currently, YouTube is under an FTC consent decree requiring COPPA compliance after already being hit with a $170 million penalty in 2019 for violating the child privacy law. This penalty was "the largest amount the FTC has ever obtained in a COPPA case since Congress enacted the law in 1998," the FTC said in 2019. But child advocacy groups now suspect that a second FTC probe into YouTube could result in a fine that dwarfs that 2019 record penalty. Their letter suggested that if millions of COPPA violations are discovered through the FTC probe, "the Commission should seek civil penalties upwards of tens of billions of dollars."

"If Google and YouTube are violating COPPA and flouting their settlement agreement with the Commission, the FTC should seek the maximum fine for every single violation of COPPA and injunctive relief befitting a repeat offender," Josh Golin, Fairplay's executive director, told Forbes.

Golin told Ars that when Adalytics released its report last week, he was surprised to see YouTube seemingly willing to "get its hand caught in the COPPA cookie jar again."

Golin told Ars that heftier fines may be needed to motivate

YouTube to take more steps to protect kids on its platform. He recommended that instead of trusting YouTube to limit data collection, YouTube should be required to secure parental consent for all youth data collection—or cease monetizing youth data entirely.

Google did not immediately respond to Ars' request to comment.

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Amazon tries to take over pirate sites that sold DVD copies of Rings of Power

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Amazon yesterday sued the alleged operators of websites that sell pirated DVD copies of *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* and other Amazon-made streaming series that haven't been officially released on discs. People who bought the show on DVD ended up receiving low-quality pirated copies, Amazon said.