Watch Linda Yaccarino's wild interview at the Code Conference

On Wednesday evening, X CEO Linda Yaccarino appeared onstage at the Code Conference with frustration and protest. "I think many people in this room were not fully prepared for me to still come out on the stage," she told interviewer Julia Boorstin, senior media and tech correspondent at CNBC.

Yaccarino sounded rattled. She'd found out earlier in the day that Kara Swisher, a Code Conference co-founder, had booked a surprise guest to appear an hour before her: Yoel Roth, Twitter's former head of trust and safety. He has been an outspoken critic of the direction Elon Musk has taken the site.

In his interview with Swisher, Roth recounted how Musk put him personally in danger. Musk suggested on Twitter that Roth had advocated for sexualizing children — a completely unfounded claim — which led to death threats and his address being posted online. "I had to sell my house. I had to move," Roth said. He encouraged Yaccarino to think about how Musk could turn on her, too, and said the site was bleeding users and advertisers.

These criticisms are nothing new, but Yaccarino was visibly bothered by having to appear shortly after a well-known critic of her company. "I'd be happy to respond," Yaccarino said. "I think I've been given about 45 minutes [of notice]." The conference's 300-some-seat ballroom was packed for her appearance; I caught Swisher reclining on a couch in the back before things kicked off, waiting to see the results of her

surprise play out.

“I work at X, he worked at Twitter.”

Throughout the interview, Yaccarino repeated that she’s only been on the job at X for 12 weeks, as if to say there’s only so much she could have done by now. But in that time, she’s managed to do one thing consistently: dismiss concerns about X, whether it’s the platform’s disinvestment in moderation or Musk’s chaotic leadership.

Her dismissive stance was very much on display Wednesday night. She wrote off Roth’s claims about the platform’s performance as outdated (“I work at X, he worked at Twitter,” she said); she said the Anti-Defamation League — which Musk is threatening to sue — pays too much attention to the antisemitism on X and not enough to the improvements the platform has made; and she argued that despite the panic around advertisers fleeing, *most* of the big ones are coming back.

These were not satisfying answers if you’re a person who thinks Musk is destroying Twitter or stoking harassment. But they were, for the most part, confident answers. Yaccarino answered slowly and carefully, and she seemed determined to push the complaints aside as collateral damage for reinventing the platform.

“X is a new company building a foundation based on free expression and freedom of speech,” she said at the start.

“We talk about everything.”

Boorstin prodded Yaccarino for hard numbers on how X is doing amid all these crises. Yaccarino said the company would be profitable “in early ’24.” The platform has 200–250 million daily active users. “Something like that,” Yaccarino said. She went to check her phone, as if to confirm the number but never finished checking. Later, she suggested that X has 540 million

monthly active users and 225 million daily active users. (That would be slightly down from the 238 million daily users Twitter had before the acquisition.)

It was hard to know whether Yaccarino wasn't prepared enough or if she simply didn't want to give definitive answers. At one point, Boorstin asked about Musk's recent statement that X will eventually charge all users to post on the platform, and Yaccarino appeared unable to speak to the proposed change.

"Can you repeat?" Yaccarino asked.

"Elon Musk announced you're moving to an entirely subscription-based service," Boorstin said. "Nothing free about using X."

"Did he say we were moving to it specifically or is thinking about it?" Yaccarino asked.

"He said that's the plan," Boorstin said. "Did he consult you before he announced that?"

"We talk about everything," Yaccarino said. She never clarified X's plans.

The interview was filled with rocky moments like this, but Yaccarino didn't run. As the clock ran out on the interview, Boorstin said she would let Yaccarino stay as long as she wanted — and Yaccarino took her up on it. Even when Yaccarino finally said she needed to leave, she stuck around for a few more questions. At close to 40 minutes, it was the longest interview of the conference.

It was a long conversation and a far more complicated one than Yaccarino may have wanted to have. At the top of the interview, she tried to push aside concerns about X with a statement of confidence. "It's a new day at X, and I'll leave it at that," she said.

But it could never be that simple. As long as Musk is in the

mix, she’ll always need more time to explain whatever’s going on at X.

https://www.theverge.com/2023/9/28/23895150/linda-yaccarino-code-conference-2023-x-twitter