

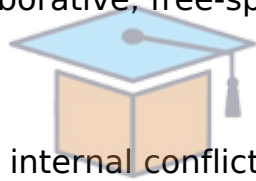
## 86. Blue Checks

Blue Checks, a feature initially associated with verification on Twitter, became a focal point of controversy and organizational upheaval in November 2022 following Elon Musk's acquisition of the platform. Under Musk's leadership, Twitter underwent significant changes that affected both its internal structure and its relationship with advertisers. Despite facing significant layoffs, Yoel Roth and his content moderation team pressed on with their duties, including the introduction of a new policy on misgendering and the relaunch of the "Bird Watch" feature as "Community Notes" to allow the public to contribute to content moderation. These changes, aimed at improving transparency and user interaction, were set against the backdrop of increasing unrest among advertisers, who were becoming increasingly uneasy about the platform's direction under Musk's control.

As the pressure mounted, advertisers began to withdraw their support for Twitter, fueled in part by a boycott movement that criticized the changes under Musk's leadership. In response, Musk threatened to publicly shame companies pulling their ads, a move that reflected his increasingly combative stance toward criticism. Musk perceived these actions as attacks on free speech, believing that the boycott advocates were attempting to stifle open dialogue. His aggressive reaction to the advertiser exodus represented the sharp divide between his vision for a more open Twitter and the platform's reliance on corporate partnerships, which were crucial for its financial stability. However, Musk's approach, which included naming and shaming companies publicly, escalated tensions within the advertising community and left many questioning the sustainability of Twitter's revenue model moving forward.

The internal conflicts within Twitter came to a head when Musk demanded Roth and his team ban users advocating for advertiser boycotts. This authoritarian move contradicted Twitter's previous stance on free speech, creating a major ethical

dilemma for Roth, who had long supported open discourse on the platform. The situation highlighted the growing tension between Musk's top-down leadership style and the values of transparency and freedom of expression that Twitter had once championed. Roth's eventual consideration of resignation emphasized the internal struggles Musk faced in trying to implement his vision for Twitter while maintaining the platform's fundamental principles. These disagreements exposed the complexities of governance and decision-making at Twitter, where Musk's unilateral approach clashed with the more collaborative, free-speech-driven ethos of the company's previous management.



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In addition to these internal conflicts, Musk's Twitter Blue initiative, which aimed to introduce a paid subscription service granting users a blue check mark for verification, faced serious practical challenges. The goal of reducing fake accounts and generating revenue was quickly overshadowed by widespread impersonation and misinformation, as users exploited the system to impersonate high-profile figures and companies. This led to a significant backlash, including confusion and damage to the reputations of companies whose stock prices were impacted by the spread of false information. The chaotic rollout of Twitter Blue further underscored the difficulties Musk encountered as he sought to overhaul the platform, often rushing into decisions without fully considering the potential consequences.

Musk's authoritarian approach to leadership, which included demanding employees return to the office and confronting them over policy decisions, led to widespread dissatisfaction within the company. The friction between Musk and his staff, particularly in relation to the implementation of Twitter Blue, culminated in the resignation of Yoel Roth, who expressed concerns over the platform's future and the viability of Musk's vision. Roth's departure symbolized the deepening divide within Twitter and highlighted the challenges of leading a company through rapid and contentious transformation. Musk's leadership, characterized by aggressive decision-making and confrontational interactions, exacerbated the instability at Twitter, leaving the company in a state of operational turmoil.

The period of upheaval in November 2022 demonstrated the significant complexities and pitfalls associated with rapid organizational change. Musk's vision for Twitter, which prioritized freedom of expression and a shift towards profitability, clashed with the platform's previous values of inclusivity and transparency. The conflict between Musk's authoritarian management style and the company's historical governance principles highlighted the need for careful, thoughtful decision-making in order to navigate such a substantial transition. Roth's resignation and the broader operational challenges Twitter faced illustrated the difficulties inherent in implementing sweeping changes, especially in a company with a large, diverse user base and complex internal structures. This episode served as a reminder that the path to transformation is rarely straightforward, and successful leadership requires a balance between bold innovation and the ability to manage internal and external pressures effectively.